

## Arizona A-10 Still Lost [2 articles]

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 Subject: Arizona A-10 Still Lost [2 articles]

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By ARTHUR H. ROTSTEIN  
 .c The Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. (April 8) - The search for a Air Force jet that disappeared Wednesday in Arizona was focused on a rugged central Colorado mountain - about 775 miles off course.

The A-10 Thunderbolt II attack plane could be buried under snow on the side of New York Mountain, about 100 miles west of Denver, the Colorado Civil Air Patrol said.

'The terrain is just impossible, and there is a lot of loose snow, so we can't send a ground team in,' CAP spokeswoman Cindy Butler said.

The possible return of winter weather could make the task harder today.

The Federal Aviation Administration has used tips from the public and radar logs to try to recreate the possible path of the A-10 since it disappeared from southwestern Arizona on Wednesday. A U-2 reconnaissance aircraft was even used, although officials said it would take some time to process the U-2's film.

After the jet piloted by Capt. Craig David Button vanished, FAA records intermittently tracked an unidentified plane traveling in the opposite direction of the targeted bombing range.

New FAA information showed a possible radar track between Vail and Eagle, Colo. A motorist along Interstate 70 reported seeing smoke on the New York Mountain one day last week. Other visual sightings had a low-flying plane making two wide, opposing circles before disappearing.

Capt. Andrew White, spokesman of Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, said it appears the aircraft made some course adjustments that an autopilot couldn't make.

Last week, officials said the pilot could have become incapacitated and may have activated the plane's autopilot mechanism. He also could have ejected, though no parachute was seen by his colleagues over Arizona.

Button had been training about six weeks to fly the A-10, an \$8.8 million plane that carried four 500-pound bombs.

His father, World War II flyer Richard Button, said from his home in Massapequa, N.Y., that he knew of no medical or other condition that might explain his son's disappearance.

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PHOENIX (April 9) - When Capt. Craig David Button's bomb-laden Air Force attack jet broke away from formation, some thought he became incapacitated and put it on autopilot, or ejected after trouble.

But ejection should have activated an automatic homing device, which did not happen when the A-10 Thunderbolt disappeared last Wednesday.

And while radar records indicate the plane's path was initially straight - backing the autopilot theory - it changed course 800 miles away over Aspen, Colo., something that would require a pilot at the helm.

Is it possible the pilot stole the plane?

Not likely, say officials. But to cover all the bases, investigators are sifting through Button's background.

'The investigation ... includes all aspects of the plane and pilot, anything to do with the situation,' said Staff Sgt. Bret Zieman, a spokesman at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson.

The mystery began last Wednesday morning after Button's plane took off in formation from Davis-Monthan with two other A-10s bound for a bombing range in southwestern Arizona. The plane was carrying four non-nuclear bombs and mounted machine guns.

Button was with the rest until about 90 minutes into the flight. The other pilots broke formation and began the search, spotting nothing.

Initially, the search focused in Arizona, but it shifted to Colorado - nearly 800 miles off course - three days later after authorities checked radar records and witnesses there reported seeing a low-flying plane.

The plane may have gone down in the New York Mountain area, near Edwards, Colo., at which time it would have been nearly out of fuel. The last radar trace of the A-10 is there amid the snow-covered Rocky Mountains.

But officials were also looking elsewhere.

The Pentagon was checking into the time Button spent at Laughlin Air Force Base in Del Rio, Texas, where he was a flight instructor until he arrived in Tucson in February to train on the A-10. CBS reported Monday that Button had asked that his training flights at Laughlin be routed through Colorado.

An Air Force official at the Pentagon, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Button had made many cross-country flying trips during his training, and they may have involved stops in Colorado. Button has a brother in Denver.

The Air Force's Office of Special Investigations has been called in, the unit which typically handles criminal matters such as fraud and counterintelligence.

Capt. Steve Murray, spokesman for the Washington-based office, would not comment on Button's case, saying only that his unit has become involved in past aircraft accident investigations.

'Anything you can think of has probably been looked at,' said Staff Sgt. Rian Clawson at Davis-Monthan. 'But the evidence so far doesn't indicate any of these wild hypotheses, like he was trying to steal it, or he went off to Telluride to go skiing.'

People who live near the base consider anti-government or even cult activity possible.

'It sounds fishy,' said Bob Jones, a customer at Famous Sam's Restaurant and Bar. 'He could be part of a militia, for all anyone knows.'

Button's relatives said there is nothing suspicious about the 32-year-old Massapequa, N.Y., native.

'He was A-OK, stable, didn't seem to be under any stress. But he was having to study hard,' said the captain's father, Richard Button, who had trained pilots during World War II.

The elder Button said his son had a passion for flying and dreamed of living a life like the pilots in the movie 'Top Gun.'

'We're hoping he bailed out. There's no evidence that he bailed out, but there's no evidence that he didn't,' he said.

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