

04-17-1998 – Indiana – Karl Kelly – GW LEO Boat Training – Low Head Dam – Hydraulic



## OFFICER DOWN MEMORIAL PAGE

REMEMBERING ALL OF LAW ENFORCEMENT'S HEROES

<http://www.odmp.org/officer/15074-first-sergeant-karl-eugene-kelley>



### Bio & Incident Details

**Age:** 56

**Tour:** 28 years

**Badge #** Not available

**Cause:** Drowned

**Incident Date:** 4/16/1998

**First Sergeant**

**Karl Eugene Kelley**

Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Indiana

### End of Watch: Friday, April 17, 1998

First Sergeant Karl Kelley died from injuries suffered the day before during a training exercise on the East Fork of the White River at the Williams Dam in Lawrence County.

A boat containing two other conservation officers had overturned in turbulent waters and when First Sergeant Kelley and another conservation officer attempted a rescue, their boat capsized as well. First Sergeant Kelley was rescued after being submerged for 15 minutes and survived for 24 hours before succumbing to his injuries at University of Louisville Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky.

First Sergeant Kelley had served with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources for 28 years. He was survived by his wife, two daughters, son, two stepsons, parents, brother, sister, four grandchildren and two step grandchildren.

### Killed in the line of duty

[http://www.greenfieldreporter.com/2017/01/04/killed\\_in\\_the\\_line\\_of\\_duty/](http://www.greenfieldreporter.com/2017/01/04/killed_in_the_line_of_duty/)

**Karl Kelley**

Indiana Department of Natural Resources Sgt. Karl Kelley, 56, died on April 17, 1998, from injuries he'd suffered while trying to save fellow officers during a water-

training exercise. The boats Kelley and other officers were using capsized in rough waves in the White River on April 15, 1998. When two officers fell from their boat into the river, Kelley attempted to rescue them but was swept from his own boat. He was underwater for more than 15 minutes. He was taken to a Louisville Hospital where he died two days after the accident.

## **Authorities still trying to find what went wrong**

April 17, 1998 By TERRI JO COOPER, Times-Mail Staff Writer

WILLIAMS --Indiana conservation officers haven't been able to determine what went wrong at a high-water rescue training mission Wednesday at Williams Dam that left one officer in critical condition.

"We reviewed a video that was taken by a bystander, and have talked to officers at the scene and several witnesses," Indiana conservation officer Jeff Barker said. "But we haven't been able to put our finger on anything yet."

First Sgt. Karl Kelley, 52, of Waldron, was injured after he and other conservation officers were thrown from their rafts and sucked under the water at the base of the dam.

Kelley is on life support and in critical condition in the intensive care unit at University Hospital in Louisville, Ky.

Kelley and others were practicing a two-boat tether rescue when the accident happened. The exercise is used to practice a rescue of a boat or person stranded in a "boil" --a churning depression that is created at the base of the dam.

The men got caught in the boil, Barker said.

"If a person or object gets caught there, they are plunged to the bottom and then pushed back to the surface, and then plunged toward the face of the dam again. It's a continual process, over and over."

Conservation officers knew the training mission was dangerous when they entered White River, Barker said.

Officer Tom Jahn, stationed at Dubois County, and Officer Steve Woolwine, stationed in Fountain County, were in the first raft and were on their way near the dam to practice rescue techniques. They were to take their raft to the edge of the boil line and stop.

A rope was attached to the raft and then to a johnboat about 100 yards downstream to keep the raft from being sucked into the boil. But the raft crossed the boil line, putting the men in grave danger. "There is a clear line in the water before the boil starts," said Barker. "The raft was to go up to that line and stop, but the raft got into the boil. They got too close."

Barker said the line is visible from the shore and the boats. The officers at first didn't realize they were in trouble.

"Steve (Woolwine) threw in a rope bag (an item used to save a drowning person) and were pulling it back toward the raft when waves killed the motor," Barker said.

"Tom (Jahn) got the motor started again." But it didn't help, Barker said. "All Tom could do was keep the raft perpendicular to the dam," he said.

"The propeller didn't have any effect because the water was so aerated."

The second boat that was operating in reverse downstream tried a "peel out" to pull the raft from the boil. A peel out is a whipping motion that actually whips the raft from the boil, Barker said. "They just couldn't get enough force to pull the raft out," he said.

The raft was sucked up against the dam, throwing Woolwine and Jahn into the turbulent water, Baker said. "They tried frantically to get back into the boat," he said. "The force of the water was tremendous."

While the men were trying to get back into their raft, a second raft was launched. It was manned by Kelley and Tim Theriac, a conservation officer from LaPorte County. He was identified incorrectly Wednesday as a firefighter from South Bend.

But Kelley and Theriac got into trouble after they crossed the boil line trying to get to Jahn and Woolwine.

"All they knew was that their fellow officers were in trouble," Baker said. "They would have done anything to get to those men and save them. They did manage to throw a rescue line to the other raft two times, but the pressure of the boil was too much." Once they crossed the boil line, they had two options -- to peel to the right and go into the waves, which would have flooded the raft, or to try and go between the other raft and the dam.

The second option was the one they took, Barker said. "But the boil pulled them into the dam, causing the raft to flip and break apart," he said. "When that happened, all four men were in the water."

Woolwine told Barker that he didn't think he was going to make it. "Steve said he was making his second circulation under the water and needed air," Barker said "He could see his hands reaching for the surface, but he couldn't get to the surface."

For the next 30 minutes, the men struggled to survive while being tossed by the turbulent waters, Barker said.

Witnesses at the scene said watching the men was like a "nightmare." One of the johnboats trying to free the rafts from the boil flipped straight into the air, throwing

conservation officers into the air.

Jahn and Theriac managed to pull Kelley into the raft and tried to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation until they were pulled out of the boil and to shore. Kelley still was unresponsive after being taken to shore.

Dunn Memorial Hospital paramedics and emergency workers continued CPR efforts on Kelley, and he had a faint pulse as he was transported to Dunn Hospital. Once there, he was flown by helicopter to University Hospital, Barker said.

Kelley has been a conservation officer for 28 years and is the assistant commander for District 6, which is headquartered at Brown County State Park near the Indiana community of Nashville.

## **Conservation officer Karl Kelley remembered at Shelbyville funeral**

<http://www.tmnews.com/stories/1998/04/23/archive.300959.tms>

April 23, 1998, last update: 12/31 Associated Press

SHELBYVILLE Conservation Officer Tom Jahn stood next to 1st Sgt. Karl E. Kelley's casket and thanked the man who drowned while trying to rescue him.

"How do you thank a man who gave it all?" Jahn asked. "How do you say goodbye to a man who laid down his life for you?"

More than 300 law enforcement officers turned out Wednesday to remember Kelley, who died last week after helping rescue three fellow Indiana conservation officers from the White River during a river rescue drill that went awry.

Jahn and a half dozen other conservation officers who spoke Wednesday called Kelley a hero for what he did.

"Karl knew the rules and the chances of his survival, and he took the chances," Jahn said at Kelley's funeral in the Shelbyville High School auditorium.

Jahn was one of two members of the Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division who fell from a boat and into the swift-moving White River in Lawrence County during a river rescue training exercise at the Williams Dam on April 15. Kelley, who was helping conduct the exercise, moved to the officers' aid but was swept out of his boat along with a fourth officer.

While the three other officers were rescued, Kelley was underwater for 15 minutes. Unconscious, he was sent to University Hospital in Louisville, Ky., where he died April 17.

Gov. Frank O'Bannon joined the hundreds of police officers and firefighters, some of whom were trained by Kelley for water rescues, who filled the high school

auditorium for the funeral. The stage was filled with floral displays, surrounding a black-draped portrait of Kelley, 56, of Waldron, a 28-year conservation officer.

At the foot of the stage was the casket, and sitting in the front row were his wife, Janet I. Kelly, his two daughters and son, and two stepsons.

Most of the state's 200 conservation officers were at the service. They sat stoically as the funeral progressed.

"Karl is a hero," said Capt. Terry Hyndman, a state conservation officer who was involved in the rescue drill last week.

In the rescue exercise, conservation officers were showing how to get to a person caught in a boil, the swirling water at the base of a dam. Swollen by rain, the White River was 6 feet higher than normal, but there was no thought of canceling the exercise.

Two rescue boats were lashed together. According to conservation officers, the trouble started when the first boat was moving toward the base of the dam and its engine failed, and the two officers were swept into the water.

Watching the exercise in a third boat, Kelley moved to help, but he was pulled into the water himself.

The DNR is bringing in a member of an Ohio river rescue team to review the incident, said Stephen Sellers, spokesman for the department.



<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Accident/detail/accidentid/485/>

New York Conservation Officer reports that on April 15 Sgt. Karl Kelly, an Indiana conservation officer with 28 years of experience, died during a training exercise at the Williams Dam on the White River near Bedford, Indiana. Kelly was part of a team practicing a two-boat tether rescue. The lead boat stalled and swamped while attempting to recover the "victim", a floating throw bag, spilling the occupants overboard. Sgt. Kelly was in the downstream, or backup, boat. After attempting to pull the lead boat clear of the hydraulic, Sgt. Kelly moved his motor-powered raft upstream, between the swamped boat and the dam, to make the rescue. This was a terrible mistake; one that ran contrary to his training. His boat swamped, and he was caught in the backwash. Safety boats managed to rescue everyone else, but Kelly, although given prompt care, died in the hospital two days later. Two other officers were also hospitalized.

On April 15, 1998 Sgt. Karl Kelly, an Indiana conservation officer with 28 years of experience, died during a swiftwater rescue training exercise at the Williams Dam on the White River. The river, near Bedford, IN, was running extremely high due to recent rains. Kelly's team was practicing a two-boat tether, a dam rescue technique. While attempting to recover the practice "victim", a floating throw bag, the lead boat stalled and swamped in the backwash and spilled the occupants overboard. Kelly was in the downstream, or backup, boat. After attempting to pull the lead boat clear of the hydraulic, he moved his motor-powered raft upstream, between the swamped boat and the dam, to attempt a throw-line rescue. The boat swamped, throwing Kelly into the water. He recirculated for some time in the hydraulic. Safety boats picked up everyone else quickly, but could not reach Kelly for some time. Once he was washed out, he was quickly recovered downstream. CPR was administered, and they did get a pulse back. Despite this, he died in the hospital two days later. Two other officers involved in the drill were also hospitalized.

SOURCE: International Game Warden Magazine via NY Conservation Officer Ben Bramledge

On April 15th, the Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources (IDNR) was >> conducting swift water rescue training at the Williams Dam on the White >> River near Bedford, IN in south central Indiana. While practicing a >> two-boat tether, the tethered motorboat was sucked in, along with >> another boat. One man is in critical condition in a Louisville, KY >> hospital, two others were treated and released at the Bedford hospital. >> The river was running 7-feet over flood. For some very dramatic photos >> and complete story see the Bloomington, IN Herald Times web site at >> Article on the newspaper web site today says that the conservation officer, who had been hospitalized, has passed away. Our thoughts and sorrows go out to his friends and family. Roger Lynn Safety Chair Colorado White Water Association.

ANALYSIS: (Walbridge) Sgt. Kelly's action's, though courageous, was foolhardy. Dam backwashes are dangerous, and the whole aim of the two-boat tether is to keep rescuers clear of it. His actions were contrary to his training, and paid a fearful price.

## **PRACTICE RESCUE ENDS IN FATALITY**

<http://www.lifesaving.com/articles/practice.htm>

The following tragic story, written by Tom Vines, was extracted from the July 1998 issue of Fire-Rescue Magazine.

Williams, Indiana - A practice swiftwater rescue ended tragically April 15, 1998 with the death of state conservation officer First Sgt. Karl Kelley.

Three other officers survived the ordeal when two boats were drawn into a deadly hydraulic. This turbulent reversal of water occurs when water pours over an obstruction, such as a low-head dam, to create a dangerous circulation at the base.

The incident occurred at Williams Dam on the White River while the participants were using a difficult and potentially dangerous technique known as the "two-boat tether."

In his text, *Swiftwater Rescue*, Slim Ray describes the technique as using two boats tied together with a 100' - 150' line. The upstream boat gets as close as safely possible to the "boil line", the downstream margin of the hydraulic, while a rescuer in the bow of the boat attempts to throw a tethered flotation line to the subject trapped in the hydraulic and pull the victim to the boat.

According to Ray, "Under normal circumstances, the upstream boat does not enter the dam's backwash." The second boat, downstream, performs two functions. It assists the upstream boat in maneuvering and acts as a safety to pull the first boat back out if it enters the backwash. At all times, the downstream boat keeps enough tension on the line to keep it from snagging on an obstacle or a propeller."

On this day, however, as the first boat approached the dam's hydraulic, it was drawn past the boil line and hit the face of the dam, throwing the two officers from the boat into the water. The two men clung to the side of the small, inflatable craft and struggled to get back into the boat.

The two officers in the downstream safety boat tried to maneuver into position to throw a rescue line to the individuals in the water. But their boat apparently lost power and it was also pulled across the boil line into the hydraulic. As it crashed into the face of the dam, it broke apart, throwing the second two officers into the water.

Now, all four men struggled to regain control of the first boat, which crashed repeatedly into the dam face, but remained intact.

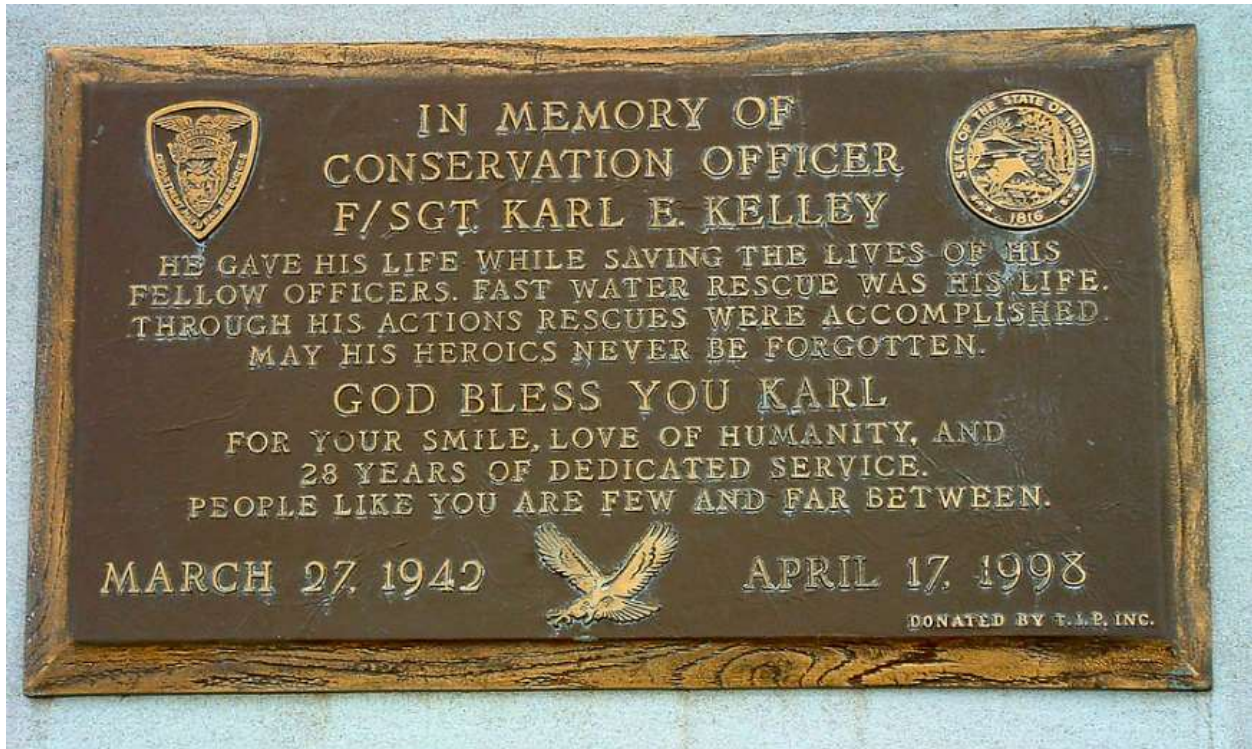
Finally, the officers made it into the surviving boat, which was pulled to safety, but Kelley (who had been in the safety boat) was unresponsive. The surviving officers attempted to revive him after he was dragged from the water.

By the time the officers reached shore, paramedics from Dunn Memorial Hospital were on scene and immediately began CPR. After an assessment at the hospital, the officer was taken by helicopter to the University of Louisville Hospital in Kentucky. He never regained consciousness and was taken off life support. He died at 2030 hrs. Friday, April 17. A second officer was also transported to Dunn Memorial Hospital, where he was treated and released.

Kelley had been a conservation officer for 28 years and was the assistant commander for District 6.

Information for this report was taken from Slim Ray and the Bloomington Herald-Times.

**DISCUSSION:** The river was about 7 feet above flood stage before the exercise began. The rescue craft was facing downstream, away from the dam, but the propeller was apparently unable to get enough "bite" in the hydraulic because of the aerated water. In addition, some water rescue authorities recommend against using a jet drive type, which was the design used on the rescue boat in this situation.



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/cindy47452/89790775>

## Indiana Conservation Officer Organization

HOME ABOUT CONTACT SCHOLARSHIP YOUTH CAMP

### ICOO Karl E. Kelley Memorial Youth Camp

<http://www.icoo.com/youthcamp.php>

#### IN MEMORY OF

In April 1998 F/Sgt. Karl E. Kelley lost his life in the line of duty while attempting to rescue fellow officers that had become trapped in a low head dam during a training exercise.



Karl Kelley was an officer's officer. He was a model to all of us and this loss will be felt for years to come.

The family of F/Sgt. Kelley expressed the desire that Karl be remembered by teaching the people of Indiana about the importance of the Indiana Conservation Officer. In response to this request the ICOO named our newly founded youth camp program in honor and memory of our fallen brother.

The Karl E. Kelley Conservation Officers Youth Camp Program will strive to meet this request.