

06-22-1995 Lynchburg VA – Carter Martin – FF- Attempted Flood Rescue

## **Carter D. Martin**

<http://www.lynchburgva.gov/fallen-firefighters-heroes>



**Carter D. Martin**

Firefighter III Carter D. Martin died in the line of duty on June 22, 1995, while performing duties with the Brookville-Timberlake Volunteer Fire Department when rendering aid during flood conditions.



## **Carter Martin**

<https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/firefighter-fatalities/fatalityData/detail?fatalityId=317>

On June 22, Assistant Chief Carter Martin of the Brookville-Timberlake Volunteer Fire Department drowned after he waded into fast moving flood waters to search three vehicles that had been swept downstream. Chief Martin was swept under water and trapped. He was wearing full protective firefighting turnout clothing while in the water, was not wearing a life vest, and had been tied into a rope that was attached to a fire engine. Two other rescuers were thrown into the water but survived. Chief Martin also served as a career firefighter with the Lynchburg Fire Department and was an instructor with the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. It was later discovered that the occupants of the vehicles had reached safety on their own prior to the response of emergency personnel.

## Dam break kills rescuer

[http://www.recordnet.com/article/19950624/A\\_NEWS/306249983](http://www.recordnet.com/article/19950624/A_NEWS/306249983)

Jun 24, 1995 - Updated Jan 7, 2011

**LYNCHBURG, Va.** (AP -- Heavy rain washed out a 69-year-old dam, unleashing a torrential flood that dragged a rescue worker to his death and swept several stranded cars off a bridge into a raging creek. The dam broke late Thursday night, draining a rain-gorged 75-acre lake to its muddy bottom and sending a wall of water down Buffalo Creek.

It was roaring like a jet plane when the water turned loose, said Charles Falwell, who lives on the lake. Within 15 minutes, the water cut through it like a knife.

A mile downstream, the water tore into a four-lane bridge that was already submerged under - to 4 feet of water. The force of the torrent crumpled steel guardrails like accordions, snapped a telephone pole in half and ripped huge slabs of asphalt and concrete from the bridge.

I was expecting road, and I hit a river, said Jason Schnabel, 22, of Bedford, one of a half-dozen people who waded off the bridge after their cars stalled. The water kept rising, and I told my girlfriend, Weve got to get out of here.

State police trooper Bob Stoup said Carter Martin, 41, of the Brookville-Timberlake Volunteer Fire Department drowned while checking inside a flooded car on the bridge. Martin was harnessed in a safety belt and rope when the water surged, causing him to lose footing. Two other rescue workers sustained minor cuts.

The water receded Friday.

The bridge on U.S. 460 remained closed so inspectors could assess the damage. More than five miles of U.S. 460 were closed, as well as parts of other roads that were flooded or covered by mud slides.

The dam washed out after 8 inches of rain fell in Campbell County between Wednesday and Thursday nights. Nearly - inches of rain per hour fell at times Thursday in Lynchburg and Amherst County.

Five or six people were treated at the Lynchburg hospital, some after tree limbs fell on them or boats capsized, supervisor Sally Evers said. It was still raining early today, and more heavy rains were forecast.

The dam was built in 1926 to create a lake for a subdivision south of Lynchburg. After it broke the lake fell at least 4 feet in a half-hour, John Willard, a nearby resident, said. Several nearby houses were flooded.

My parents heard it cracking, then they heard a roar and that was it, said Robbin Salmon. It took half the dam away.

State engineers were trying today to find out why the dam failed, said Gary Waugh, a spokesman for the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. The dam was built long before state standards were imposed in 1981, and the homeowners association was not required to correct any problems. However, the homeowners had fixed a leak in recent years, and had been working with state engineers on a design to increase the volume of the spillway, Waugh said.

## **One dead, homes wrecked after dam fails**

[http://lmtribune.com/nation/world/one-dead-homes-wrecked-after-dam-fails/article\\_bb643090-de79-5dce-ac17-5e87c8e1b31b.html](http://lmtribune.com/nation/world/one-dead-homes-wrecked-after-dam-fails/article_bb643090-de79-5dce-ac17-5e87c8e1b31b.html)

Jun 24, 1995 From wire service reports

LYNCHBURG, Va. Ira North and his neighbors heard a cracking sound coming from the earthen dam that held in their 75-acre lake. Then, with the roar of a jet engine, the water broke loose, swamping homes, washing away cars and sweeping a rescue worker to his death.

As dawn broke Friday, residents found carp flopping in a smelly, muddy mire where their back yards and a lovely expanse of blue had been a day earlier.

"There was this huge, huge sound," said North. "It was like a machine, an enormous turbine turning. And that was the dam breaking, and the water rushing over it."

North used to live at the end of a pretty, manmade lake where large-mouth bass were plentiful and power boats were banned. But when the dam built in 1926 broke, the lake went with it, ripping out trees and tossing boats and docks and a child's blue plastic slide in a muddy jumble.

"It drained so quick, we couldn't believe it. It was like somebody took the stopper out of a bathtub Whoosh!" North said.

Rains like no one in the leafy Timberlake neighborhood can remember 8 inches since Wednesday night had pushed the lake waters halfway up North's steeply sloped lawn, nearly submerging his boathouse and carrying off a picnic table.

He and a neighbor watched the water rise for a while Thursday night, then went back inside about 10:30 p.m. Moments later, the dam failed.

"I didn't know exactly, but when I heard it, I had a pretty good idea what had happened," North said.

Lightning illuminated a terrifying scene. In place of the dam was a deep slash of powerful water a river where none had been before. The road on top of the dam was gone.

"We watched in the flashes ... as stuff went over the side," said North's 18-year-old son, Tig.

A mile down Buffalo Creek, the water tore into a four-lane bridge that was already submerged under 3 to 4 feet of water, crumpling steel guardrails like accordions, snapping a telephone pole in half and ripping off huge slabs of asphalt and concrete.

"I was expecting road and I hit a river," said Jason Schnabel, 22, of Bedford, one of a half-dozen people who waded off the bridge after their cars stalled.

Carter Martin, 41, of the Brookville-Timberlake Volunteer Fire Department, drowned while checking inside a flooded car on the bridge. He was harnessed in a safety belt and rope when the water surged and he was swept off the bridge.

## **Residents Remember 20 Years After Historic Flood, Breaking of Timberlake Dam**

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<http://wset.com/archive/residents-remember-20-years-after-historic-flood-breaking-of-timber-lake-dam>

June 19th 2015 by Kody Leibowitz



Timberlake, VA - At its core, dozens of homes sit near the cooling ripples of a man-made watering hole in a small community.

The present for Timberlake and its dam is calming, but a stormy moment remains in its past. Charles Falwell remembers the historic time. That night, while at home eating dinner, he noticed his water crawling across half his front yard.

"I told my wife 'we've got a problem down in our emergency spillway,'" remember Falwell. "We had three, 36-inch pipes that kept the lake from overflowing.

"When I got [to the dam, the pipes were running] wide open and the lake was continuing to climb. I knew we had a real problem."

It's the night of June 22nd 1995, a date forever seared in the minds of locals. "I felt such a deep sense of sadness for people who had lost their lake and what that was going to mean for their future here," said DeeDee Gillett, who now lives near the Timberlake Dam.

Hours of torrential downpour caused the dam to crumble with reports of hundreds of millions of gallons of water released. Rushing water flooded cars as stranded drivers laid across their hoods waiting for help. Two people died that night: Doris Stanley, a Forest woman returning home from Richmond. And Carter Martin, a local, high school coach and then-assistant chief at Brookville Timberlake Volunteer Fire Department.

"A lot of it is kind of fuzzy for me," said Mike Mays, chief at the same fire department Martin once worked.

Mays knew [Martin](#) well. He worked along side him the night he drowned. "We were down there and all of a sudden we get hit with a wall of water," said Mays. "Carter Martin was a friend. He was a mentor to me."

A dam broken and a community deep in pain, but 20 years of tomorrows have [made things easier](#). Though it took two years, the community [rallied and rebuilt the dam](#). It took more than one million dollars to rebuild the dam, Falwell says, which the community renamed the Carter D. Martin Memorial Dam. Questions were raised after the breaking of the dam about safety regulation of Virginia's dams, according to the Association of State Dam Safety Officials. "The 20th anniversary of the Timberlake failure serves as a reminder of the importance of stringent safety regulations for dams," said Lori Spragens, Executive Director of the Association of State Dam Safety Officials, in a press release this week. "The failure provides a clear example of the need for all dams to meet current design and safety requirements, regardless of when they were constructed. Inspections alone do not make dams safe. It is essential that regulators charged with ensuring public safety have the necessary authorities in place."

An exemption at the time, which stated that the state lacked authority to require upgrades, is no longer in place. Also, according to ASDSO, the state now requires developers of projects that "impact nearby lakes and reservoirs to help pay consequential required safety upgrades to impacted dams.

"It just so happened that we were the one that happened to fail and cost lives at the times they were drawing conclusions with what had to be done," said Falwell. "The community realizes now how quick something like this can happen and how quick you can lose it."

"Communities when standing together can accomplish great things," said Gillett.

Residents and the community members will remember the 20th anniversary on Saturday at the site of the dam with a number of commemorations starting at 10AM.

### **Timberlake community recalls lives lost in dam disaster**

[http://www.newsadvance.com/news/local/timberlake-community-recalls-lives-lost-in-dam-disaster/article\\_6f94aeba-1794-11e5-bebe-fbe16bc42ec4.html](http://www.newsadvance.com/news/local/timberlake-community-recalls-lives-lost-in-dam-disaster/article_6f94aeba-1794-11e5-bebe-fbe16bc42ec4.html)

### **Twenty years ago heavy rains caused earthen dam to give way**

Jun 20, 2015 Ashlie Walter

On a clear, sunny Saturday morning on Timber Lake, about 100 people gathered to remember one of the worst storms in the Timberlake community. Twenty years ago on Monday more than a foot of rain caused the Timber Lake Dam to give way. The ensuing flood killed two people.

Members of the community and local firefighters attended a ceremony Saturday morning at the edge of the reconstructed Timber Lake Dam. A few shed more tears in remembrance of Carter Martin, one of the victims of that flood.

"We had the greatest tragedy to happen in Timberlake," said Doug Washington, president of the Timberlake Homeowner's Association during the flood.

Washington described a community that came together after the dam's break. Many people at the time thought it would be a normal thunderstorm.

When news of Carter Martin's death spread, everyone shed a lot of tears, he said. "There were two floods: one by water and another by sightseers coming to see what had happened," he said.

Many experts at the time told the community they should turn the lake into a golf course but they decided against that, Washington said. Instead, they built a new dam that can be seen today.



**Jonathan Wright (left) and Mike Mays salute to a memorial during a wreath laying ceremony in memory of Carter Martin a firefighter who died in the line of duty while trying to save lives after torrential rain caused the Timber Lake Dam to burst in 1995. (Autumn Parry/The News & Advance)**



Martin was assistant chief of the Brookville-Timberlake Volunteer Fire Department. He died while trying to rescue motorists stranded on a U.S. 460 bridge. Robert Ore, a 20-year veteran of the department, was one of the firefighters holding a safety rope attached to Martin during the rescue mission.

"He slept beside me a bunk over ... it was 20 years ago but it seems like yesterday," Ore said.

John Vasvary, former Brookville High School athletic director, said Martin was a dedicated coach to the football program. He attended a school board meeting with Martin shortly before the storm.

"It's hard for me not to have tears now... I remember when I got the call 'Carter's gone,'" he said.

Doris Stanley, of Forest, was the second victim of the flood. She was driving home on Turkey Foot Road when her car was swept into the water, Washington said.

At the end of the ceremony, Ore rang a memorial bell a total of 20 times.

The bell ceremony is a tradition for firemen's' funerals. Many years ago, an alarm call was sounded by a bell and the bell would ring at the end of a day. When a firefighter had died in the line of duty, the bell would ring 5 times.

The anniversary continued Saturday with a potluck dinner and presentations by community members later that evening.

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6/22/1995	<b>Carter Martin, Assistant Chief Brookville-Timberlake (VA) Volunteer Fire Department</b>	<b>Volunteer, Age Unknown Drowning</b>
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Assistant Chief Martin **drowned** after he waded into fast moving floodwaters to search three vehicles that had been swept downstream. Chief Martin was swept under water and trapped. He was wearing full protective firefighting turnout clothing while in the water, was not wearing a life vest, and had been tied into a rope that was attached to a fire engine. Two other rescuers were thrown into the water but survived. Martin also served as a career firefighter with the Lynchburg (VA) Fire Department and was an instructor with the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. It was later discovered that the occupants of the vehicles had reached safety on their own prior to the response of emergency personnel.