



Fresno County Sheriff's Office

Margaret Mims, Sheriff

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News Release

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FLIR Systems Presents FSO Air Support Unit with Pursuit Award

In July, FLIR Systems, Inc. hosted its 2019 FLIR Vision Awards in Omaha, Nebraska. The company, which develops thermal imaging cameras, named the Fresno County Sheriff's Office its winner of the Pursuit Award. Members of the Sheriff's Air Support Unit attended the ceremony, which recognized Pilot David Cunha and Tactical Flight Officer Richard Coningsby for their work utilizing our department's airplane to safely handle a vehicle pursuit. Additionally, FLIR made a \$1,000 contribution to the Sheriff's Foundation for Public Safety. This nonprofit organization utilizes charitable donations to develop programs focused on education, prevention and intervention in an effort to improve the quality of life for everyone within our county.

Shortly after 11:00 pm on October 6, 2018, a Fresno County Sheriff's deputy spotted a stolen Honda Civic near South and Buttonwillow Avenues in Reedley. The deputy followed the car for several miles as he requested other patrol cars and air support to respond to the area. Once additional resources arrived to the area, the deputy turned on his lights and siren in an attempt to stop the car. However, the driver, later identified as 32 year old Ronald Patala of Reedley, refused to pull over. Instead, he led the deputy on a pursuit. Patala reached speeds of 75 mph and aggressively drove behind other motorists, forcing some of them off the road. Once Patala reached the area of Wakefield and Adams Avenues, he drove into an orchard of orange trees. Deputies Cunha and Coningsby, who were aboard our EAGLE Three airplane, took over monitoring the suspect's location and relayed that information to numerous patrol units. Utilizing the aircraft's FLIR thermal imaging camera, Coningsby helped position patrol cars in proper places to try and intercept Patala.

The pursuit turned into a game of cat and mouse, traveling through fields and along canal banks, lasting approximately 13 minutes. Patala eventually stopped his car, ran into an orchard and tried hiding under trees near the intersection of Lincoln and Crawford Avenues. However, thanks to the FLIR camera, the EAGLE Three crew was able to keep a constant eye on Patala. Ten minutes later, deputies and a K-9 converged on Patala's hiding spot. Not wanting to get bit by the dog, he chose to surrender and was taken into custody.

Patala has since gone through the court system and is now serving a four year sentence in prison. He has a criminal history involving stolen vehicles, pursuits and methamphetamine use.