

Macomb County beer distributor rescues pilot from Lake Huron

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From staff and wire reports

A well-known Macomb County beer distributor and his wife rescued a missing New York pilot who spent 17 hours in Lake Huron after his plane crashed.

Dean Petitpren, president of Petitpren Inc., a wholesale Anheuser Busch dealer in Mount Clemens, and his wife, Diane, were heading to the Upper Peninsula in their yacht when they spotted the pilot in the water without a life jacket on Wednesday.

Petitpren, a philanthropist who resides in Grosse Pointe Farms, told WXYZ-TV (Channel 7) the couple saw pilot Michael Trapp waving a sock over his head to grab their attention.

"He said he had already taken his pants off because they were too heavy. So he was in his undershirt and undershorts," Petitpren told the TV station.

"Of course, from the boat (he) looked like a pineapple in the water. We got the boat around, came alongside him and threw him a ring and got him aboard."

Petitpren said the pilot was in 45 feet of water with calm seas and warm water. He said the pilot looked exhausted and his eyes were starting to close.

The Petitprens were aboard their boat Eagles Nest when they made the discovery and feel it's a miracle they were able to assist the pilot. They had been talking about the missing pilot and knew they were boating through the area where the plane had been reported missing.

Trapp, 42, was able to survive by swimming and treading water after his 1966 Cessna 150 went into the lake after the aircraft had engine problems. He was flying alone from Gouverneur, N.Y., to Wisconsin for a family reunion.

Petitpren said the pilot was happy and talkative when pulled to safety.

"I asked him if we wanted some water at that point and he said, 'No, I've had enough water.'"

Trapp was taken to a hospital in Harbor Beach for treatment.

He told WWNY-TV in Watertown, N.Y., that he was inspired to keep going because "there's a lot of people that depend on me."

"It's amazing what goes on in your mind when you're laying in water and you look up at the skies and watch the shooting stars and watch meteorites go round. Gives you time to realize what's important in life at that point," he told the TV station.

Trapp, who owns an auto repair shop, said he contacted the Federal Aviation Administration when the engine began

stalling over the lake on Tuesday. He said: "I'm going in right now."

"Holy moley," Trapp thought to himself, "what in the world just went on?"

He told the TV station that he took off his pants and shoes and "just went into survival mode." He doesn't consider himself physically fit at 5 feet 10 inches tall and 200 pounds.

"I kept going, kept going. There's a lot of things I want to do yet," Trapp said.

He said he was unsuccessful in using a credit card to try to reflect the sun and get the attention of several boats that were in the area. Finally, the Petitsprens spotted him waving a sock around 10:30 a.m. Wednesday and pulled him aboard — "by the grace of God," he said.

Trapp believes he swam 15 miles after his two-seat Cessna crashed 17 miles from shore, the U.S. Coast Guard said.

Harbor Beach Police Chief Sid Schock said Trapp was "quite chilled" but talking when he was put in an ambulance, about 125 miles northeast of Detroit. He was examined at a local hospital, then transferred about 90 miles to Covenant HealthCare in Saginaw where he was in good condition, spokeswoman Kristin Knoll said.

Trapp told WWNY that he couldn't walk. He did not immediately return a phone message from The Associated Press seeking comment about his extraordinary ordeal.

The president of the Harbor Beach hospital, Ed Gamache, would not discuss Trapp's health but said he was talking to doctors and in "excellent spirits."

"It's a remarkable story," Gamache said.

At Trapp's auto garage in Gouverneur, there was high praise for the boss.

"He's just strong-willed," Mike Cutway said of Trapp's survival swim.

Jim Dreyer, a Grand Rapids-area man who has swum across Lake Huron and other Great Lakes, said Trapp's weight probably helped insulate him against cold water.

"It's amazing what the human spirit is capable of," Dreyer told the AP.

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