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Man Hunt Near the Upper San Leandro Reservoir

By Sophie Braccini

At approximately 6:45 p.m. on Monday, July 25, an East Bay Regional Park District patrol officer was attacked in the fields and hills that extend south from Moraga to the Upper San Leandro Reservoir by two assailants carrying what he said sounded like automatic weapons. The officer, who was not hurt, took cover and called for reinforcement.

Forces from Moraga, Lafayette, Orinda, Richmond, the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office, and the Highway Patrol, including an armored truck and helicopters, came to his rescue.

The search was led by East Bay Park Police Captain Mark Ruppenthal, who is familiar to Moraga residents as their former Chief of Police, and was called off at 10:00 p.m. due to darkness.

Ruppenthal believes that the incident erupted because the gunmen were trying to protect a marijuana growing farm, hidden somewhere in the wilderness. A decision was made on Tuesday morning to wait for reinforcements in order to be able to scour the large expanse of hills in search of pot fields.

"I am very pleased at the response our department made and the assistance we provided," said Moraga's current Chief of Police Bob Priebe, "We were able to provide one sergeant, three patrol officers, and one reserve officer to assist. I am very happy with the positive outcome of getting the involved officer out of the dangerous area safely and with no injuries to anyone."

Priebe explained that the area involved is far outside the Town's borders-the incident and suspected grow area are in Alameda County. "Rancho Laguna Park is still a safe place to enjoy and there should be no concern for safety based on last night's activities," Priebe stated the next day.

Later in the week, Ruppenthal confirmed that the investigation is still open and personnel would be returning to the area soon.

Ruppenthal also discussed hiker safety on the EBMUD trail between Rancho Laguna Park and the San Leandro Reservoir. "It is safe, as is any walking in wilderness; be aware of your surroundings," he said, "these people don't want to be found-hikers must stay on the trail."

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