On Sunday, May 15th 2011, the GEOS International Emergency Rescue Coordination Center (IERCC) received an SOS notification from a SPOT Satellite GPS Messenger. The location coordinates provided were that of a remote avalanche-prone region in Washington State's Northern Cascade mountain range. The registered owner of the SPOT Messenger is Dan Anderson, a former Marine, a retired Army Special Forces Soldier (Green Beret) war veteran and a Washington State Trooper.

The IERCC contacted the Washington State OEM (Office of Emergency Management) providing the location coordinates and Mr. Anderson's registered profile information. An immediate search and rescue was dispatched.

Days earlier, the off-duty Mr. Anderson embarked on a planned crossing of the rugged Cascades. An experienced outdoorsman, he had decided to complete the crossing solo by snowshoe.

Anderson headed towards Holden Village near the north end of Lake Chelan. As he was setting up camp on Sunday night near a mountain glacier above 5,000' elevation, Anderson realized that he had lost his all-season tent during an earlier fall. A combination of heavy rain and snow left Anderson cold, wet and without proper shelter.

"Despite building a lean-to, I realized that I would be unable to keep my down sleeping bag dry and that in this environment, hypothermia was just a matter of time," said Anderson. "I immediately made the decision to press the SOS button on my SPOT and tried the best I could to stay warm and sleep for the night."

Once contacted by the IERCC, Washington State search and rescue officials began organizing search teams. Due to nightfall and inclement weather, a helicopter rescue attempt was not possible and ground teams would set out at first light the next day.

The next morning when help had not arrived, Anderson made a hard decision to turn around and head back over familiar terrain.

"I was very cold and moving with the rucksack was a better source of warm than waiting by a fire," added Anderson.
Ground crews arrived at the location where Anderson activated his SPOT device to find snowshoe prints leading away from camp. Due to recent snowfall and high winds, the tracks were lost and the search continued.

Anderson traveled nine or ten miles back up to the heights of Suiattle Pass, making camp about 500 feet below on the eastern side. The next morning he continued to the west side of the pass and broke out into clear skies.

Despite the good visibility, he was unable to effectively signal the aircraft.

"I kept thinking of my family and was determined to survive this and see them again" said Anderson.

Anderson navigated back, intercepting trail 785 below the snow line. He continued on the trails for over nine miles to within one mile of the trail head (784), where he was rescued by members of the Snohomish County Search and Rescue, who were on horses. He was still 12 miles from the remote road closure and the nearest paved road where he would likely find help was over 24 miles away.

"Ultimately I thank God for being here today," added Anderson. "Having the SPOT Messenger device allowed me to send my location coordinates to rescues officials from an extremely remote and rugged wilderness. I'm grateful to the search and rescue teams and the GEOS IERCC for their efforts and expertise."

Dan Anderson plans on returning to complete his route at a later date with friends.

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