

06-21-1987 – Detroit River -Richard Fortin – LEO PSD Rescue Equipment

Richard Fortin

Assigned as police diver, rescued four people from an overturned boat, attached a towline, sank from view and drowned.

American police officer aged 45 died while searching the Detroit River for victims of a boat that had capsized. It was later alleged that the malfunction of a valve on a dry suit was a contributing factor to his death.

<http://www.thediversassociation.com/index.php/sheets>

JUNE, 1987 MICHIGAN

A 45 yoa police diver drowned while attaching a tow line on the surface to an overturned boat involved in a boating accident. The diver entered the water in a dry suit, but was without a BC and dry suit underwear and wore in excess of 40 lbs. of weight. The diver reportedly had problems with his dry suit inflator and dropped below the surface and drowned.



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REMEMBERING ALL OF LAW ENFORCEMENT'S HEROES

<http://www.odmp.org/officer/5019-police-officer-richard-l-fortin>



Bio & Incident Details

Age: 45

Tour: 23 years

Badge # Not available

Cause: Drowned

Police Officer

Richard L. Fortin

Detroit Police Department, Michigan

End of Watch: Friday, June 19, 1987

Officer Richard Fortin drowned while attempting to rescue four people from a boat that had capsized.

Officer Fortin had been with the agency for 23 years and was survived by his wife, daughter, two sons, and mother.

DIVER HELPING WITH RESCUE OF OVERTURNED BOAT MISSING IN DETROIT RIVER

<http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1987/Diver-Helping-with-Rescue-of-Overturned-Boat-Missing-in-Detroit-River/id-6bae7b4496a900415af6972461e9a367>

Jun. 19, 1987 AP, Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) _ Four people who went overboard when their small boat capsized on the Detroit River were rescued by other boaters Friday, but a police diver assisting with the rescue was missing, authorities said.

The craft began sinking at 3:16 p.m. outside Detroit's Renaissance Center, where thousands gathered Friday to watch Formula One race cars prepare for Sunday's Detroit Grand Prix VI through the city's downtown streets.

"We're missing a Harbor Master police diver," said a petty officer with the Coast Guard's Belle Isle Lifeboat Station who declined identification.

Police identified the diver as Richard Fortin, 45, a 23-year police officer and a member of the department's volunteer diving team.

Fortin was assigned to a Fire Department rescue boat patrolling the river along the Grand Prix circuit, said Executive Deputy Police Chief James Bannon.

"Dick was aboard and wearing a wetsuit, but he did not have on breathing apparatus," Bannon said.

Fortin "trained in that water and knows it's probably the single most treacherous piece of water in Michigan," Bannon said. "The current and turbulence created beneath the surface are deadly."

The petty officer said four people leaped overboard when the small boat capsized and were rescued nearby by other boaters. Coast Guard and Detroit police boats were summoned to the scene and the diver was reported missing at 3:38 p.m. Philip Frame, who works in the Renaissance Center, said he saw a man holding onto the capsized boat as the Coast Guard was attempting to attach a tow line to it, when he began drifting downstream.

"There were a dozen boats around him, including a police boat, and nobody went after him," Frame said. "He started gesturing the boats toward him to 'Come get me.' He just kept waving. All of a sudden he went under and, poof, he was gone."