

**01-06-1998 – Virgin Islands – Manuel Zurita – Secret Service LEO – Boat Accident
President Protection**



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<http://www.odmp.org/officer/15030-criminal-investigator-manuel-zurita-vii>



Bio & Incident Details
Age: 46
Tour: 12 years
Badge # Not available
Cause: Boating accident
Location: Virgin Islands
Incident Date: 1/1/1998

Criminal Investigator

Manuel Zurita, VII

United States Department of the Treasury - Customs Service - Office of Investigations, U.S. Government

End of Watch: Tuesday, January 6, 1998

Investigator Manuel Zurita died on January 6, 1998, from injuries he sustained in a boating accident on January 1, 1998, while assisting the United States Secret Service with a presidential protection detail for President William Clinton.

He and two other customs agents were securing the waters to assure a safe landing for Air Force One when their boat hit a coral reef outside of St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Investigator Zurita was air-lifted with massive injuries to a hospital in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where he later died of his injuries. The two other agents were seriously injured in the accident.

Investigator Zurita had served with the Customs Service for 12 years. He is survived by his wife and four children.

Customs Agent Injured While Protecting Clinton Dies

<http://www.sddt.com/News/article.cfm?SourceCode=n9801071f& t=Customs+Agent+Injured+While+Protecting+Clinton+Dies#.WZYzkFGGOUK>

Wednesday, January 7, 1998

WASHINGTON (AP) - A Customs Service agent has died from injuries suffered in a boating accident while protecting President Clinton and his family during their

vacation in the Virgin Islands last week. Senior Special Agent Manuel Zurita died Tuesday night in a hospital in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where he was airlifted after the Jan. 1 accident off St. Thomas, the Treasury Department said Wednesday. He was 47.

Zurita was among three Customs agents seriously injured New Year's Night when their vessel struck a reef in waters near the Charlotte Amalie airport. Clinton and Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin offered condolences to Zurita's wife and four children. "We are eternally grateful for the courage and bravery of the men and women who protect us each and every day," Clinton said in a statement. "This tragic accident painfully reminds us of the risks our law enforcement officials face keeping our country safe."

Zurita, a 12-year Customs veteran, suffered massive injuries. A second agent sustained severe head and neck injuries and bruised ribs. A third had a badly broken right forearm. Both survivors have been released from the hospital.

The agents were aboard a 37-foot Customs Service speedboat in the flight path of Air Force One, helping to assure a secure landing. The accident occurred about 8:30 p.m. as the boat hit the reef after finishing its patrol. One of the victims summoned help on a cellular telephone, and another Customs vessel arrived at the scene shortly afterwards. Two rescuers sustained minor injuries.

Air Force One, the presidential jet, had landed, and Clinton and his family had left by motorcade for a four-day vacation at a beach house when the accident occurred.

The U.S. Customs Service is investigating the accident. Treasury Undersecretary Raymond Kelly, acting Customs Service Director Samuel Banks and Secret Service Director Lewis Merletti planned to attend Zurita's funeral, scheduled Friday in Puerto Rico.

Statement on the Death of Manuel Zurita

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PPP-1998-book1/html/PPP-1998-book1-doc-pg9.htm>

January 7, 1998

[Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton (1998, Book I)]

[January 7, 1998]

[Page 9]

[From the U.S. Government Printing Office www.gpo.gov]

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Customs Senior Special Agent Manuel Zurita. We are eternally grateful for the courage and bravery of the men and women who protect us each and every day. This tragic accident painfully reminds us of the risks our law enforcement officials face keeping our country safe.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife and their four children as they deal with this devastating loss.

Note: Agent Zurita was fatally injured in a January 1 boat accident while aboard a U.S. Customs Service vessel providing security for the President's arrival in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Customs agent injured in boat accident dies

https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/111355904/THE_COURIER-JOURNAL

JANUARY 8, 1998

WASHINGTON

A Customs Service agent has died from injuries suffered in a boating accident while preparing for the arrival of President Clinton and his family during their vacation in the Virgin Islands last week. Senior Special Agent Manuel Zurita died Tuesday night in a hospital in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where he was airlifted after the Jan. 1 accident off St. Thomas, the Treasury Department said yesterday. He was 47.

Zurita was among three Customs agents seriously injured last Thursday when their vessel struck a reef in waters near the Charlotte Amalie airport. The agents were aboard a 37-foot Customs Service speedboat in the flight path of Air Force One, helping to assure a secure landing. The accident occurred about 8:30 p.m. as the boat hit the reef after finishing its patrol.

The U.S. Customs Service is investigating the accident.

3 Clinton Guards Hurt In Boat Mishap

http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1998-01-03/news/9801030073_1_boat-mishap-agents-

January 03, 1998|By From Tribune News Services.

ST. THOMAS, Virgin Islands — Three Customs Service agents helping provide security for President Clinton's arrival in the Virgin Islands were hurt Thursday night in a boat accident, officials said Friday.

The agents, one of whom was critically injured, had completed their assignment in the waters off King Airport on the western part of St. Thomas during the landing of Air Force One and were returning to shore at about 8 p.m. in their 38-foot interceptor boat when the accident occurred.

A Customs Service statement said the agents' boat "struck a rock or a shoal in the water."

"The boat was severely damaged, and the three agents were seriously injured, one critically," it said.

All three agents, described as experienced boatsmen, were flown to San Juan, Puerto Rico, where they remained in a hospital.

The Customs Service said it would not release the names of the injured agents out of concern for their medical condition and for their families' privacy.

The agents, who are stationed in Puerto Rico, were assisting the U.S. Secret Service in providing protection for the first family.

They were in one of a number of offshore boats used for security at the arrival of Clinton, his wife and their daughter.

A White House official said Clinton's security was not affected by the incident, and it was unclear whether he had been told about it.

The Clintons are spending four days on the island of St. Thomas. They are to return Sunday to Washington.

BOAT CRASH HURTS 3 IN CLINTON SECURITY DETAIL

https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/01/03/boat-crash-hurts-3-in-clinton-security-detail/31cbd821-f125-40f9-870b-db83ff1da712/?utm_term=.5e6e73aae2ed

January 3, 1998 By Peter Baker

Three U.S. Customs agents involved in providing security for President Clinton's vacation here were seriously injured when their boat smashed into underwater rocks in the waters off this Caribbean island, authorities said today.

One of the agents was listed in critical condition and officials said his injuries were life-threatening. The other two were hospitalized in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where all three were flown by helicopter after the accident.

The incident occurred about 8:30 p.m. Thursday, shortly after Clinton and his family arrived in St. Thomas for a four-day winter break before returning to Washington on Sunday. The agents were manning a 38-foot interceptor boat that helped to clear away boat traffic from beneath the landing path of Air Force One. With their task complete, they were returning to the dock when their boat struck a rock or shoal in the water, officials said.

In addition to the three injured on board, the Customs Service said two other agents were slightly hurt during the subsequent rescue. None of the agents involved was identified. The Secret Service sometimes enlists help from its fellow Treasury Department agency in securing the locations of presidential trips.

An accident investigation team and several high-ranking officials, including Treasury Undersecretary Ray Kelly and acting Customs Commissioner Bonni Tischler, set out for St. Thomas to look into the incident.

Clinton's travel has resulted in accidents before. In 1996, an Air Force C-130 transport plane carrying support equipment for the first family's Wyoming vacation crashed and killed eight Air Force service members and a Secret Service agent.

Three weeks later, a CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter supporting a campaign swing through Florida flipped over and burned, although its six occupants escaped unharmed.

The president, first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and their daughter, Chelsea, spent today secluded in their borrowed villa overlooking picturesque Magens Bay, reprising their first Virgin Islands getaway of a year ago. Clinton interrupted his vacation long enough to tape his Saturday radio address and to telephone Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) to express his condolences over the death of his nephew, Michael Kennedy, in a New Year's Eve skiing accident.

But otherwise the day included few serious ventures. "They're just shuttling back and forth between the beach and the pool," said spokesman Joe Lockhart.

Indeed, at one point, a shirtless commander-in-chief was spotted by clandestine television cameras taking his new dog Buddy for his first ocean swim and trying in vain to teach him how to play fetch with a toy bone. "He got the part about fetching," Lockhart reported. "He didn't get the part about returning."