

Helicopter crash victim's friends to move memorial

By Beth Minneci
Sun staff

A wooden cross near the edge of McMurdo Sound has stood for eight years to honor a helicopter mechanic and search-and-rescue team member named Ben Micou who died in a helicopter crash. But a group of people who knew Micou say a new set of gray water pipes that run within two feet of the monument are too close.

"We just want to move the cross to a more appropriate place," said Mike Hush, air transportation services supervisor.

Hush worked with Micou in the U.S. Navy's VXE-6 Antarctic Development Squadron. Within weeks of Micou's death, friends built a monument and erected it near the hangar where he worked.

National Science Foundation representative David Bresnahan sanctioned the move earlier this season. The group is still considering a site, but plans to carry the cross to a nearby location early next month.

"I'd like to keep it near the helicopter hangar, someplace close enough to where it's accessible," Hush said.

Micou is also being memorialized at the Naval Air Station in Fallon, Nevada, where he was stationed before Antarctica. The First Class Petty Officer's Association in Fallon recently decided to name its new meeting building after Micou, said Sam Cox of the Fallon station. Cox never met Micou, yet he spearheaded the effort to name the building.

"I knew that he had been stationed here," Cox said. "I brought it up and the association voted unanimously to name the building after him."

The disaster was the last in which a person working with the U.S. Antarctic Program died in a helicopter crash.

On Oct 13, 1992 Micou and four others were riding to McMurdo Station from Cape Byrd in bad weather when the helicopter slammed into a glacier.



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*- Steve Dunbar
search-and-rescue leader*

Friends of 1992 helicopter crash victim Ben Micou say new water pipes near the helicopter hangar are too close to the cross that bears Micou's name.

The aircraft slid and rolled about 100 feet, then dropped and spun until it hit rocks below, said field science support manager Steve Dunbar, who led the search-and-rescue team that responded to the accident.

One of the early impacts threw Micou from the helicopter. Two New Zealand support service workers, Garth Varcoe and Terry Newport, were also tossed out of the helicopter and died.

Dunbar described the conditions that day as whiteout with 20 to 30 feet visibility. The rescue team had a hard time finding the aircraft.

"Once in a while the clouds opened up and we got a glimpse of the wreckage," Dunbar said.

The pilot, Ed Crews, and the copilot survived, but immediately after the crash the copilot was injured to the point that he was unable to move. Crews crawled to reach an emergency radio in the back of the plane. Search-and-rescue was not within radio range, however, until the team's helicopter was close to the crash site.

Neither the stranded pilot nor the rescue party could see the other heli-

copter through the storm, not even when the rescue helicopter was directly overhead. Once Crews heard helicopter blades thumping, he called a radio message to Dunbar and the rest of the crew, Hush said.

"The pilot actually talked them into the location," Hush said. "He said, 'You have to be awfully close, I can hear you.'"

Some of the former U.S. Navy crew that worked with Micou still miss him. Micou was known for his cheerful disposition and generous heart.

"He was a very kind, gentle man who was excited about the place he was working," Dunbar said. "He had this infectious enthusiasm about it. He was just one of those good guys."

Hush said that Micou, who was 35 when he died, was a person who made the best of situations.

"He never had foul words for anybody," Hush said. "There were some people he didn't like but he was able to put them behind. He was probably – no, he was the greatest guy I ever knew."

Micou was survived by his wife, Janice, and an adopted son. ■