

10-21-2008 Woodbridge VA - Frank Stecco - LEO Vol PSD Training Lost

Frank J. Stecco

42 year old police diver or trainee police diver, surface exercise wearing a dry suit, lost, body recovered 4 days later. Reported as 'drowned'.

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

Stecco was role playing in the exercise involving the dive team and a helicopter when he drowned. His body was discovered several days later. He was a 19-year veteran of the police force.



FAIRFAX COUNTY

Police Officer Disappears in Diving Exercise

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/10/21/AR2008102101820.html?nav=rss_email/components



Boats search Pohick Bay for the police officer. Helicopters and craft from 10 neighboring jurisdictions assisted Fairfax County's efforts to locate him. (Photos By John McDonnell -- The Washington Post)

October 22, 2008 By Tom Jackman and Jerry Markon Washington Post Staff Writers

A 42-year-old Fairfax County police officer disappeared during a diving exercise in Pohick Bay yesterday afternoon, and an intensive search of the waters near the Mason Neck area has not located him.

Police did not release the officer's name but said he is a male. About 15 people were involved in the training exercise, including members of the police dive team and

helicopter and marine patrol units as well as several Fairfax firefighters, said Fairfax Officer Don Gotthardt, a police spokesman.

The exercise began about 1:30 p.m., Gotthardt said, and the officer was reported missing about 2:45 p.m.

Boats and helicopters from 10 neighboring jurisdictions swooped in to scour Pohick Bay in southeastern Fairfax, which is bordered by Mason Neck on the south and Fort Belvoir on the north.

Fairfax Officer Tawny Wright said the officer was wearing a dry suit rather than a wet suit; a dry suit is used in cold water and might enable the missing officer to survive longer in the wind-swept waters. He was not wearing an oxygen tank or a diving apparatus.

"His role in the training did not require diving equipment," Wright said. Police later said the officer was not a member of the dive team, but was serving as a role-player in the exercise.

Wright said the training exercise involved a helicopter, but she did not have further details.

More than 10 inflatable and flat-bottom boats searched Pohick Bay into the darkness as helicopters circled. The bay is the western branch of Gunston Cove, which opens into the Potomac River.

"Every jurisdiction that has a boat is here," said Lt. Raul Castillo of the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department.

Some of the search boats were equipped with sonar, and helicopters used infrared cameras, which can sense heat sources even in darkness.

Police asked property owners along the bay to help with the search, and they said residents had responded by going out on their piers to see whether they could spot anything.

At the Pohick Bay Marina, ambulances and other rescue vehicles idled, waiting for a call.

As nightfall arrived, seven boats with flashing lights patrolled an area at least two miles wide that extended beyond Gunston Cove to the coast



By Laris Karklis — The Washington Post

of Charles County in Maryland. Police said they were expanding their search into the Potomac, in case the current had pulled the officer out of the bay.

The bay is bordered on the south by Pohick Bay Regional Park, part of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. The park, about 25 miles south of Washington, calls itself one of only three Northern Virginia access points to the Potomac.

Pohick Bay is less than a mile wide at its widest point, where it flows into Gunston Cove. But the cove, as it enters the Potomac, is about 1 1/2 miles wide.

Fairfax County (VA) Police Officer missing during water rescue training operation

<https://lifesaving.com/node/1399>

22 Oct 2008

LORTON, Va. – More than 24 hours after a Fairfax County police officer was reported missing during a training operation on Pohick Bay, authorities are not giving up hope that they'll find him.

Investigators say the 42-year-old male officer was playing the role of a victim in a rescue mission during training exercise with a dive team when he was reported missing on Tuesday afternoon. They say 16 others were taking part in the exercise in Pohick Bay, a water park on the Potomac River about 25 miles south of the District, when he was reported missing.

The training started around 1:30 p.m., and at 2:47 p.m., the 19-year veteran officer was not accounted for. Fairfax County officials have not identified the missing officer.

The Fairfax County Police and fire crews are receiving help from a number of agencies in the search for the officer. Among those agencies helping with the search are the U.S. Park Police, emergency crews from Charles, Prince George's and Prince William Counties, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the FBI. They used infrared technology to search well into the night, and their search from the air, on the ground, and in the water continued throughout the day on Wednesday.



Police used side scan sonar as well as heat seeking devices in hopes of finding the officer safe and sound.

"Now we have more bodies along the shoreline," said Officer Eddie Azcarate of the Fairfax County Police Department. "They've been deployed along the shoreline, some stationary, some somewhat static, some walking inland to see if he made it to shore where he may have sought refuge and safety."

Authorities say the officer was wearing a dark-colored dry suit with orange coloring on the shoulders when he vanished. Police say he was simply there one minute, and gone the next.

"For a brief moment they lost sight of him," explained Officer Azcarate. "When they came back around and saw that he was missing, that's when they started the search."

Fairfax County Police spokesman Don Gotthardt says the training exercise was routine, and it's something that members of the Underwater Search and Recovery Unit do regularly to maintain peak performance in their daily work. In this case, the dive team, the helicopter unit, the marine unit and the Fairfax County Fire Department were taking part in the training.

Officials say the missing officer was playing the role of the victim in the exercise, and though he was wearing a dry suit, he is not a diver—thus he was not wearing a tank, mask, or other diving apparatus. He is, however, described as being extremely physically fit.

Even though it's been more than a day since he disappeared, investigators stress they're not giving up hope he'll be found safe.

"This is a rescue operation," said Chief David Rohrer of the Fairfax County Police Department. "Based on what the officer was wearing and gear he has on, he could survive. That's based on an analysis of the water temperature and currents."

Investigators say the officer had on a dry suit and a shirt underneath it, similar to the ones rescuers are wearing. The suits provide thermal protection in the bay's 62-degree water.

Statistics from the U.S. Water Rescue Dive Team show that someone could survive in 60-70 degree water temperatures for between 2 and 40 hours.

Rescuers say they're concentrating part of their efforts on a beacon in the water that's used to track the currents. They say they are still within the window of survival.

Police say they've launched an internal investigation into the officer's disappearance, and because of that they won't release any details about Tuesday's rescue exercises or what was happening at the time the officer disappeared.

The following is an update Chief Rohrer sent to all members of the FCPD on Wednesday:

October 22, 2008

Message from Colonel Dave Rohrer to the Fairfax County Police Department
I ask that all Department members continue to keep our officer and his family in your thoughts and prayers.

I am not able to provide significant detail at this stage, but our current focus is our commitment to continue our search and rescue mission, with significant efforts underway by our dedicated men and women. I have been on the scene through yesterday afternoon and throughout the night and we have continued focused water and aerial searches, which we have again expanded with additional ground searches with the rising sun this morning.

We are blessed with significant support and resources from the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, the FBI, and the U.S. Coast Guard. Several other local agencies, such as MPDC, Prince William, and Charles County, have provided support yesterday and through the night, and we have received offers of support of many others.

Most importantly, I ask, as always, that you continue to support each other. As police officers many of us are reluctant to share our personal feelings, but it is critical that we do so.

With respect,
Colonel Dave Rohrer
Chief of Police

Authorities have also asked that the officer's name not be released out of respect for his family.

Officials are also asking residents in the Pohick Bay area and along both sides of the Potomac River to help in the search for the officer by taking a look around their docks and the waters around their home to see if they might be able to spot him. Anyone with information should call Fairfax County Police or 911 immediately.

Police Continue Search for Officer Missing After Training Dive

<http://www.wjla.com/news/stories/1008/563247.html>

VIDEO ON SITE

October 22, 2008

POHICK BAY, Va. - Crews continued through the night in their search for a Fairfax County ([web|news](#)) police officer who disappeared while doing diving exercises Tuesday afternoon.

"This is still, I emphasize, a rescue operation," said Fairfax County's Chief of Police David Rohrer.

The officer was one of 16 divers participating in a training exercise with helicopters in the county's Pohick Bay. It began about 1:30 p.m. He was reported missing about 2:45 p.m.



As the search by water and land pressed on into

the evening, there were still more questions than answers as to what happened. Police said during the helicopter training exercise with the dive team, marine patrol and rescue boat, the officer was acting as a role player. A little more than an hour into the exercise, he went missing.

He was wearing a dry suit, but didn't have an oxygen tank. "This is a rescue operation. Based on what the officer was wearing and the gear he had on, he could be obviously surviving in the water," said Rohrer.

Searchers from Fairfax, Prince William, Prince George's, and Charles counties were participating in the search, along with the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Park Police.

Using sonar in the water, search boats and divers combed the dark waters while a helicopter worked from above. While others covered the shore line by foot and with search dogs, all were driven to find the officer before it is too late. "I ask for the thoughts and the prayers for the family and the officer and for my police department," said Rohrer.

Sources say the 42-year-old 19-year police veteran is a strong swimmer and is married with children. Crews say they will remain on the scene as long as it takes.

"I ask that you respect the family. They're obviously concerned. We're taking good care of them," said Rohrer.

Search Continues for Missing Virginia Diver

[http://www.officer.com/web/online/Top-News-Stories/Search-Continues-for-Missing-Virginia-Diver/1\\$43812](http://www.officer.com/web/online/Top-News-Stories/Search-Continues-for-Missing-Virginia-Diver/1$43812)

October 22, 2008 **BILL STARKS** *Courtesy of [WUSA-TV](#)*

[Watch Video](#)

CHARLES COUNTY, Md. -- Air, ground and boat rescue crews were scouring the Charles County Maryland shore of the Potomac River late Tuesday night after an electronic signal was heard that may be an emergency beacon carried by a police officer who went missing during a water training exercise nearly three miles away in Pohick Bay Virginia.

The officer, a 42 year old Fairfax County police veteran was "playing a role" in a helicopter and dive team search exercise in Pohick Bay when he went missing at about 2:45 p.m. Tuesday, according to Fairfax County Police.

They would not describe the role he was playing, but he was wearing a dry suit and was swimming in the waters of Pohick Bay.

"Based on the suit he was wearing, the water and air temperature and the conditions here this is very much a rescue mission," said Fairfax County Police Chief David Rohrer. "This is not a recovery operation."

The incident has prompted a gigantic response that has included dive teams, rescue boats, and air crews from throughout the region. At least 4 Virginia and Maryland counties have sent help along with the [FBI](#) and the U.S. Coast Guard. An estimated 200 rescuers have been involved.

Police refused to release the identity of the missing officer. They described him as a 16-year veteran who was not a member of the county's dive team, but who was wearing water survival gear at the time he was lost.

His family has been informed and has reason to remain hopeful, according to Rohrer.



Courtesy of WUSA-TV

The Fairfax County police officer was "playing a role" in a helicopter and dive team search exercise in Pohick Bay when he went missing Tuesday.

Search Continues For Fairfax Officer

<http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/410261049.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Oct+23%2C+2008&author=Tom+Jackman+-+Washington+Post+Staff+Writer&pub=The+Washington+Post&edition=&startpage=B.1&desc=Search+Continues+For+Fairfax+Officer%3B+Lieutenant+Was+Not+Dive+Team+Member>

October 23, 2008 By Tom Jackman - Washington Post Staff Writer

Lieutenant Was Not Dive Team Member

The Fairfax County police officer who disappeared in the waters of Pohick Bay on Tuesday afternoon had volunteered to play the role of a "victim" during a training session for a helicopter water rescue, though he was not a member of the dive team, and he has been honored at least twice for his bravery in the line of duty.

The missing officer is 2nd Lt. Francis J. Stecco, 42, a 19-year veteran of the Fairfax force, law enforcement sources said. Although boats, helicopters and divers scoured the water and land around the bay in southeastern Fairfax, Stecco was not located yesterday.

Fairfax Police Chief David M. Rohrer continued to describe the search for Stecco as a "search and rescue" mission, but the mood was grim among Stecco's colleagues gathered at Pohick Bay. Many commanders and officers, including Rohrer, arrived at the scene not long after Stecco was reported missing at 2:45 p.m. Tuesday and stayed through the night and into yesterday as the search continued.

But the officers realized that the chances of Stecco surviving for more than 24 hours were very slim. If he did not survive, he would be the sixth Fairfax officer to die in the line of duty in the department's 68-year history. Authorities said the search will continue until Stecco is found.

Police declined to identify Stecco publicly, saying his family did not want to be overwhelmed by well-wishers. Police also did not want to provide many of the details of the training exercise because it is now the subject of an internal affairs investigation, Officer Shelley Broderick said.

"Anytime something goes wrong in any operation, we conduct an internal investigation," Broderick said. "We're basically looking to see if there was an adherence to policy and protocol."

Broderick said that the exercise was intended to provide training for the police helicopter unit, that the dive team was involved and that Stecco was "a role player." Police said about 15 people participated, including some from the Fairfax fire department and the police marine patrol.

Stecco was wearing a "dry suit" when the exercise began at 1:30 p.m., and he was in the water, not in a boat, when last seen, Officer Eddy Azcarate said. He said Stecco had water rescue training in the military before he became a police officer but he did not know details of Stecco's military service.

Soon after Stecco disappeared, police placed a tracking beacon in the water to see how the tides would carry it. The beacon exited Pohick Bay and then the

larger Gunston Cove and wound up across the Potomac River near the Maryland shoreline in Charles County, Azcarate said.

Fairfax police sent a ground search and rescue team to Charles County in hopes that Stecco would turn up there. The team found nothing, and the search ended in late afternoon, Broderick said.

The U.S. Coast Guard helped police coordinate a grid-based search of the bay, using boats from various agencies and helicopters. Divers could be seen standing in three to five feet of water near the shorelines, moving slowly in tandem, trying to find Stecco.

A dry suit is different from a wet suit in that it is bulkier and insulated, and is designed to keep the person inside dry. Steven M. Barsky, a diving accident investigator in Santa Barbara, Calif., said the suits have light boots attached, latex seals at the wrists and neck to keep water out, and a waterproof zipper.

If used properly, Barsky said, the suits should have a small amount of air inside that allows the person to move or turn in any direction. But if the suit gets too much air inside, it can cause the person to flip upside down, and "you can have a problem if you haven't been trained to deal with recovery from an inverted position," he said.

Barsky said he did not know the specifics of the Fairfax case and did not want to comment on it.

According to a recent article in the Scranton Times-Tribune, Stecco is the son of John J. and Lorraine Stecco of Throop, Pa., outside Scranton, where John Stecco served as mayor for 16 years after a 25-year career in the Air Force. John Stecco died in August.

Details of Frank Stecco's career were not fully available. He has served as a patrol officer in the Mount Vernon station, where he was assigned when he shot and killed a man armed with a knife who was menacing him in 1993. In 1997, Stecco was awarded the Bronze Medal of Valor by the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce, given for "acts involving unusual risk" beyond the standard officer's responsibilities, but details of that incident were not available yesterday.

In 2000, Stecco received a Certificate of Valor from the Chamber of Commerce for his actions in an episode in January 1999. Police were called to a Springfield motel for a report of a man with a knife trying to commit suicide. A psychiatrist arrived, and Stecco followed him into the room. The man had a knife and a razor blade and was bleeding profusely, according to the Valor Awards report.

When the man asked for a drink of water, Stecco approached with a cup. As the man took the cup, Stecco swept the knife and razor blade away and then helped subdue the man.

Police Officer Found in Pohick Bay

Officer went missing Tuesday afternoon while participating in training exercise.

<http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/article.asp?article=321222&paper=81&cat=104>

October 23, 2008 **By Chuck Hagee, Gazette**

Divers recovered the body of 2nd Lt. Frank Stecco on Saturday, Oct. 25, at 12:25 p.m., according to a Fairfax County Police press release. Stecco's body was found in Pohick Bay, about 100 feet from where he was last seen.

Divers, boats and dogs were participating in the search when he was discovered.

In the release, Col. David Rohrer, chief of the Fairfax County Police, confirmed the discovery of Stecco. The murky condition of the water and the contours of the bottom of the bay contributed to the difficulty in locating Stecco.

Stecco, a 42-year-old, 19-year veteran of the Fairfax County Police Department, went missing Tuesday in Pohick Bay in Southeastern Fairfax County during a police training diving exercise involving water and air rescue procedures.



Fairfax County Police
2nd Lt. Frank Stecco has been missing since Tuesday afternoon, Oct. 21.



Photos by Scotty Boatwright
Rescue operations on Pohick Bay

The search included police and fire department boats, helicopters and personnel from Fairfax County, Alexandria City and throughout the Washington joined with U.S. Coast Guard and Federal Bureau of Investigation equipment and personnel in the search for the victim who disappeared during the Tuesday afternoon exercise. Stecco was not one of the dive team but was participating in the exercise when he disappeared in the Mason Neck area of Pohick Bay,

according to Fairfax County Police reports.

Both Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department and the Alexandria Fire Department Marine Operations teams and boats were dispatched to the area to participate in the search and rescue efforts, according to Lt. Raul Castillo,



Photos by Scotty Boatwright
Rescue operations on Pohick Bay

Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department public information officer and Capt. Luis Santano, Alexandria Fire Department public information officer.

The training exercise got underway at approximately 1:30 p.m. Tuesday and the officer was discovered missing about 2:45 p.m., according to Fairfax County Police. Stecco was not wearing any breathing apparatus because "his role in the exercise did not require it," said police spokesperson Tawny Wright.



**Photos by Scotty Boatwright
The National Park Police helicopter joined the search**

Rohrer authorized that the search transition to a full search and recovery operation starting Thursday evening.

Also, the Coast Guard set up a federal safety zone that would prohibit recreational boating in all of Gunston Cove, Pohick Bay and the area of the Potomac River in the vicinity of the cove. Commercial boaters may enter the zone, but must slow down to avoid small boats and divers involved in the search and recovery effort. The safety zone shall remain in effect for seven days.



**Photos by Scotty Boatwright
Police boats from throughout the area joined the search**

Pohick Bay lies between Pohick Bay Regional Park and the southeastern tip of Fort Belvoir. It flows into Gunston Cove and then into the Potomac River at the Fairfax County, Va. and Charles County, Md., line.

Police Recover Body of Missing Fairfax Officer

<http://www.myfoxdc.com/myfox/pages/News/Detail?contentId=7722300&version=7&locale=EN-US&layoutCode=TSTY&pageId=3.2.1>

25 Oct 2008

Fairfax County Police have recovered the body of missing Second Lieutenant Frank Stecco. Positive identification is pending an autopsy by a medical examiner.

The body was found 100 feet away from where Stecco was last seen.

Officer Stecco, a 19 year veteran of the force, disappeared Tuesday during a training exercise in Pohick Bay. He was playing the victim in a helicopter water rescue exercise just before 3 p.m.

Related Items

Search for Missing Officer Becomes Search and Recovery Mission

Rescuers to Search "As Long As It Takes" For Missing Officer

Rescuers say the murky water and awkward shape of the floor hindered their investigation.

Officer Stecco's body was put into an ambulance to be escorted out of the park by police motorcycle escorts.

In a statement, Colonel David Rohrer, Chief of the Fairfax County Police Department, said "My heart goes out to Frank's family; my heart goes out to his police family; and my heart goes out to the community Frank worked in and loved."

Officer Stecco was a highly-decorated officer who friends say was courageous and dedicated to his work. He was awarded a Silver Medal of Valor in 1994, a Bronze Medal of Valor in 1997, and a Certificate of Valor in 2000 by the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce for acts of bravery above and beyond the call of duty.

Officer Stecco leaves behind his wife, their three children, and his mother.

Funeral arrangements have not been announced yet.



A photo of Fairfax County Police 2nd Lt. Frank Stecco, who went missing in Pohick Bay on Tuesday.

October 25, 2008

WASHINGTON—Fairfax County police say the body of a police officer who went missing in the Pohick Bay has been found.

Police tell WTOP Radio the body of 42-year-old Lt. Frank Stecco was recovered Saturday. Divers found his body just 100 feet from where he was reported missing. Stecco participated in a helicopter water rescue exercise on Tuesday when he disappeared. He volunteered to participate in the training exercise.

Divers conducted what is described as a 'hand by hand' search because conditions were so difficult.

"That water is very murky with a foot or less visibility down there," says Mary Ann Jennings, police spokeswoman.

Fairfax County police chief Robert Rohrer says Stecco's death is a big blow for his department and community.

"My heart goes out to the family of our fallen officer," says Rohrer. "My heart goes out to the men and women of the Fairfax County police department. My heart goes out to the community who also feel the loss of a dedicated and professional officer."

Police are still investigating the circumstances of Stecco's death. An autopsy is planned.

Stecco's body was transported with full honors with a motorcycle escort to the medical examiner's office.

He had been a police officer with Fairfax County for the past 19 years. He is survived by his mother, wife and three children.

Monday, October 27, 2008

Lost In The Line Of Volunteer Duty - Tragic Accident

<http://citizencorps.blogspot.com/2008/10/lost-in-line-of-volunteer-duty-tragic.html>

Fairfax County Police Department

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News Release: 08/295/1942/EJA/(6)

October 25, 2008

Missing Police Officer Recovered

Divers located Second Lieutenant Frank Stecco at 12:25 p.m. on Saturday, October 25. He was found in Pohick Bay approximately 100 feet from the point at which he was reportedly last seen. Boats, dogs and divers were actively searching when the discovery was made.

The murky waters and the contours and make-up of the bottom of the bay made this a particularly difficult search. The use of technology aided in searching potential areas where Lt. Stecco may have been. Divers turned to meticulous hand-by-hand searches within a grid pattern. Divers likened this search to dropping a quarter on a football field and attempting to find it by hand.

Colonel David Rohrer, Chief of the Fairfax County Police Department, confirmed the recovery saying, "My heart goes out to Frank's family; my heart goes out to his police family; and my heart goes out to the community Frank worked in and loved."

Chief Rohrer called Lt. Stecco a highly decorated member of the department. Lt. Stecco was transported with full honors to include a motorcycle escort to the Medical Examiners Office.

Lt. Stecco was a volunteer role player in a police helicopter water rescue exercise at Pohick Bay Regional Park when he disappeared in the bay at 2:47 p.m. on October 21, 2008. Extensive air, ground and water search and rescue efforts began immediately and continued through the recovery today. Federal, state, and regional public safety and military agencies helped sustain the search, contributing

sophisticated detection equipment, expertise, boats, helicopters, specially trained dogs and supplies.

Lt. Stecco joined the Fairfax County Police Department in 1989 and served 11 of his 19 years assigned to the Mount Vernon District station. His bold, proactive style of policing earned the respect and admiration of his peers and supervisors and helped distinguish him as a courageous and selfless officer. He was awarded a Silver Medal of Valor in 1994, a Bronze Medal of Valor in 1997, and a Certificate of Valor in 2000 by the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce for acts of bravery above and beyond the call of duty.

Fueled by his passion and dedication for serving the children and teenagers of the county, Lt. Stecco opted to leave the Mount Vernon district and join the Department's Youth Services Division just one month prior to his untimely death.

He leaves behind his wife, their three children, and his mother. Details of services to honor Lt. Stecco are not yet available.

Funeral Held for Drowned Fairfax Police Officer

http://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/Funeral_Held_for_Drowned_Fairfax_Police_Officer.html

Officer died during training exercise

WOODBIDGE, Va. -- Friends, family and colleagues said goodbye Thursday to a Fairfax County Police department lieutenant who drowned in a training exercise in Pohick Bay last week.

Frank Stecco's funeral was held Thursday morning.

Services were held at the Cecil D. Hylton Memorial Chapel in Woodbridge.

A memorial fund in honor of Stecco has been established. Make a donation at any Fairfax County Credit Union branch or mail donations to the Fairfax County Federal Credit Union, Frank J. Stecco Memorial Fund, P.O. Box 1300, Fairfax, VA 22038-1300.



Until the End, Lieutenant Was Devoted to Duty

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/10/30/AR2008103003158.html>

October 31, 2008 *By Tom Jackman - Washington Post Staff Writer*

His colleagues said it was no surprise that Fairfax County police Lt. Frank J. Stecco volunteered to climb into the cold waters of Pohick Bay last week to help the police helicopter unit practice rescuing people. "That's what he did," said Officer Mark Yawornicky, who worked with Stecco at the Mount Vernon station. "He would help out whenever he could. He would take care of his people."

And when Stecco began spending time with kids, in addition to his three children, in an anti-gang program at his station, it provided him with another avenue to help others. So he successfully requested a transfer to the Youth Services Division just last month.

Stecco's vision of service to others was cut short when he drowned during the training exercise in Pohick Bay, in southeastern Fairfax. Police are still investigating the accident.

Yesterday, after a procession past the Mount Vernon station and a memorial service in Woodbridge, Stecco was buried at Quantico National Cemetery.



Fairfax County motorcycle police officers in procession pass the police station. (Susan Biddle - Washington Post)

Stecco, 42, spent 19 years on the Fairfax force after a four-year stint in the Marines at Quantico. He was honored for heroism three times during his years on patrol: for rescuing a man from a burning mobile home in 1993, for disarming a shooting suspect in 1996 and for disarming a bleeding, suicidal man in 1999.

Looking at Stecco's wife and children during the memorial service at Hylton Memorial Chapel, Fairfax Police Chief David M. Rohrer said: "Your father was not only a hero to you, he was a courageous man and hero to many. . . . Let us honor him with the same courage, resolve, resiliency, professionalism and devotion to duty that he demonstrated every day."

Stecco was married for 18 years to Julie Stecco and had three children: Maria, 16, Nicholas, 13, and Alexander, 10. He is also survived by his mother, Lorraine Stecco of Throop, Pa., a suburb of Scranton, and his sister, Kathryn Stecco of Palo Alto, Calif.

On Oct. 21, Stecco volunteered to play a victim in a training exercise in which he would be rescued by the police helicopter. But something went wrong during the exercise, and Stecco disappeared. After an intensive four-day search, his body was found in Pohick Bay, about 100 feet from where he had last been seen.

"To give one's life while teaching another to save lives," Fairfax Supervisor Gerald W. Hyland (D-Mount Vernon) said, "is the consummate sacrifice, and Lt. Frank Stecco did that."

A procession of about 60 family and police cars carried Stecco's coffin past the Mount Vernon station yesterday morning, where he spent 11 of his 19 years with the Fairfax department. A police cruiser draped in black bunting and adorned with

flowers was parked out front, and a line of officers and firefighters stood at attention and saluted as Stecco's white hearse passed.

Officer Steve Cicinato of the Mount Vernon station said Stecco was "an all-around great guy. If an officer got in trouble, he'd counsel them, work with them, because the discipline would come from him. That's how you take care of your troops."

About a dozen civilians turned out to watch the procession, including Tom Coyle, a retired Fairfax officer. "I just think it's real important," he said, "to honor an officer who died while on an exercise to support the citizens of this community. He wasn't out there doing the backstroke; he was doing something important. He died doing exactly what a good officer would do."

Officer Kevin L. Webb left a poem near the car honoring Stecco outside the station: "Frank loved working 'The Highway,' and to spend his final day, in a boat on a river, he wouldn't have had it any other way."

The procession then headed to the chapel in Woodbridge, where a funeral Mass was said by his pastor, the Rev. Michael J. Bazan of Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Manassas.

"We all feel a loss," Bazan said, "because a good man no longer is with us, in one sense. . . . We don't say goodbye; we say farewell. You served God and your people well. Now go and receive your reward from your heavenly father."

Rohrer said Stecco was renowned for his sense of humor. "I won't talk about all the pranks I've heard about these last few days," the chief said. "Hopefully, God has a sense of humor."

The chief noted that Stecco "gravitated towards programs like 'Road DAWG' [the police's Don't Associate With Gangs summer camps], where he demonstrated a passion for youth." After two summers working on Road DAWG, Rohrer said, Stecco lobbied for his first assignment outside of patrol and was assigned to Youth Services at headquarters.

While he was on the street, Maj. Sharon Smith said after the service, "people migrated to his squad. People always wanted to work with him. He did all the things he asked his troops to do."

A much longer procession of police and fire vehicles from across the Washington area then accompanied Stecco on his final ride to Quantico, where he was buried.

Stecco was the sixth Fairfax officer to die in the line of duty since the department was created in 1940.

Lieut Francis Joseph "Frank" Stecco

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=31003475>

Birth: Sep. 23, 1966
California, USA

Death: Oct. 25, 2008
Fairfax County
Virginia, USA

2nd Lt. Frank J. Stecco joined the Fairfax County Police Department in 1989 after spending the previous five years in the United States Marine Corps stationed at Quantico Marine Base in Quantico. He spent 11 of his 19 years of service at the Mount Vernon District Station before leaving to join the department's youth services division. He received the Fairfax Chamber of Commerce the Silver Medal of Valor in 1994, the Bronze Medal of Valor in 1997 and a Certificate of Valor in 2000, all for actions above and beyond the call of duty. In recent years had focused his energies on working with at-risk kids, first in anti-gang programs and then in a recent transfer to the Youth Services Division. He drowned during a training exercise in Pohick Bay when he volunteered to play the role of "victim" in a training exercise for the police helicopter unit, in which he would be rescued by the helicopter. But something went wrong during the exercise and Stecco disappeared. After four days of intensive searching, his body was found in Pohick Bay, about 100 feet from where he had last been seen. The devoted father and trusted police officer was the sixth Fairfax officer to die in the line of duty since the department was founded in 1940. He was married for 18 years to Julie Stecco and had three children. He is also survived by his mother, Lorraine Stecco and his sister, Kathryn Stecco. His father, John J. Stecco, died in August 2008.



Burial:

[Quantico National Cemetery](#)

Quantico

Prince William County

Virginia, USA

Plot: Sec 4 Site 700

Created by: [Elizabeth Reed](#)

Record added: Oct 30, 2008

Find A Grave Memorial# 31003475



FAREWELL FRANK

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/newsletter/sul/november2008.pdf>

November 2008 By: MPO W. M. Brock

I am sure that by now most of you have heard of the loss within the police department's family. Second Lieutenant Frank Stecco died as the result of drowning during a water rescue exercise conducted in Pohick Bay on October 21, 2008.

After his disappearance at 2:47 p.m. on the 21st of October, an extensive air, land and water search was initiated. Several jurisdictions assisted in the various phases of the search. It was not until 12:25 p.m. on October 25th that search efforts were halted. This was the result of divers discovering Frank's body approximately 100 feet from where he had last been seen.



It is still hard to comprehend. When something like this happens we go through the various stages of grief. These stages include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These are perfectly normal reactions and some may last longer than others. At times during this process we may have many conflicting feelings and this can cause undue stress. The police department is a family, so I can say that we have all been affected in one way or another by this sudden loss.

In the police department, we never know what to expect. One minute things are calm and relaxed and the next minute all has gone awry. We do a lot of training. Some of it is very realistic. It has always been said that you will, "fight like you train." There are inherent risks that we as police officers take. One is just coming to work and putting our uniform on.

Although there are risks, I have never really dwelled on them. I think you would go crazy if you did. I doubt if Frank dwelled on them either. He did what was needed to get the job done. He was also a fairly laid back and easy-going person.

Frank had recently been transferred to the Youth Services Division. That made him one of my bosses. In crime prevention we answer to two different captains. One is the commander of the district station in which I am assigned. The other is the captain in charge of Youth Services. Frank was our direct supervisor in Youth Services.

Unfortunately, due to the short time that Frank had been assigned to Youth Services, I did not get to know him better. We had spoken several times in passing over the years, but were not very close. He had spent a majority of his career at the Mount Vernon Station, while mine was spent at the McLean District Station.

Going through the academy, I remember the instructors speaking about Karen Jean Bassford. She was killed on July 27, 1977, after striking a utility pole on her way to a burglary call. She was the only Fairfax County Police Officer up to that time, who had died in the line of duty. It was hoped she would also be the last.

Unfortunately it did not work out that way. Since losing Karen, we have lost five additional members of our police family. They are Special Officer Hendrik "Sandy" Gideonse, Captain Tommy Bernal, Master Police Officer Mike Garbarino, Detective Vicky Armel and now 2LT Frank Stecco. May they all rest in peace and know that they have not been forgotten for the individuals that they were, the sacrifices that they made, their many achievements and dedication to the Fairfax County Police Department.

If you wish to make a donation



There have been many requests for the following information:

Donations in Memory of Second Lieutenant Frank Stecco

The Fairfax County Police Department announces that a memorial fund has been established at the Fairfax County Federal Credit Union in memory of 2Lt. Frank Stecco, who passed away during a training exercise at Pohick Bay Regional Park.

Anyone wishing to donate may do so at any branch of the Fairfax County Federal Credit Union (FCU) or send to:
Fairfax County Federal Credit Union
Frank J. Stecco Memorial Fund
P.O. Box 1300 Fairfax, VA 22038-1300

Messages of condolence may be sent to FCPD-2252@FairfaxCounty.gov
or mailed to: Mount Vernon District Police Station, 2511 Parkers Lane, Alexandria, VA 22306



Photo by: Donna Spiewak

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Photo by: Donna Spiewak

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2