

03-09-1960 – Fonda and Wilcox – FED LEO Frozen Lake Patrol**Park Ranger John C. Fonda**

<https://www.odmp.org/officer/4979-park-ranger-john-c-fonda>



United States Department of the Interior - National Park Service, U.S. Government

End of Watch Wednesday, March 9, 1960**Bio**

- Age** 28
- Tour** 8 years
- Badge** Not available
- Military Veteran**

Incident Details

- Cause** Drowned
- Location** Wyoming

**JOHN C. FONDA**

Park Ranger John Fonda and District Ranger Gale Wilcox, along with the Assistant Chief Ranger, were on back country patrol on cross-country skis in Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming. The three came upon the Snake River, which had frozen over, and judged that it was safe to cross. The Assistant Chief Ranger began to cross first, followed by Ranger Wilcox and Ranger Fonda.

Ranger Fonda had made it only 15-feet from shore when the ice broke and he fell into the river. Ranger Wilcox, who could not swim, immediately belly-crawled to Ranger Fonda's position to try to reach him with ski pole. The Assistant Chief Ranger also went to the location to help also. The ice then cracked and the other two rangers fell into the river. The Assistant Chief Ranger was able to remove his skis and then tried to remove the skis of the other rangers but was unsuccessful. He then climbed out of the water. He was able to pull Ranger Wilcox out of the water but Ranger Fonda, who was still treading water with his skis on, went under and did not resurface.

Ranger Wilcox was suffering from severe hypothermia and was unable to move or speak. The Assistant Chief Ranger, who was also suffering from hypothermia, immediately set out for the nearest ranger station to radio for help and medical supplies. When rescue workers arrived at the scene they found that Ranger Wilcox had passed away from exposure.

Ranger Wilcox was posthumously



awarded a Citation of Valor from the Department of the Interior and the Bronze Medal from the Carnegie Hero Commission for his efforts to save Ranger Fonda. The Assistant Chief Ranger was also awarded the Citation of Valor.

Ranger Fonda was a Korean War veteran. He had been a full time ranger for the Park Service for two years and had served as a seasonal ranger for six years. He was survived by his wife and daughter. His daughter is now a U.S. Marshal.

Ranger Wilcox had been with the agency for 24 years.

District Ranger Gale H. Wilcox

<https://www.odmp.org/officer/14167-district-ranger-gale-h-wilcox>

BIO

- Age** 48
- Tour** 24 years
- Badge** Not available

INCIDENT DETAILS

- Cause** Hypothermia
- Location** Wyoming