

**03-06-1962 Long Beach NJ – Angelo J Leonetti – LEO Flood Vehicle Accident**



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REMEMBERING ALL OF LAW ENFORCEMENT'S HEROES

**Chief of Police Angelo J. Leonetti**

<http://www.odmp.org/officer/8070-chief-of-police-angelo-j.-leonetti>



**Biographical Info**

**Age:** 45

**Tour of Duty:** 14 years

**Incident Details**

**Cause of Death:** Exposure

**Date of Incident:** March 6, 1962

**Chief of Police Angelo J. Leonetti  
Long Beach Township Police Department  
New Jersey**

**End of Watch: Tuesday, March 6, 1962**

Chief Leonetti succumbed to exposure while conducting rescue efforts during a severe flood. Because of the high water, they were unaware that a portion of road had been washed out.

The military truck they were in sank when they encountered the washed out roadway. Chief Leonetti was rescued from in a chest-deep water and sand mixture, but succumbed to hypothermia a short time later.

The town's police commissioner also died as a result of the incident.

Chief Leonetti had served with the agency for 14 years. He was survived by his wife and four children.

**A Storm Like No Other - A Look Back At The March 1962 Nor'easter**

<http://patch.com/new-jersey/berkeley-nj/the-great-storm-of-march-1962>

March 8, 2012 By Patricia A. Miller (Patch Staff) –

Seven people perished during the three-day coastal storm that battered Long Beach Island and the New Jersey Shore.

"It was unexpected and unannounced, sudden and surly, inundating, devastating, mutilating, obliterating. It battered and bludgeoned the shore until there was no more shore, until it was all running water and milling debris, until almost every trace of a human presence had been washed away. Then it was gone." - Great Storms of the Jersey Shore, by Larry Savadove and Margaret Buchholz.



At first, the Great Atlantic Storm of 1962 seemed like any other nor'easter. The National Weather Service forecast on March 5 called for northeast winds of 10 to 15 knots, with snow. But by nighttime, the forecast had changed. Tides were expected to run several feet above normal. Winds would blow at a steady 35 to 45 knots.

By the morning of March 6, the forecast had changed again, to a full gale. And it soon became clear that this storm was different from the usual nor'easter that New Jersey shore residents took in stride.

"There's just been nothing like it since," State Climatologist David W. Robinson said. "Nothing else compares. This is the benchmark for all nor'easters when it comes to the coast of New Jersey. When you are talking storms, you start with '62. Long Beach Island was just pummeled."

### **Not a Typical Nor'easter**

Jersey Shore residents and especially Long Beach Islanders were no strangers to winter nor'easters. The storms typically batter the shoreline, gobble up beaches and flood the streets of coastal towns. But this one was not typical. A powerful high front to the north gave a low pressure system coming up the coast and one from the west no way to escape. The high blocked the lows and kept the storm swirling about 100 miles offshore for almost three days, Robinson said.



Five massive astronomical spring tides swept in, toppling houses and inundating the streets. The back bays filled and had no way to drain before the next high tide came in, he said.

"The March 1962 northeaster was comparable in strength to the most intense hurricanes of historical record, using criteria similar to those used by Saffir and Simpson to rate hurricanes," according to the U.S. Geological Survey's website.

Seven people died on Long Beach Island, including Long Beach Township Police Chief Angelo J. Leonetti, Township Police Commissioner Kenneth G. Chipman, First Aider Robert Osborn and two elderly couples.

### **Compelling Stories in Video**

There is little footage of the three-day storm at its worst. But a video produced by Wet Water Video Co. gives us a window back in time to what Long Beach Island looked like after the "Ash Wednesday" storm, as some called it.



"It was essentially underwater," Robinson said. "The island was breached in several locations."

The Wet Water video is a treasure trove of interviews with local officials, residents and footage taken during and after the storm, while the streets of Long Beach Island were still under several feet of water.

One of the most poignant sections of the video is an interview with James Leonetti, the police chief's son. He was a teenager back in 1962.

Jim Leonetti recalled his last words with his father. The chief was heading out to see the beached Navy destroyer U.S.S. Monssen, then to Holgate with Chipman and Osborn to see if people on the southern tip of the island needed help.

"It was approximately 7 a.m., and I wanted to go with him," Leonetti recalled in the video. "He said 'No, you can't. I'll be back.' "

### **Long Beach Island Took Brunt of Storm**

The sheer length of the storm increased its severity.

"This powerful storm was a slow-moving winter event fueled by the combination of several low-pressure systems," the USGS says. "What made the storm so destructive and responsible for such widespread coastal changes was its duration and timing. The storm lasted for several days that included as many as five spring high tides at some locations."

Long Beach Island was the hardest hit.

The late James J. Mancini — longtime mayor of Long Beach Township and an Ocean County Freeholder — had no doubt the March 1962 storm was the storm of the century.



Mancini held up the 1962 storm as his personal yardstick for any subsequent nor'easters or even hurricanes. He was the civil defense coordinator for Long Beach Township when the storm hit.

When asked by a reporter back in the 1990s how he summed up one particularly rough recent coastal storm, Mancini had but one word. "Peanuts," he snorted.

Then he pulled a scrapbook out of his drawer in his office at Town Hall. It was crammed with pictures of Long Beach Island during and after the storm. Six hundred homes on the island were lost.

"I have been through the worst," he said in a 1998 Asbury Park Press interview. "62 was the worst. I respect the ocean. Just when you think you have it all figured out, it'll do something else. We lost all the beach, all the dunes and 12 miles of Long Beach Boulevard. It was devastating."

The four-wheel drive truck Leonetti, Chipman and Osborn were riding in sank into a washed-out roadway on the way to Holgate. The water temperature was 34 degrees. Leonetti was still alive when Lester Parker and several others managed to get him to a nearby house to warm him up, Parker says in the video.

## **A Haunting Memory**

But the chief suffered a massive heart attack while they were attempting to revive him. He left behind his wife and four children. Chipman's body was found almost totally buried in sand at the bay's edge several days later. Osborn's body was found in the marsh.

The loss of the three men haunted Parker for years.

"For many years after the storm, I would wake in the middle of the night and remember closing the (truck) door and advising them to watch what they were doing," an emotional Parker says in the video.

Beach Haven resident Joseph Veitch was lucky. He had turned down Leonetti's invitation to join them on the truck, he recalls in the video.

"He said they had four-wheel drive and they could go anywhere," Veitch said. Veitch later agreed to accompany some U.S. Coast Guardsmen when they attempted to rescue some residents trapped in the Holgate section of Long Beach Township.

But a massive wave hit the Coast Guard boat on the way to Holgate and it flipped over, Veitch recalled.

The nine people on board formed a human chain and began walking across the meadows to try and make it to a nearby Coast Guard station, he said in the video.

One of the elderly women sat down and said she couldn't go any further, which caused the others to panic, Veitch says in the video.

The last time he saw the two elderly couples, they were clinging to telephone poles. Veitch and the others eventually made it to the Coast Guard Station.

The bodies of two of the elderly people were found later in the week in Ocean City, more than 30 miles away. The other two were never found, Veitch says in the video.

In the end, the damages to New Jersey were estimated at \$80 million in 1962 dollars, according to the now-defunct Ocean County Sun's memorial booklet published in 1962.