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Doctor falls to his death

By Nilda Gallo, Marsante G. Alison

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BALAMBAN – He so loved the outdoors he gave up his medical profession to explore caves and mountains full time.

Dr. Adolf “Doc” Espina, an optometrist, met his death in the dark chasm of a cave in barangay Gaas, Balamban town in west Cebu about 6 p.m. Friday.

Mountain rescuers yesterday carried out the remains of the doctor, who fell to his death in a caving accident.

Espina, a mountain climber and spelunker with over 10 years experience, was pulled out of the cave about 11:40 a.m. after a 17-hour search and rescue operation.

Five of his companions, including an American, were rescued after they were trapped inside the cave.

The six-man team was on a three-day mapping and exploration of the cave to determine if the cave was the deepest in the Philippines, said Merks Certifico, one of the cave explorers.

Each team member carried a 400-meter rope and was down to 150 meters in the cave when the accident happened, Certifico said.

“It was equipment failure,” said Certifico, a Manila-based caver, who recovered the doctor’s locking carabine of the rappel, harness and rope.

The 36-year-old Espina fell 56 meters down and got stuck on a ledge.

A bachelor, Espina was a former teacher of the Southwestern University (SWU) at the Optometry Department. He discontinued his practice a few years ago to devote time to his passion for mountain climbing and spelunking.

The other rescued cavers were identified as team leader Dondon Dimpas, Jolina Asis and Khublai Espina, a distant relative of Adolf Espina.

The six spelunkers went inside the cave shortly before 9 a.m. Friday to measure the depth. It was the second time for the team to explore the cave after an earlier trip three months ago, when they were limited by their gear and a 150-meter-long rope.

Certifico, a 33-year-old development worker, said the locking carabine of the rappel rack, which was connected to Espina’s seat harness, somehow got loosened. It eventually detached Doc from the common rope.

Certifiko said they would examine Espina’s equipment more closely to determine what happened

Randy Su, former president of the Mountaineering Federation of the Philippines, said the locking carabine can sometimes loosen if it is constantly rubbed against by a protruding stone.

“They were qualified cavers. Their expertise cannot be questioned. Basically, mountaineering and caving accidents are caused by failure of equipment 90 percent of the time,” Su said.

The recovery operation was hindered by howling winds, thick fog and rain. It took about 17 hours to locate and carry out the lifeless body of Espina, who was 5 feet six inches tall and weighed 240 pounds.

The rescue teams were made up of members of the University of San Carlos Mountaineers, Central Visayas Search and Rescue (Cevsar) and the Cebu City Fire Department. Members of the Philippine Air Force were also there to assist. Radio communication was provided by the Federation of Cebu Radio Clubs.

The Inter-Mountaineering Society of Cebu, of which Espina was a member, also provided ground support.

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