

12-31-1984 Sabinal TX – James R Wulf – LEO Attempted Rescue Flood**Chief of Police James R. Wulf**

Sabinal Police Department, Texas
End of Watch Monday, December 31, 1984

JAMES R. WULF

Chief of Police James Wulf drowned while attempting to rescue a man whose car became trapped while attempting to drive across a low water crossing on Highway 127 over the Sabinal River.

Rescuers were waiting for a helicopter to arrive but Chief Wulf thought the water was rising too fast and volunteered to go to the car on a rope. He was able to rescue the elderly man but lost his grip while returning to shore and drowned.

Chief Wulf was survived by his child, mother, brother, and two sisters. He had previously served with the Uvalde County Sheriff's Department and as a U.S. Marine during the Vietnam War.

BIO

- **Age** 34
- **Tour** Not available
- **Badge** 607
- **Military Veteran**

INCIDENT DETAILS

- **Cause** Drowned

**The Galveston Daily News**

<https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/13524115/>

January 3, 1985

The ice and snow, accompanied by winds of 25 mph and more, caused electric failures in north and south Austin. Many Austin businesses closed early and a number of state workers went home at noon. The University of Texas also closed Wednesday morning. Officials also feared that conditions would get worse as the National Weather Service forecast a 50 percent chance for more sleet or snow. "The bad thing is tonight when the temperature drops. Any precipitation that has fallen is going to glaze over," said forecaster Jim Dugan in Austin. Victoria schools closed early Wednesday, sending 13,000 students home. "It's sleeting and the weather bureau has advised us strongly to get the kids home," said Robbie Parkman, a school spokeswoman. "Thank goodness it doesn't happen very often." Ron Stagno of the National Weather Service said snow and maybe a half-inch of ice was possible in Houston Wednesday night. Houston's most recent official snowfall was

February 1980, when 1.4 inches was measured. The most recent trace of sleet was measured three years ago. Dan Jones of the Houston Public Works Department said 30-40 trucks loaded with sand were standing by in case streets freeze, but the city does not have enough equipment if all streets are iced. "If there is a general glaze, the roads won't be open," Jones said. The snow and sleet in Central Texas came hard on the heels of flooding across the Texas Hill Country that claimed the lives of at least three people. Authorities found the bodies of 33-year-old Jose Manuel Barraza of Comfort, and his 3-year-old daughter, Beatrice. But Barraza's 22-month-old daughter was still missing Wednesday. The flooding Monday also claimed the life of Sabinal Police Chief Jim Wulf, 35, who drowned while trying to save a stranded, handicapped motorist.

The Paris News From Paris

<https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/20202471/>

January 3, 1985 Page 10 article text (OCR)

Sabinal mourns police hero who drowned

SABINAL, Texas (AP) - Jim Wulf's friends remember him as a hero, a man who gave his life to save a handicapped motorist from drowning at a flooded river crossing. Wulf, a 35-year-old former Marine, had been police chief in this tiny South Texas only seven months when he was swept away in the rain-swollen Sabinal River Monday.

"Jim made a decision — not just as a lawman, but as a man. He died a hero,"

Uvalde County Deputy Sheriff Carson Wells said as he and other friends gathered at Wulf's small office at Sabinal City Hall Tuesday. Weldon McCutchen, an Uvalde County constable who was with Wulf when the police chief answered his last call, said a brown Cadillac was trapped in a river crossing, slowly being pushed off the bridge by the rushing water.

Inside, the driver shouted that he was handicapped and unable to move.

McCutchen said Wulf took some rope, put on a life jacket and waded toward the car. "Jim got him out and tied the rope around this guy, and we started pulling him out," McCutchen said. McCutchen said the water got to Wulf before he could tie the other end of the rope around his waist. "We saw him tumble twice in the water.

Then we saw that orange life jacket pop up, and we knew we'd lost him," McCutchen said. "There were 200 people out there, and a bunch of them jumped in water running a mile a minute. They did that because they like Jim Wulf and they didn't want to see him die." Wells was one of those who tried to save Wulf.

He was pulled from the water just as the river sucked Wulf from his life jacket and swept him away

Town Tells Of Death of Hero Chief

<https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/145758576/>

January 6, 1985 Asbury Park Press from Asbury Park, New Jersey · Page 25

Dallas Morning News SABINAL, Texas

The day before, they had watched Jim Wulf drown. Now, on the first day of a new year, his friends arrived one by one, bone-tired and restless, to say goodbye. They gathered at Wulfs small, empty office at Sabinal City Hall, about 60 miles west of San Antonio.

As chief of a two-man police force, Wulf didn't need anything larger.

Slowly, uneasily, came the words of his friends: "We'll spend some time from now on living that day," said Uvalde County sheriff's Deputy Carson Wells. "We'll wonder if there was something more we could have done to save him. If s gotten to the point when it's all questions. There ain't no answers."

Wulf, 35, disappeared in the rain-swollen Sabinal River one mile north f town about 2:30 p.m. Dec. 31. He had waded into rapidly moving water to rescue a handicapped motorist whose car stalled in the flooded river crossing. The motorist, James Ballard Mcintosh of Uvalde, later was rescued; he suffered only minor injuries.

Searchers found Wulfs body at 8:20 p.m. on New Year's Eve, lying in muddy weeds about 50 yards from the bridge.

Wulf had been police chief of this South Texas town of 1,800 for only seven months. He was the town's first policeman to die in the line of duty. "The whole thing was pointless, just a waste," Wells said. "Barricades had been put up, and the road was closed. That car wasn't supposed to be there. But it was. And now that driver will have a lot to think about."

Wells' eyes showed the strain of the past 24 hours. He nearly died in the chocolate-brown waters of the Sabinal River in an attempt to rescue Wulf. A third man pulled Wells from the water just as the river sucked Wulf from his orange life jacket and swept him away. "Jimmy never liked the 9-to-5 routine," said Joe Willy Petrash, Sabinal's other full-time policeman. "He always liked to find something new around the corner. I guess that's why he chose law enforcement work."

Wulf was born in Dilley, a small community in the mesquite and scrub brush of Frio County. He joined the Marines, serving in Vietnam in 1969. ; After his discharge, Wulf looked for a job. With his size nearly six feet and 200 pounds and his sardonic view of life, Wulf was made for law enforcement, friends said.

"I think Jim would be the first to point out that the car he pulled that guy from was still sitting on the bridge New Year's morning after the waters fell back," Petrash said.

After returning to South Texas, Wulf joined the LaSalle County Sheriff's Department in Cotulla in the early 1970s. He worked there about five years. There, he met Petrash.

Wulf worked outside law enforcement for a few years, Petrash said. But in early 1983, he went to work for the Uvalde County Sheriff's Department. After about 18 months, he applied for the job as Sabinas's police chief. He was sworn in June 1, 1984.

"Jimmy could work with people well, and as long as I've known him, if anyone needed help, he was the first one in line to do it," Petrash said.

Wells, his voice strained and tense, added, "Nobody who took the time to know him failed to like Jim. He was just a good man. And that's pretty rare." Waldon McCutchen, a Uvalde County constable, was with Wulf when the police chief answered his last call for help.

"We were parked in town, and I kidded him about this old house he was fixing up," McCutchen said. "Then some kids told us about a car trapped in the crossing, and we took off."

At the crossing, a brown Cadillac was being inched across the narrow bridge by the rushing waters. From inside, the driver yelled that he was handicapped, unable to move. Wulf took some rope and, after putting on a life jacket, waded into the water towards the car.

"Jim got him out and tied the rope around this guy, and we started pulling him in," McCutchen said. "People were yelling at Jim to tie the remaining rope around his own waist. But the water got to him first "We saw him tumble twice in the water, then we saw that orange life jacket pop up, and we knew we'd lost him," McCutchen said. "There were 200 people out there, and a bunch of them jumped in water running a mile a minute. They did that because they liked Jim Wulf and didn't want to see him die." "People were yelling for Jim to get out of the water,-and, God, he tried," Wells added.

"But it was too much. We couldn't reach him. The river got him." Wulf is survived by his mother and sister in Cotulla and another sister in Wisconsin. A half-brother lives in Fort Stockton.

Wulf's friends, sitting in a cramped office, relived, minute by minute, Wulf's last moments, wondering if something different could have been done. But they have no doubts about Wulf's actions.

"Jim made a decision not just as a lawman but as a man. And you can't second-guess that," Wells said.

'Now, he's a dead hero.'

FM Gives Posthumous Hero Award

<https://newspaperarchive.com/clarksville-times-apr-04-1985-p-5/>

April 4, 1985 Clarksville Times

A Sabinal police chief who lost his own life while rescuing a handicapped motorist from the swirling waters of the Sabinal River last December was named posthumous winner of the IMS Texas Rural Heroism Award here Monday. Mrs. Alyne Wulf of Dilley accepted the award on behalf of her late son, Jim Wulf, during the annual Texas* Southwestern Safety Conference and Exposition at the Shamrock Hilton Hotel. Wulf was 35 at the time of his death.

The annual award is sponsored by the Texas Farm and Ranch Safety Council. Ben Bullard, associate director of the Texas Farm Bureau Health & Safety Department, is the council president.

Receiving honorable mention in this year's competition was Ricardo Elizondo, 16, also of Sabinal, for saving the life of a Uvalde County rancher who was being attacked by a knife-wielding man in June IMM. The late Police Chief is credited with, having rescued James Ballard Macintosh, 34. of Leakey last Dec. 31 after the victim was trapped in his automobile while attempting to cross a low water bridge over the Sabinal River on Texas Highway 127 north of Sabinal in Uvalde County.

Wulf and Carson Wells, a Uvalde County sheriff's deputy, and members of the Sabinal Volunteer Fire ailment worked to free Macintosh from his trapped vehicle. A 150-foot rope was tied to a tree with several fishermen forming a lifeline along the rope, while Wulf and Wells got into the water to attempt to free Macintosh.

After Macintosh was rescued, Wulf as swept downstream by the raging waters before he could get back to the bridge. Wells later stated that the rescuers urged Wulf to tie a rope around his waist, but that "he (Wulf) was more concerned about rescuing the guy.

"I was half way in the water when Jim called me back and said he was going in because he was the only one of us that didn't have a family," Wulf said. "We both knew how dangerous this was."

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD SENATE June 1985 1984 ROLL CALL OF HEROES

<http://digitalcollections.library.cmu.edu/awweb/awarchive?type=file&item=640579>

Chief James Robert Wulf, City of Sabinal Police Department. 501 North Center Street Sabinal, Texas 78881..._..... 12/31/84 1 This date may not coincide with the date of the accident causing the death.

Beauty is Only Skin Deep

<http://www.bullettbob.com/texas-snow-brings-beauty-and-tragedy.html>

The snow truly was beautiful but, like I'd been warned, it didn't last more than a couple of days and then came the rains which hurried the melting process. Heavy rains and more than a foot of snow combined to make for the first flood of many I would witness.

South Texas, like much of the desert south, is usually dry and receives only occasional rain. The rivers and creek beds are often completely dry or with just pools of water in areas. But when heavy rains come that changes very rapidly. Creeks that had no water in them a day before would overflow their banks surprisingly quickly.

By New Year's Eve, all of the streams and rivers were quickly overflowing their banks.

In Sabinal, a small town twenty miles to the east of Uvalde and an area we often patrolled, the Sabinal River was usually dry or with just stagnant water in certain areas. As the snow melted, due to the heavy rains, the Sabinal River and many of the tributary creeks quickly swelled to flood level. An older man, misjudging the level of a flooding creek just north of Sabinal, tried to drive across the low area. He and his vehicle were quickly washed away by the rising waters. The waters continued to rise, trapping the man in his vehicle which was slowly being pushed down the river. Sideways in the currents, it was susceptible to being turned on its side which meant a high likelihood of death for the occupant.

The Chief of Police of Sabinal, James Wulf, responded to the call of the vehicle being washed away. Chief Wulf was a single man, and stepped forward to wear a harness to try to rescue the older gentleman who was still in his vehicle which slowly was being washed down through the violent current of the once dry riverbed. Chief Wulf, wearing the harness with a rope being held by a myriad of fire and law enforcement personnel, was swept down to the truck and grabbing it, made it to the temporary safety of the high parts of the roof of the truck. He took the harness off and put it on the older man.

The vehicle was starting to tip so Chief Wulf made the decision to hold tightly to the man and both of them would be pulled to the shore by the rope.

Chief Wulf, who tried to hang onto the harness, was washed away by the violent waters, and swept down the river out of the view of the horrified onlookers who could do nothing to save him. They were able to pull the older man out of the river but there was nothing they could do to save Chief Wulf. His body was found later, tangled in the debris that the river had easily picked up.

Chief James Wulf would be the first of many officers that I knew who were killed in the line of duty.