

07-04-1990 Port Colborne ONT – Harry Chevalier – FF Off Duty – Rescue Attempt



CANADIAN FALLEN
FIREFIGHTERS FOUNDATION
THE FALLEN



HARRY MICHAEL CHEVALIER

Port Colborne, Ontario

Age 35
Rank Firefighter
Department Port Colborne
Date Joined April 19, 1983
Category full time
Date of Death July 4, 1990
Date of Funeral July 10, 1990
Cemetery Mount St. Joseph Cemetery
National Memorial Location 11

MAN WHO SAVED 4 NEVER QUESTIONED WHETHER TO TRY FORMER LIFEGUARD IS A HERO DESPITE DEATHS OF 3 IN LAKE

<http://buffalonews.com/1990/07/07/man-who-saved-4-never-questioned-whether-to-try-former-lifeguard-is-a-hero-despite-deaths-of-3-in-lake/>

Jul 7, 1990 by ESTHER MILLER AND JOSEPH BORIS , JOSEPH BORIS ,JOSEPH BORIS AND CAROLYN RAEKE ,JOSEPH BORIS AND DAN HERBECK , andWALTER FUSZARA AND JOSEPH BORIS

For most people, the prospect of saving another's life remains an abstract question. For Thomas Turner, the answer became a very real "yes" on Independence Day -- his birthday.

Turner, 33, of Kelburn Avenue, used a 5-foot-wide inner tube to rescue four people whose rafts capsized Wednesday in heavy waves off Pleasant Beach near Port Colborne, Ont., as they tried unsuccessfully to rescue three other people.

"If I would have sat there and watched those people drown, I couldn't live with it," said Turner, a former lifeguard with seven years' experience.

Turner described the events leading up to his rescue of the four:

Dennis Schultz, 32, of Cheektowaga, was thrown into the water when his dinghy capsized in six-foot waves and strong winds.

Robert M. Funk, 25, of Springville, and Harry Chevalier, 35, a Port Colborne firefighter, then went out and tried to rescue Schultz, but all three drowned.

After a massive search effort, Funk's body was recovered at about 7 p.m. Friday by diving teams from various police and fire departments, according to Niagara Regional Police.

"His body was recovered near the area of the incident . . . a couple of hundred yards offshore and in about 13 feet of water," the spokesman said.

"That leaves two more still in the water."

When it became apparent that Funk and Chevalier were having trouble getting to Schultz, a man and woman went out in a raft to try to help.

After the couple lost their raft, two men watching on the beach got on another raft and tried to save the couple. But the second raft also was snagged by the choppy waters.

Turner, celebrating his birthday and the holiday at his parents' cottage, watched from the beach with family and friends and decided to jump in with the oversized tube, which came from an earth-moving vehicle.

"I watched them for a second, and they were all drifting out," he said. "I grabbed a 5-foot inner tube -- the thing's 20 years old. . . . I swam out to them, with the tube, and I got to them one at a time."

After rescuing the two of the male would-be rescuers, Turner said he then rescued the woman and finally the other man.

"She was really tired," he recalled. "She couldn't even hold on to the tube. . . . He was pretty tired, too."

Turner said he was in the middle of the tube, holding onto the tube and the woman's arms, while the three men clung to its side.

"We were about 150 yards from shore by the time I got them all together," he said, adding that it took him 30 minutes to get to the last person, while the whole rescue took about an hour.

"It just seemed like forever," he said.

Once ashore, the four were helped by people on the beach before rescue crews and police arrived at the scene.

Turner said he thought only one person, the woman, was taken to a hospital, but he could not identify her and information was unavailable from hospitals in southern Ontario.

Turner, a lab technician at Bell Aerospace in Wheatfield and a father of three, received first-aid and rescue training as a student in Cheektowaga Central High School. He worked as a lifeguard at Cheektowaga Town Park and while attending Geneseo State College.

Turner said he doesn't regard himself as a hero. He said his training and experience were keys to his effort's success.

"When I got out of the water, I felt really sick and just sat down on the blanket for about two minutes and then went home, back to the cottage."

Arrangements for Funk are being handled by the Smith-Weismantel Funeral Home of Springville, where the body is being sent, according to a spokesman for a Port Colborne funeral home handling the transport.

A memorial service for Chevalier will be conducted by the Port Colborne Fire Department at 2 p.m. Tuesday in the Port Colborne Arena on West Side Road. Chevalier was a volunteer firefighter for the department for seven years and a paid member for the past four months.

FIRE CHIEF DISCOURAGING LAKE RESCUES PORT COLBORNE DEPARTMENT LACKS TRAINING, GEAR

<http://buffalonews.com/1990/11/08/fire-chief-discouraging-lake-rescues-port-colborne-department-lacks-training-gear/>

Nov 8, 1990 By CHARLES ANZALONE AND MICHAEL LEVY , GENE WARNER AND MICHAEL LEVY , GEORGE BORRELLI AND MICHAEL LEVY , JUSTIN MCGUIRE AND MICHAEL LEVY , MICHAEL LEVY , MICHAEL LEVY AND BARBARA O'BRIEN , MICHAEL LEVY AND DALE ANDERSON , MICHAEL LEVY AND JAY REY , MICHAEL LEVY AND JIM HEANEY , and MICHAEL LEVY AND JON R. SORENSEN

Unless the City Council mandates it -- and comes up "with a substantial sum of money" -- the Fire Department here is out of the water rescue business.

"Council will meet Monday to discuss the budget," said Fire Chief Doug Lockyer, "and my recommendation is that our department does not continue, after the tragic accident we had here last July. But if Council decides we have a mandate for water rescues on Lake Erie, we'll need at least \$60,000 a year extra."

Last July 4, three boats capsized and Firefighter Harry Chevalier, 35, died when he was dragged down by a strong undertow during the rescue attempt.

Chevalier, the father of four children, was one of several firefighters who linked themselves together with a rope and entered the lake to try to rescue the boaters.

A civilian who aided the rescue attempt also drowned, along with one of the boaters. The other two boaters made it to shore.

And then the provincial Ministry of Labor entered the picture.

"Whenever you have an accident in the workplace the ministry steps in," said Lockyer. "They told us what we had to have in the way of equipment and training if we were to continue in lake rescue work." With an annual budget in excess of \$1 million, the chief recommended to the city's Finance Committee that such rescues not be undertaken.

"I realize there may be a human outcry . . . but the safety of our firefighters must be addressed," the chief told the Finance Committee this week.

Lake emergencies, whether during the summer or on winter ice, should be the responsibility of the police and Coast Guard, he said.

But if the Council decides the Fire Department should continue lake rescues, they'll have to finance the gear required by the Ministry of Labor, the chief said.



Official Records for 3 December 1990

- Hansard Transcripts

http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/house-proceedings/house_detail.do?locale=en&Parl=35&Sess=1&Date=1990-12-03

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr Owens: My question is for the Minister of Labour. According to published reports, the Ministry of Labour ordered the Port Colborne fire department not to respond to water rescue calls until such time as they are trained and properly equipped. Apparently this arises out of a situation where a Port Colborne firefighter, Harry Chevalier, drowned while he was attempting to rescue two swimmers. The two swimmers also died. What does the minister know of this order and did he have any personal involvement in this issue?

Hon Mr Mackenzie: I want to thank the member for raising the question. I want to inform him and this House that the media report is not true at all, that my ministry has issued no such order to the Port Colborne fire department or to any fire department in this province. What has happened is that the ministry officials investigated the accident, since it was an on-the-job accident, and orders were issued to the Port Colborne fire department to assure proper training for water rescue so that this unfortunate tragedy would not happen again. But we have never told nor would we ever tell any public safety organization not to respond to the need for emergency rescue. I think that would be unthinkable. We must take every possible precaution to protect the lives of rescue workers, but public safety must come first in this province.

I would like to thank the minister for clearing up the inaccurate report. I would like to know what steps his ministry is taking other than issuing orders to train the firefighters to respond appropriately to these calls, both appropriately and safely.

Hon Mr Mackenzie: First of all, as a result of the ministry investigation into this tragedy, a hazard alert is being issued and developed for use by fire departments right across the province of Ontario. Second, there has been an inquest into the drownings and we are awaiting the recommendations of the jury. My ministry will be studying those recommendations carefully to see if there is anything else that can be done to handle this matter.

As I said before, we are vitally concerned with the health and safety of all workers, including public safety workers who are often at extreme risk, but as well we must also bear in mind that public safety is paramount. Training and proper equipment will give public safety workers even more confidence during rescue attempts and ultimately, hopefully, save more lives in the province of Ontario.

Robert Funk

CARNEGIE FUND SELECTS STUDENT FOR HERO'S MEDAL SPRINGVILLE MAN DIED IN BID TO RESCUE BOATER FROM LAKE

<http://buffalonews.com/1991/12/26/carnegie-fund-selects-student-for-heros-medal-springville-man-died-in-bid-to-rescue-boater-from-lake/>

Dec 26, 1991 By ANTHONY CARDINALE AND KAREN BRADY, CARL ALLEN AND KAREN BRADY, GENE WARNER AND KAREN BRADY, HENRY L. DAVIS AND KAREN BRADY, JUAN FORERO AND KAREN BRADY, KAREN BRADY, KAREN BRADY AND ANTHONY CARDINALE, KAREN BRADY AND BARBARA O'BRIEN, KAREN BRADY AND BOB BUYER, and KAREN BRADY AND CAROLYN RAEKE

Thursday was filled with bittersweet honor for the family of the late Robert M. "Rob" Funk of Springville.

The Buffalo State College student and Air Force veteran who died trying to save a drowning boater on the Fourth of July 1990 was one of 15 individuals in the United States and Canada recognized by the prestigious Carnegie Hero Fund Commission.

"This doesn't make Rob's loss any less in vain, but it's something for us all to be proud of," said his father, Herbert Funk of Springville, a district manager for National Fuel.

"Christmastime is a hard time for this, but the way Rob died I consider to be very noble," said his youngest sister, Janet, 22, of Philadelphia. "Rob should be honored for the sacrifice he made."

Funk was 25 and celebrating the Fourth of July with his parents and five of his seven siblings on the day he died. The family was at Pleasant Beach near Port

Colborne, Ont., where Funk's eldest brother, Paul, had rented a cottage for the month.

"It shows the type of person Rob was -- he was the first one up when we heard the cry for help," Paul Funk recalled. "He was always very caring. The night before he died, we had a big bonfire, and he entertained the kids, telling them stories."

All four of the Funk brothers -- Rob, Paul, Tom and David -- responded to the cry for help shortly after 2 p.m. that day, after three boaters were thrown into the choppy waters of Lake Erie when their rubber dinghy capsized. One boater, Dennis Schultz, 32, of Cheektowaga, and a Port Colborne firefighter, Harry Chevalier, 35, who had joined in the rescue, also died in the accident.

"The Carnegie Commission first contacted us about a month later," said Paul Funk, "but for quite a while, I was unable to respond. It took time for me to come around to this being a worthy honor, when you just want to forget about it."

According to Paul Funk, the commission "kept interviewing us. We didn't know until a couple days before Christmas that Rob Funk was chosen for the honor."

The letter confirming the choice of Rob Funk "came in the mail with all the Christmas cards we were getting," said Janet Funk. "That was hard."

In a few weeks, Herbert Funk said, he and his wife, Shirley, will receive their late son's Carnegie Medal from the commission, which was founded in 1908 by Andrew Carnegie to honor those who risk their lives trying to save others.

Rob Funk is one of 93 people to be recognized in 1991 and one of 7,604 honored in the past 84 years. In addition to the Carnegie prize and international recognition, his parents will receive \$2,500.

"I think Rob would be absolutely flabbergasted," said Paul Funk of Kenmore, advertising director for City Mattress. "I think he wouldn't expect anything at all, anyway, except to rescue the guy and get back to everything. He was planning on going into video communications."

The wind and high-wave conditions that had capsized the dinghy kept searchers from finding Funk's body for two days. His death was blamed on the same treacherous undertow that has apparently taken a number of lives in the Point Abino/Pleasant Beach area -- including that of Mary Faso, a Buffalo mother, last summer and Buffalo lawyer Dennis Denny in 1982.

All of the deaths brought outcries over the lack of warning signs at private beaches in the area. In the incident involving Funk, a coroner's inquest ended in safety recommendations for Pleasant Beach.

The deaths also brought a strong suggestion from the Port Colborne fire chief that unless his department receives a substantial amount of money to enhance water rescue efforts, it will no longer take part in such rescues.

"What were really needed were warning signs," said Paul Funk. "People who don't know the area don't know about the undertow. There's something like a reverse tide in the lake flow that puts people in danger."