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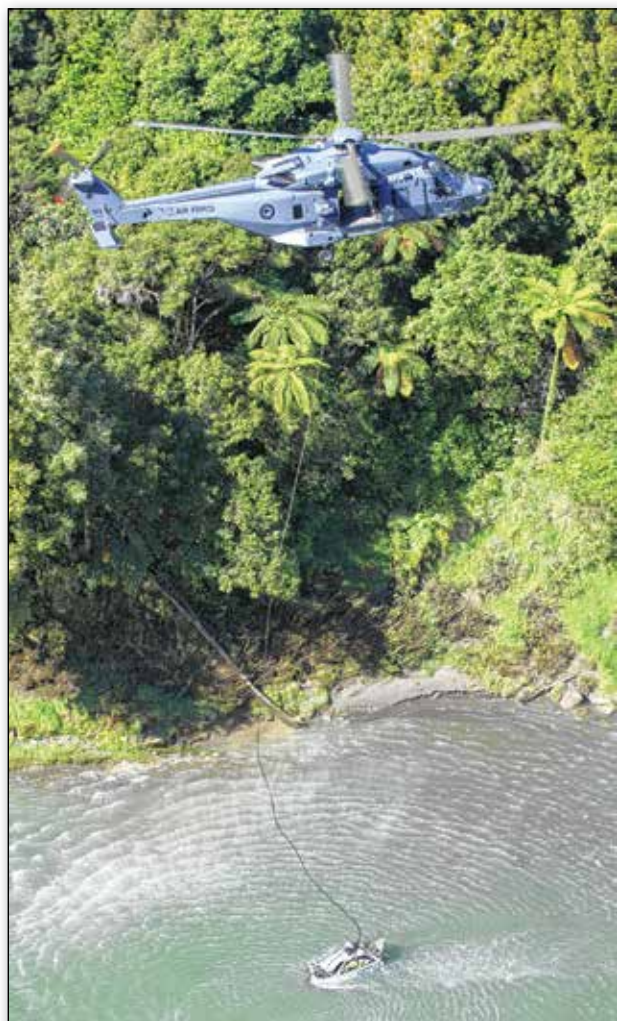
Sport

P 3

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P 7

P 15



Police probe into gang car plunge

AN Air Force helicopter was used to retrieve the car that crashed into the Mohaka River on Saturday, killing three Wairoa Mongrel Mob members and injuring a fourth.

The vehicle lay submerged in the river since 2.30pm on Saturday when it plunged off State Highway 2 and down a 150-metre cliff.

The names of the three men killed in the crash were released by police yesterday afternoon. They were: Terry Stone, 31; Ronald Rigby, 53 and Nathan Isaac 29.

One of the men was pronounced dead at the scene while two had not been found at that stage. The fourth was taken to Wairoa Hospital with minor injuries and released on Saturday evening.

A police dive squad recovered the bodies of the two missing men on Saturday evening and Sunday morning.

Yesterday's retrieval of the white Honda car was a crucial part of the investigation as police try to determine the event's that led to the crash.

An attempt to use a crane on Sunday was unsuccessful and floats were attached to the vehicle until the helicopter could be brought in.

Mourners of the deceased gathered at the site yesterday. Detective Senior Sergeant Brent Greville confirmed reports they were investigating the possible involvement of a second vehicle and whether the Mongrel Mob members were forced off the road.

They are appealing for sightings of a blue car with a dent in its bonnet.

"It's very early days and we're just piecing things together," said Mr Greville.

"There may be a possibility that another car was involved. It's an aspect we need to look into as part of the investigation so we would like to talk to anyone who may have seen anything unusual on that section of the highway during that time.

"We have found evidence at the scene that suggests a blue car may have been involved, but at this stage we have no more information. We'd like to hear from anyone who may have seen a blue car travelling on the highway on Saturday afternoon."

Mr Greville said police could not confirm who had been driving the crashed car or who it belonged to.

Speculation that gang rivalry could have led to the crash would be "foolish to ignore", said Mr Greville, however Wairoa Mayor Craig Little deemed it "unhelpful".

Mr Little said people needed to let police do their job. There had been no unrest in Wairoa since the deaths.

"On the gang stuff, there's no tension in town."

"OK, these guys were Mongrel Mob members on their way to a hui or a celebration. They were also guys who had families, they were also someone's loved ones.

"The guy that survived will have a huge ordeal ahead of him now."

Mr Little urged the town to keep a cool head over the situation.

Court records show Rigby was a father of at least two children, and had made efforts to leave the Mob and turn his life around.

He was jailed along with Stone for being part of an organised criminal group, after he turned up to a gunfight at the Wairoa Mob gang pad in 2010.

Rigby had turned up to help the gang's then-president, who had his patch stolen in a leadership

quarrel, but then had driven away.

Rigby at that point had had no violence convictions since 1992, surrendered his gang patch, and wrote a letter to a judge saying he wished to turn his life around.

The records showed Stone had a history of methamphetamine convictions, and had previously been jailed for threatening people and violence offending.

As recent as May this year he was in court for his part in an unprovoked attack on a man waiting for his takeaways. At the time Stone had been on supervision for a charge of male-assaults-female.

According to Nathan Isaac's Facebook page he was from Waikaremoana but had been living in Perth, Australia.

A rahui has been imposed on the Mohaka River and beach for the next 12 days.

Travelling to gang's 50th

THE four men involved in Saturday's incident were on their way to a controversial Mongrel Mob 50th anniversary celebrations in Hastings.

As part of the gang's celebrations, the members had visited cemeteries across Hawke's Bay.

It is understood the men in the fatal crash were on their way to a paddock behind Te Aute Tavern, where the gang was drinking.

Tavern owner Ian Morse has been reported as saying police officers turned up and quietly pulled a few gang members aside to inform them of the crash.

The men left, and it was decided to keep the news from partygoers who did not know the men involved for the rest of the evening so as not to put a damper on the celebrations, Morse said.

"Not everyone was told initially — just the people that were affected personally."

One of the deceased was jailed for four years and three months in 2010 for participating in an organised criminal group after two warring gang factions held a shoot-out over an argument about who should be the gang's top dog in Wairoa.

Hastings gang chapter president Rex Timu would not comment on the fatal crash.

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The helicopter and police dive squad attached strops to the car before winching it out of the Mohaka River and lifting it to a nearby paddock.

