

## 1974 – Elgin IL – Michael Whalen and Stanley Balsis - 2 FFs – Attempted Low Head Dam Rescue



## Elgin Firefighters Memorial graffiti sparks outrage Vandals also hit Pioneer Family statue

<http://tedschnell-portfolio.blogspot.com/2012/07/firefighters-memorial-graffiti-stirs.html>

June 29, 2012 By Ted Schnell • BocaJump

“Nice,” was the comment of a passerby, her voice dripping with sarcasm Friday afternoon as she stopped for a moment to see what a photographer was taking a picture of on Elgin’s downtown riverfront.

Someone vandalized the Elgin Firefighters Memorial, leaving a spray-painted phrase containing an expletive apparently intended as an insult to police. Based on the color of the spray paint used, the same person or persons also tagged the Pioneer Family Memorial statue.

The graffiti apparently was done Thursday night or on Friday. Both memorials are along the Fox River, south of the Kimball Street dam, and the vandalism sparked anger among those who stopped to look upon it.

A fisherman paused in shock when he saw the damage to the Firefighters Memorial on Friday afternoon, shortly before an Elgin Public Works crew arrived to clean up the silver spray paint.

“Kids!” he said in disgust, shaking his head. “They must have done this overnight. I was here (Thursday) afternoon and there was nothing.

“This is very sad,” he added, holding a fishing pole in one hand, a minnow bucket and tackle box in the other. Before turning to head down to the shore, he pointed to the memorial and added, “Those men are heroes. This is no good.”

BocaJump learned of the vandalism shortly before 4 p.m. Friday, when Elgin Chat posted a link to a photo of the vandalism to the Firefighters Memorial with the message, “I don't know if anyone at @ElginIL is aware of this vandalism but they might want to know aout (sic) this.” The post had been made about 3:30 p.m.

BocaJump sent this reporter to the Firefighters Memorial to take pictures, where he discovered the Pioneer Family Memorial statue also had been struck. BocaJump forwarded copies of its pictures and reported the damage to the Elgin Police Department. Elgin Public Works employees Dave Christensen, Liz Price and Katie Thrun were on the scene shortly after 6 to begin removing the paint.

“We’re outraged to see such disrespect,” Elgin police Cmdr. Glenn Theriault said Friday afternoon after being notified of the graffiti. “We will pursue the perpetrators of this.”

Elgin police said the graffiti was not gang-related.

Theriault urged residents who see such graffiti to call police to report it, even if they already have mentioned it or posted it to social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Vandalism is costly to combat, he said, particularly late on a Friday afternoon when a crew must be called in after their work is done for the day to clean it up.

Both memorials are significant, but for different reasons.

The Pioneer Family Memorial statue is a sculpture designed by Elgin native Trygve A. Rovelstad, 1903-1990, a renowned sculptor and medalist.



**Elgin Public Works employees Dave Christensen, left, and Liz Price work to remove graffiti from the Elgin Firefighters Memorial early Friday evening as co-worker Katie Thrun steps out of the picture to grab gear from the van.  
(Ted Schnell • BocaJump)**

[According to the Fox Valley Arts website, "Elgin native Trygve A. Rovelstad was a renowned sculptor and medalist. He was sculptor of the City of Elgin's monumental bronze 'Pioneer Family Memorial.'"](#)

The Elgin Firefighters Memorial, however, is dedicated to the memory of two Elgin firefighters who, as the memorial proclaims, made "The Ultimate Sacrifice."

Elgin Fire Department Capt. Stanley Balsis and firefighter Michael Whalen died while attempting to rescue a man who had become trapped in the "boil" at the base of the Kimball Street dam on June 2, 1974.

It is a tragedy that stands out in the memory of Elgin residents from that time. The man they were trying to rescue survived. On a \$5 bet, he had gone over the dam on an inflatable raft and was trapped in the dam's backwash. Balsis and Whalen were overcome by the fierce current as they attempted the rescue. At one point, the man broke free of the same current that exhausted the two firefighters who finally succumbed to the deadly current.

The vandalism angered not only passers-by on Friday afternoon, but also members of the Elgin City Council.

"It is disturbing anytime property is defaced with graffiti," Councilwoman Tish Powell wrote in an email to BocaJump. "However, the fact that the perpetrators chose to vandalize a memorial honoring individuals who have given the ultimate sacrifice in our community is even more disheartening. It is completely disrespectful. I hope that those responsible are caught and prosecuted."

Councilman John Prigge also expressed his displeasure.

"This is especially disturbing at a time where I have seen such few cases of graffiti this year," he wrote in an email.

He noted that the sacrifice made by Balsis and Whalen is one remembered vividly by many of those who lived in Elgin at the time.

"The day these two firefighters lost their lives will be forever etched in my mind as it was opening day for Teener League baseball at Trout Park," Prigge wrote. "My best friend was our centerfielder and soon after the first pitch he broke his leg on a pick-off play. We called an ambulance to take him to the 'new' St. Joseph Hospital. He asked me to ride with him as his parents were away for the entire day. A private ambulance had to come as all fire equipment was at the river. It was gut-wrenching to hear my friend in pain with a compound leg fracture while listening with the ambulance attendants to the scanner in the ambulance as the attempted rescue was going on."

Fire Chief John Fahy could not be reached for comment on Friday afternoon.

## Elgin Service Recalls 1974 Dam-Rescue Deaths

<http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20140510/news/140519875/>  
5/10/2014

Eight Elgin firefighters are listed on a wall at Elgin Fire Barn No. 5 Museum that honors those who died of injuries suffered on duty. Two had heart attacks; one injured a leg and died of the resulting infection; one died of a concussion; one was crushed under the wheels of a fire truck; and one died of a shotgun injury.

Saturday, firefighters remembered the two who lost their lives 40 years ago this summer, trying to save a teenager from drowning in the boil under the Kimball Street dam on the Fox River.

Two teens had, on a dare, ridden a raft over the dam on the flood-swollen river. They capsized in the hydraulic roller, or boil, below the dam. One was thrown free; the other was stuck.

To his rescue came Station 2 Pipeman Michael Whalen and his captain, Stanley Balsis, said current Fire Chief John Fahy.

"They did what they are supposed to do. They got their boat in the water and they were the ready to go," Fahy said of Balsis and Whalen.

Both were killed when their rescue boat capsized. Whalen died almost immediately when their boat slammed against the concrete wall of the dam.

"And the tragedy had begun," Fahy said, at the annual Elgin Area Firefighters' Memorial Service at George Van De Voorde Firefighter Memorial Park.

Balsis held on to the capsized boat for 45 minutes, with a broken arm and a separated shoulder, battered by the boil. Efforts to save him proved fruitless, as he could not hang on to flotation devices firefighters threw to him to pull him out. The raging waters took him.

"This is what Captain Balsis signed up to do," Fahy said.

Both teenagers survived the tragedy.



**A giant American flag is held aloft over the crowd by two ladder trucks during the annual Elgin Area Firefighters Memorial Service Saturday at George Van De Voorde Firefighter Memorial Park and Elgin Fire Barn No. 5 Museum.**

*photos by Brian Hill | Staff Photographer*



The memorial message from guest speaker Bob Shaw was especially poignant. Shaw, chief of the Du Quoin Fire Department, read a poem he wrote about the death of his 22-year-old son, a firefighter, from a building collapse at a fire in Pinckneyville three years ago.

It recalls the accident, Shaw's helpless feeling at realizing it was his son who was injured and his raw emotion on the day of the pomp-filled funeral.

"I am late, far too late. I can only turn and repeat, 'That's my boy. That's Corey Shaw.' ... I curse God, fire and all the shining engines," he read.

Shaw said he has since dedicated himself to improving training for firefighters in his mostly rural area, in honor of his son.

The ceremony featured representatives of the Algonquin/Lake in the Hills, Bartlett, Elgin, East Dundee, Hampshire, Hanover Park, Hoffman Estates, Huntley, Pingree Grove, Rutland, South Elgin, Streamwood and West Dundee fire departments and protection districts.

Besides remembering three Illinois firefighters who died on the job in the past year, the representatives also detailed former members of their departments who have died in the last year.

"Once you are a firefighter, you are always a firefighter. It's what you do. It's what you wanted to do. It's how you lived your lives," Fahy said.

## **Fire Departments Train For Water Rescues**

<https://chicagoareafire.com/blog/2016/04/fire-departments-train-for-water-rescues/>

### **June 4 Excerpts [from theChicagoTribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com):**

The Fox River can be a dangerous place, as illustrated by two recent incidents. In Geneva, two boaters went into the river but were able to get themselves out of the water by the time firefighters arrived at the scene. In St. Charles, a kayaker went into the water and was helped by another boater and brought to shore.

The Aurora Fire Department's 24-member dive team is trained in deep-water rescue and often practices on the Fox River, said fire department spokesman Lt. Jim Rhodes. Each month, the team trains for a different skill. Usually when the river is higher, we will do more swift water rescue training," Rhodes said. This includes drills on how to retrieve or rescue someone who is caught in a situation where the river is running quickly.

The Oswego Fire Department has a technical rescue team with 23 members that specialize in swift water rescue, said department spokesman Battalion Chief Dan Schiradelly. "You have to understand the power of water," Schiradelly said. In order to operate well in water rescues, it's important that firefighters don't fear the water.

Further up the Fox River, Elgin firefighters recently trained for swift water rescues near the Kimball Street dam, a spot that reminds how treacherous the Fox River can be. "Training here reinforces the challenges of river rescues and the dangers the river poses," Elgin Fire Lt. William Nangle said. "It puts what we do in perspective and points to a harsh reality."

That harsh reality happened on [June 2, 1974, when Elgin Fire Department Capt. Stanley Balsis, 45, and firefighter Michael Whalen, 25, died while trying to save a young man from drowning](#). The two firefighters used an aluminum row boat with a motor attached to the back to attempt the rescue. The boat typically was used to drag the river for drowning victims, not for saving lives. But it was the only equipment the two had when they tried to save 20-year-old James Krueger of Stone Park, who had gone over the dam.

Firefighters went over how to rescue someone who had fallen into the fast-moving river below the dam, with Nangle discussing the finer points of "reach, throw, row and go."

He explained that if possible, first, if the person in the water can't help himself, rescuers can try to pull the person to shore by reaching out with a pole or other object onto which the victim can grab. If not, the next option is to toss a rope with a throw bag that floats in front of the person in the water for that person to grab.

Past that, rescuers next option would be to use a boat to reach a victim, and finally, to enter the water to make a rescue.

... alcohol plays a role in many water-related craft accidents and drownings ...  
... the Elgin Water Rescue Team typically is called into action about a dozen times a year, with many of those false calls.

... drones ... for water rescues are being used to survey the stretch of water where an incident is happening, for locating victims and obstacles.

## **Elgin Firefighters Honor Two Who Drowned In 1974**

*June 2 Posted by [Admin in Fire Department News](#)*

**Excerpts from [theChicagoTribune.com](#):**

It was a beautiful, sunny June afternoon that Sunday in 1974 when Michael Whalen and Stan Balsis gave their lives rescuing a man in the Fox River, three now-retired Elgin firefighters who were there that day recalled Tuesday.

Forty-one years after Firefighter Whalen, 25, and Fire Capt. Balsis, 45, died, about 20 firefighters plus Balsis' son Curt gathered at the memorial to the dead rescuers along the edge of the Kimball Street Dam in Elgin. Exactly at 5:01 p.m., the time the alarm went out, two retirees who had been there that day, Larry Judkins and Frank Craig Eadler, threw a wreath of flowers into the river from the nearby Kimball Street Bridge. Those at the side of the river saluted.

Whalen and Balsis had entered the water below the dam on June 2, 1974, because a 20-year-old man in an inflatable raft had gone over the dam and gotten himself trapped in the boiling water at its base. The man eventually got free of the churning water. But Whalen and Balsis fell out of their aluminum rescue boat and were trapped in the boiling current.

As scores of people watched in horror from the bridge, first Whalen and then Basis were drowned after a drama that went on for some 40 minutes.

Eadler recalled that the firefighters were submerged, then coughed back up, then resubmerged over and over in the boiling current below the dam as they tried to escape.

Standing on the west bank, Eadler recalled, he got a rope to Balsis. But, exhausted and with his collarbone broken by the vicious current, Balsis just couldn't hold on any longer. Whalen already had drowned about 20 minutes before that.

Ten minutes later a Coast Guard helicopter arrived overhead from Chicago's North Shore, but it was too late.

But as the flowered wreath went over the dam, then popped back out of the below-dam current in just a few seconds, Balsis said, "if only my dad had come out of there that fast."

### **Excerpts [from the DailyHerald.com](http://www.DailyHerald.com):**

The Elgin Fire Department Tuesday remembered two of its own who died 41 years ago while rescuing two teenagers.

Retired firefighter Larry Judkins dropped a wreath from the Kimball Street bridge into the Fox River to commemorate the deaths of Station 2 Pipeman Michael Whalen and his captain, Stanley Balsis. Standing with him was retired firefighter/EMT Craig Eadler. Both men were part of the rescue crew and saw Whalen and Balsis die.

"Those guys were heroes," Judkins said. "They actually saved the kids in the water, but we couldn't save them."

The ceremony took place at 5:01 p.m., the time the call came in June 2, 1974. The tradition started about five years ago, Chief John Fahy said.

"There is no greater sacrifice a firefighter can give than laying down their life to save a fellow human being," Fahy said. "Stan Balsis and Michael Whalen made that sacrifice 41 years ago, forever changing the lives of the Balsis and Whalen families. May they rest in peace."

Two teens had, on a dare, ridden a raft over the dam on the flood-swollen river but capsized in the hydraulic roller, or boil, below the dam. Both teenagers survived.

The firefighters were killed when their rescue boat capsized. Whalen died almost immediately when their boat slammed against the concrete wall of the dam, while Balsis held on to the capsized boat for 45 minutes before the waters took him.

## **Elgin Fire Department Memorial**

June 3 Posted by [Admin in Fire Department News](#)

[The Courier-News has an article](#) about [Elgin's remembrance of two fallen firefighters](#).

A grand memorial at the Kimball Street River Walk is a powerful reminder of the tragic day, 40 years ago, that the Elgin Fire Department lost two of its own.

It was June 2, 1974, when fire Capt. Stanley Balsis, 45, and Michael Whalen, 25, died while trying to save a teenager from drowning.

On a dare, the teen took a blow-up raft over the Kimball Street Bridge dam and got caught in rough waters. When the boat Balsis and Whalen launched to save the teen slammed into a concrete wall and capsized, they fought for their lives, until the water proved too powerful an opponent and their comrades' best efforts to save them failed. The teen was thrown from the water and survived.

[Sunday] — on the 40th anniversary of that tragic event — the Balsis family [threw] a wreath into the river to honor their father's memory.

Throughout his life, Christopher McMillan, a grandson born long after Balsis passed away, has met a handful of local residents who vividly recall the tragedy.

Each of Balsis' four children — Brad, Linda, Curt and Sharon — keeps his memory alive by displaying his firefighting memorabilia and pictures in their homes.

They are not alone in their grief. "I can still tell you, almost minute by minute, what happened that day," said Patrick Crawford, who was then a 27-year-old paramedic in training and among the first to arrive at the scene. Five years later, Crawford quit, to pursue his part-time business, Elgin Medi-Transport Inc., full-time.

### ***An unspoken grief***

*Larry Judkins, 68, is haunted by the image of Balsis and Whalen, "like clothes in a front-load washing machine," struggling in the treacherous waters. The retired firefighter ruminates about what he could have done differently that day but realizes none of the scenarios would have changed the outcome. "The river is a dangerous place if you don't respect it," he said.*

Flanked by stone columns topped with bronze fire helmets, the memorial is etched with headshot photographs of Balsis and Whalen in their formal uniforms, and inscribed with the story of their heroic last call. It serves as a reminder, not just on



this day but every day, of the ultimate sacrifice two fallen heroes made in the line of duty.

## Elgin Firefighters Honor Two Who Drowned In 1974

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/elgin-courier-news/ct-ecn-fire-drownings-st-0603-20150602-story.html>

JUN 02, 2015 By DAVE GATHMAN ELGIN COURIER-NEWS

Elgin firefighters prepare Tuesday for a memorial service in honor of two of their number who drowned in 1974. (Dave Gathman, The Courier-News)

1 / 6

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**Firefighters Honored**

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Eadler recalled that the firefighters were submerged, then coughed back up, then resubmerged over and over in the boiling current below the dam as they tried to escape.

"They were like clothes in a front-load washing machine," he said.

Standing on the west bank, Eadler recalled, he got a rope to Balsis. But, exhausted and with his collarbone broken by the vicious current, Balsis just couldn't hold on any longer. Whalen already had drowned about 20 minutes before that. Ten minutes later a Coast Guard helicopter arrived overhead from Chicago's North Shore, but it was too late.

"We couldn't believe it. Our dad was Superman," Curt Balsis said. "But at 45 he was gone."

"Be safe out there," young Balsis told the firefighters and paramedics of 2015. He and Fire Chief John Fahy said the department now has much better equipment for handling such a rescue.

But as the flowered wreath went over the dam, then popped back out of the below-dam current in just a few seconds, Balsis said, "if only my dad had come out of there that fast."

[DGathman@tribpub.com](mailto:DGathman@tribpub.com)

## Memorial serves as reminder of dam's danger

<https://www.capitalgazette.com/ct-ecm-elgin-firefighters-memorial-kimball-dam-st-0605-20160603-story.html>

Gloria Casas Elgin Courier-News

Sunlight skimmed the Fox River, and the sound of water falling over the Kimball Street dam created a serene setting on the evening set aside to remember two [Elgin](#) firefighters who died there 42 years ago when it wasn't as calm.

"The only way to make it safer is to get rid of it," Elgin fire Lt. Wayne Smith said Thursday.

Smith organized this year's memorial service for Elgin fire Capt. Stanley Balsis and firefighter Michael Whalen, 25, who died June 2, 1974, while trying to rescue a man who had gone over the dam. The ceremony featured an honor guard and a solitary firefighter playing bagpipes on the bank of Walton Island.

Fire Chief John P. Fahy said the deaths never leave the minds of firefighters who realize they may not go home at the end of a shift.

"The message is always keep your guard up, keep your training up and keep your wits about you," the chief said.

Balsis' grandson Chad McMillan and Whalen's brother Dave, who was 14 in 1974, threw floral wreaths into the river. The honor guard saluted as the wreaths floated past.

A dispatch tone came over the department's radio at 5:01 p.m., the minute the men's crew was called to the scene. Whalen was the first to go under as he and

Balsis used an aluminum row boat in an effort to save a 20-year-old man. The boat got caught up in the "boil," or undertow, created by the water as it goes over the dam.

Retired Elgin firefighter Larry Judkins was among the first to respond. He spoke briefly at the memorial about how he tried throwing a rope to Balsis, who reached for it, letting go of the raft he was holding on to, but he couldn't hang on. Later, Judkins learned Balsis had a broken collarbone that would have made it hard to hold the rope, he said.

Balsis struggled in the water for 40 minutes, leaving firefighters feeling helpless and unable to save him.



**Elgin Fire Capt. Stanley Balsis's grandson, Chad McMillan, and firefighter Michael Whalen's brother, Dave, carry wreaths to be thrown into the Fox River, near the spot where the firefighters died 42 years ago. (Gloria Casas / The Courier-News)**

"Now we have the resources we didn't have, we don't have to just stand by," Smith said.

Smith leads the department's dive team and its regular training for water rescues at the site.

"It's the scariest thing we do," said Smith, adding only dive team members are trained. The department has a specialized rescue raft, the only one in the state, that can be used at the dam, he said.

Nothing can be done to make the dam safer, but the city has limited access there, said Smith, who'd just returned from assisting in the search for 12-year-old Eder Arroyo, of Joliet, who fell near a dam at South Island Park in Wilmington. The boy's death is another reminder of how dangerous a dam can be, he said.



**Two wreaths in the Fox River commemorate the deaths of Elgin Fire Capt. Stanley Balsis and firefighter Michael Whalen on June 2, 1974. (Gloria Casas / The Courier-News)**



The annual memorial for Balsis and Whalen "not only shows respect and tells their families we will never forget, it serves to tell the new guys to respect these waters," Smith said.

*Gloria Casas is a freelance reporter for The Courier-News.*



## **Elgin Fire Department, Elgin, Illinois**

<https://es-la.facebook.com/elginfire/posts/44-years-ago-today-the-elgin-fire-department-lost-two-of-our-own-in-a-tragic-acc/1750301298351221/>

2 June 2018 ·

44 years ago today, the Elgin Fire Department lost two of our own in a tragic accident at the Kimball Street dam. These true heroes gave their lives during a water rescue incident. Captain Balsis and Firefighter Whalen will forever be remembered by our department and our community for their ultimate sacrifice.

## **Fire Service Line of Duty Deaths**

06-01-2018

**June 2, 1974 - LODD  
Captain Stanley Balsis, 45  
Firefighter Michael Whalen, 25  
Elgin Fire Department. Elgin, IL**

Captain Balsis and Firefighter Whalen died while trying to save a teenager from drowning.

On a dare, the teen took a blow-up raft over the Kimball Street Bridge dam and got caught in rough waters. When the boat Captain Balsis and Firefighter Whalen launched to save the teen slammed into a concrete wall and capsized, they fought for their lives, until the water proved too powerful an opponent and their comrades' best efforts to save them failed. The teen was thrown from the water and survived.



## Stanley Balsis

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/179974182/stanley-balsis>

**BIRTH** 1 Aug 1928  
**DEATH** 2 Jun 1974 (aged 45)  
Elgin, Kane County, Illinois, USA  
**BURIAL** Unknown

Captain Stanley Balsis and Firefighter Michael Whalen lost their lives in the line of duty, to save the life of a citizen caught in the churning waters of the Kimball Street dam on the Fox River, downtown Elgin, Illinois.

Michael Leslie Whalen's Memorial: Find A Grave # 108400359

## Elgin Firefighter's Son Goes Back To Site Of Dad's Heroism

<https://prev.dailyherald.com/story/?id=336579>

11/14/2009 **By Harry Hitzeman | Daily Herald Staff**

Thirty-five years is a long time.

So is 20.

Chris Whalen finally got a chance Friday to visit a memorial recognizing his father's heroism and to share memories with those who worked alongside his dad and watched in horror as he drowned 35 years ago while trying to save someone who went over Elgin's Kimball Street dam on a \$5 bet.

Firefighter Michael Whalen and fire Capt. Stanley Balsis died on June 2, 1974. Chris Whalen, now 40 and living in Connecticut, had been away from Elgin for 20 years. He'd never seen the memorial that was put up in their honor five years ago. He was joined by retired firefighters who tried to save his dad on that day, along with other Elgin firefighters who wanted to show their support, such as Fire Chief John Henrici, Lt. Richard Dunne and Whalen's cousin, Mitch Whalen, who is an Elgin firefighter himself.

Whalen said he was touched by the support.

"This was really powerful, getting to meet the people who worked with my father," Chris Whalen said. "I was so young (in 1974). Now I've got the tools, the adult maturity to deal with it. I was actually looking very much forward to it."

Whalen reunited with an old Larkin High School friend, Kim Gilmore, through Facebook earlier this year and asked about the memorial to his father. That's was the start of Friday's reunion and ceremony.



Curtis Balsis, the son of Stanley Balsis, was 12 when his father died. The younger Balsis couldn't make Friday afternoon's ceremony, but planned to meet up with Whalen while he was in town.

Curtis said June 2, 1974, was a Sunday and the fire chief and another man pulled up to his Elgin home to tell him what happened. "It was a sad day," he said. On that day, a 25-year-old went over the dam in a raft on a \$5 dare. Firefighters rushed to the scene, but the churning waters capsized the V-bottomed aluminum boat that Whalen and Balsis were in.

The boil eventually ejected the boat, which the rafter grabbed onto and survived. But the river pulled Whalen under relatively quickly and he was pronounced dead at the hospital.

Balsis grabbed onto the raft itself and he struggled with the water for 45 minutes before drowning.

The reunion brought back painful memories for retired firefighter Larry Judkins and former Battalion Chief Craig Eadler - both of whom responded that day. Eadler performed CPR on Whalen on the ambulance ride.

"All the gear the guys had on, the life jackets, were totally stripped off them. It's that powerful," said Eadler, who noted he almost quit the department after the tragedy. "To actually see somebody drown in front of your eyes, I wouldn't wish that on anybody. You're helpless. One minute you're laughing and joking, drinking coffee and then they're gone."

Judkins worked with other firefighters from the riverbank trying to rescue Balsis. "We got a rope to him a couple of times. He couldn't hang onto it. We later found out that his collarbone and shoulder were broken and he was hanging onto the raft with his good arm," Judkins recalled.

Judkins said the tragedy was a wake-up call to him that firefighters were not invincible. The image of Balsis' body being tossed in the water will live with him forever.

"It was like looking at a front-loading washing machine. he just tumbled and tumbled and he was gone," Judkins said. "Firemen sometimes think we're like Superman. People call us, we solve your problem and then we go. That day, we saved the person, but we couldn't save our own guys."

## **Balsis & Whalen Memorial Ceremony**

<https://stayhappening.com/e/balsis-andamp-whalen-memorial-ceremony-E2ISTOHL331>

**SAT JUN 12 2021 AT 09:00 AM**

**Elgin Fox River Dam | Elgin**

On Saturday, June 12, 2021 @ 9:00am, the Elgin Fire Department will be conducting a memorial service for Captain Stan Balsis and Firefighter Michael Whalen. These fire department members gave their lives 47 years ago during a

heroic rescue effort at the Kimball Street dam, on June 2nd, 1974. This incident deeply affected the fire department and has shaped the operational response to all water rescue incidents since then.

We invite everyone to attend at the bike path just south of the dam. Parking is available in the City lot south of Kimball at the dam. For further information, please call 847-931-6175.



**Balsis & Whalen Memorial Ceremony**  
**SAT JUN 12 2021 AT 09:00 AM**  
**Elgin Fox River Dam | Elgin**

**Elgin Fire Department, Elgin, Illinois**

<https://www.newspapers.com/clip/20452846/michaelwhalen>

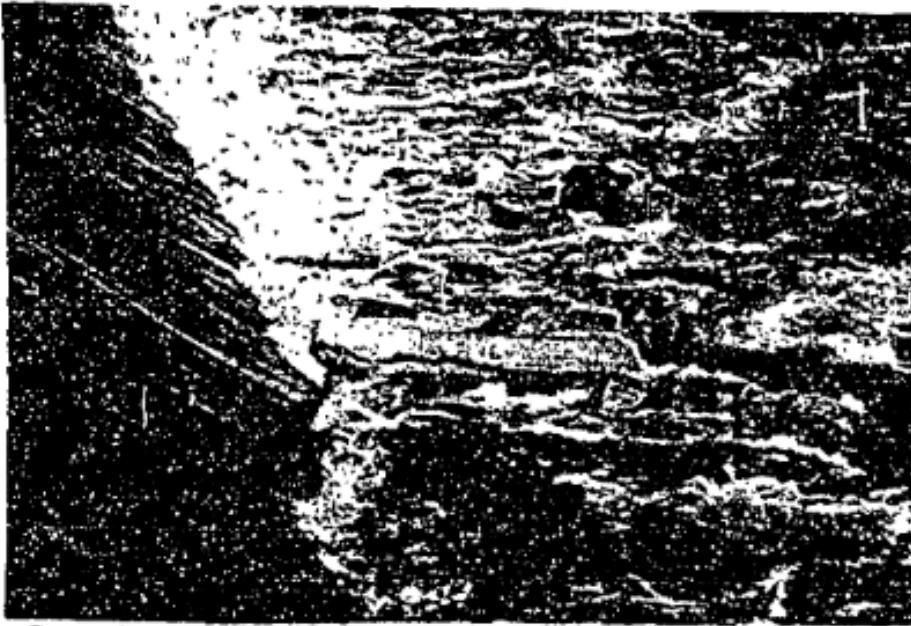
# The state



## Services today for two Elgin firemen

Funeral services will be held in Elgin today for two firemen who lost their lives Sunday trying to save a Stone Park man whose rubber raft overturned in the swirling waters of the Fox River below the Kimball Street dam. Mass for Michael Whalen, 25, a four-year veteran of the department, will be said at 10 a.m. in St. Laurence Catholic Church; and services for Stanley Balsis, 45, a 14-year veteran of the department, will be held at 1:30 p.m. in the Elgin Bible Church. The two were pitched into the fast-moving river and drowned while trying to rescue James Krueger, who made it to shore clinging to the overturned rescue boat.

[View the Full Page](#)



**Capt. Stanley Balsis, 45, an Elgin, Ill. fireman, clings to a rubber raft in turbulent water by a dam where he and another fireman, Michael Whalen (rear) were trying to rescue a boater. Both firemen later were swept to their deaths. The boater managed to reach the shore unharmed.**

<https://mdh.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/colmo5/id/69903/>