

## 05-20-09 PSD -David Sheffield - Itawamba County Dive Team

Packet #828 - May 21, 2009

**Buttahatchie River claims two lives  
Smithville youth drowns and diver dies during search**  
<http://myweb.cableone.net/columbuspacket/>



*Members of the Columbus Dive Team prepare to dive in the Buttahatchie River near Cockerham Bridge in Monroe County Monday in the effort to find the body of Smithville teen Taylor Smith. An Itawamba County diver died at the scene yesterday. Taylor's body has still not been found. A boat carrying the Monroe County Dive Team can be seen downstream from the Columbus boat.*

A 15-year-old Smithville Jr. High School student apparently drowned swimming with friends in the swollen Buttahatchie River last Friday and yesterday a diver from Itawamba County died while engaged in the ongoing search for the youth's body.

The missing youth is Taylor Smith (though the name has not been released by officials), a redheaded, popular, sports-crazy teen who recently won third place in weightlifting at a state competition in Jackson. The diver who died yesterday during the search was David Sheffield, 44, of the Dorsey Community near Tupelo—Monroe County Coroner Alan Gurley released the name last night.

Smith, known as "T.O.," was swimming with three teenage friends shortly after noon last Friday when he was swept downstream in the strong current on the east bank of the Buttahatchie just below the Cockerham Bridge (the bridge is in the Bartahatchie Community about ten miles east of Lackey). The friends saw Smith go under the surface of the water about 50 yards downstream. He has not been seen since and is presumed drowned.

A search for Smith's body began immediately and continues. It has involved divers and specialists from all over Northeast Mississippi, coordinated by the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. The Columbus Fire and Rescue Dive Team was one of the first units to respond, joining the search last Friday and continuing through Tuesday of this week.



The Buttahatchie River was running high when Smith disappeared. It had dropped about four feet by Monday but the current was still strong. People at the scene said that the current changed the river constantly.

Yesterday the Itawamba County Dive Team joined the search as volunteers. Gurley said that according to witnesses after Sheffield had been in the water between one and two hours he surfaced and said he could not breathe. Gurley said that fellow team members got Sheffield into a boat and that Dave Eldridge of MedStat Ambulance Service immediately started treating Sheffield. Gurley said Eldridge and other medical personnel continued treatment while en route to Pioneer Community Hospital in Aberdeen but that Sheffield was dead on arrival at the hospital.

Gurley said that Sheffield was apparently not breathing when he was pulled from the river into the boat. Gurley would not speculate on the cause of Sheffield's death, saying that the body will be taken to the Mississippi Crime Lab in Jackson today for an autopsy.

Gurley said that initial 911 call concerning Sheffield's condition was made at 12:21 p.m. and that Sheffield was pronounced dead at the hospital at 1:13 p.m.

Sheffield was stricken almost exactly five days after Smith disappeared. Monroe County Sheriff Andy Hood said that the search has involved the Department of Wildlife, the Monroe County Dive Team, the Monroe County Search and Rescue U.Columbus Fire and Rescue Dive Team, the Desoto County Sheriff Search and Rescue (with sonar), GTR K9 Search Dogs (Kathy Doty of Columbus), MedStat EMS Services, the Lamar County Emergency Management Agency K9 (James Smith), Search Dogs South (Bob Weible), the and the Itawamba County Dive Team. Hood said that volunteers have offered boats and help in conducting land searches and that a volunteer “flew” the river in a airplane.



*Donia and Kris Smith, at the scene Monday, four days after their son disappeared.*

Hood said that he received a call Tuesday from Itawamba County Sheriff Chris Dickinson offering to assist in the search. The Itawamba County Dive Team arrived yesterday morning and began by evaluating conditions. He said that the Itawamba team decided to search an area that had not been searched previously by divers.

Speaking yesterday of the effort to find Smith’s body—and which had now claimed Eldridge’s life—Hood said, “We have brought in every resource that was available for us to *safely* search for the missing teenager. We are working in dangerous conditions and safety is a priority.”

Hood said that Fish & Wildlife officers have been working 14-18 hours a day on the search. He said that the Desoto County Sheriff’s Dept. sent a team equipped with “sonar radar” twice—he said that the team stayed on the water almost until midnight Monday night. He said that the Monroe County Dive Team and the Monroe County Search and Rescue Team volunteered their time and that the Columbus divers sent teams for four days. He continued, “Efforts have been made and we have pooled every resource that has been available. I have had deputies volunteer to come in to work all day just to find him. We have worked hard, long hours and made every effort to recover the missing teenager.”

Hood said that last Saturday sonar experts thought they had found the body but that when Monroe divers finally cleared the object it was found to be a piece of carpet wrapped around a log. “We do not know where the body of

the teenager is at this point,” Hood said last night. “We are continuing the recovery effort and hope to get some closure for this family soon.”

Smith’s parents, Kris and Donia Smith of Smithville, have been at the scene for days, along with friends and some of their son’s classmates. Many of them spend nights under the bridge.



*Looking downstream from the Cockerham Bridge. The Columbus Dive Team boat is on the left and the Monroe County boat is farther downstream.*

Kris Smith, who has always lived in the same Smithville neighborhood, said that his son loved to hunting, fishing, and played football and baseball and lifted

weights. T.O. was the only student from Smithville to qualify for the Jackson weightlifting tournament, where he placed third.

Nets have been stretched across the river well below the spot where Smith disappeared, in case the body rises and starts to float downstream. The nets must be monitored frequently. “The community has really helped us out,” Hood said. “They have brought food and fed the officers and family. That is something that was very much appreciated. Kenneth Lackey of Lackey’s Restaurant [which recently burned] cooked hamburgers for us one day, the Hamilton Sports Association brought food, Bartahatchie Outback cooked for us, Bo Riley’s from Amory sent food, churches and individuals have gone beyond anything we could ask for. Numerous people have brought food, but these are a few.” He added, “Evans Heating and Plumbing owner JC Evans in Hamilton has accommodated us by use of private facilities to access the river.”

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Columbus Fire Chief Ken Moore said yesterday that the Columbus Dive Team participated in the search from last Friday through Tuesday. He added, “They’ve done everything they can do unless they call us back and want us to go farther.”

Members of the Columbus Fire and Rescue Dive Team who have participated in the search are Dale Ballard, Robert Bobo, Kevin Brown, Doug Cox, Clyde Egger, Richard Graves, Robert Kain, Richard McBride, Michael McReynolds, Michael Miller, Chief Moore, Susan Snapp, Scott Swain, Mark Ward and Josh Westbrook.

## **Itawamba County dive team member dies while searching for missing Smithville boy**

[http://itawamba360.com/pages/full\\_story?article-Itawamba%20County%20dive%20team%20member%20dies%20while%20searching%20for%20missing%20Smithville%20boy%20=&page\\_label=home\\_top\\_stories\\_news&id=2594420-Itawamba+County+dive+team+member+dies+while+searching+for+missing+Smithville+boy&widget=push&instance=home\\_news\\_1st\\_left&open=&](http://itawamba360.com/pages/full_story?article-Itawamba%20County%20dive%20team%20member%20dies%20while%20searching%20for%20missing%20Smithville%20boy%20=&page_label=home_top_stories_news&id=2594420-Itawamba+County+dive+team+member+dies+while+searching+for+missing+Smithville+boy&widget=push&instance=home_news_1st_left&open=&)  
by Itawamba360.com

A diver aiding in the recovery effort for a missing Smithville boy died Wednesday afternoon.

David Sheffield, 44, of Dorsey, was assisting the Monroe County Sheriff's Department and other agencies in the search for Taylor Smith of Smithville, who was last seen swimming in the Buttahatchie River in South Monroe County Friday.

According to Monroe County Coroner Alan Gurley, Sheffield received immediate medical attention.

"Mr. Sheffield and other members of the Itawamba County Dive Team had been in the water between one and two hours," Gurley said. "According to witnesses I spoke with, Sheffield came to the surface and said he could not breathe. They called for assistance and got him into boat, it is believed he was not breathing at that time. Dave Eldridge, MedStat Ambulance Service Supervisor was at the scene and immediately started medical treatment and continued it in the ambulance with other medical personal in route to Pioneer Community Hospital in Aberdeen. Mr. Sheffield was DOA and was pronounced dead at 1:13 p.m.. The incident was called in to 911 at 12:21 p.m. I have ordered an autopsy that will be conducted at the Mississippi Crime Lab in Jackson."

McNeece-Morris Funeral Home in Fulton is handling funeral arrangements.

## **Miss. diver dies during search for teen**

<http://www.clarionledger.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090520/NEWS/90520039&s=a>

By Nicklaus Lovelady • [nicklaus.lovelady@jackson.gannett.com](mailto:nicklaus.lovelady@jackson.gannett.com) • May 20, 2009

A volunteer diver with the Itawamba County Dive Team died today while searching for the body of a teenager in the Buttahatchie River. David Sheffield, 44, of Tupelo was in the water for an hour or two when he surfaced, unable to breathe, Monroe County Coroner Alan Gurley said.

Sheffield was pulled into a boat.

MedStat Ambulance Service supervisor Dave Eldridge was at the scene and immediately started medical treatment and continued it in the ambulance with other medical personal as they traveled to Pioneer Community Hospital

in Aberdeen, Gurley said.

But Sheffield was pronounced dead on arrival at 1:13 p.m.

Gurley said it is unknown what caused the diver's death.

An autopsy will be performed Thursday.

Gurley said the divers were in search of a Monroe County teen who was last seen Friday at the Cockerham Bridge. The teen has not been located.

McNeece-Morris Funeral Home in Fulton is handling funeral arrangements.  
**To comment on this story, call Nicklaus Lovelady at (601) 961-7239.**

<b>Video: <a href="#">Diver Dies on Buttahatchie</a> 5.20.09</b>
01:08   From: <u>Featured</u>
Another tragedy at the Buttahatchie River as recovery efforts continue for the body of a 14-year old Smithville teen.
Tags: accident, attack, buttahatchie, death, diver, heart, river

## Family Members Remember Volunteer Diver

[http://wcbi.com/article.php?subaction=showfull&id=1242945169&archive=&start\\_from=&ucat=2&](http://wcbi.com/article.php?subaction=showfull&id=1242945169&archive=&start_from=&ucat=2&)

21 May 2009 05:32pm | Posted by Siobhan Riley

**NORTH MISSISSIPPI** - David Sheffield was a volunteer fire fighter who loved helping his community. Early indications are, he suffered a fatal heart attack while searching for a teen who apparently drowned in the Buttahatchie River. Family members want the community to know what kind of person he really was.

Billy Sheffield wasn't surprised when his brother told him he wanted to help rescue crews find the body of Taylor Smith who apparently drowned in the Buttahatchie River last Friday.

David was a volunteer diver with the Itawamba County dive team. "He was watching TV the day before and they interviewed the father of that boy that drowned there and he told his wife, he said, 'I'm going to go down there and help him tomorrow,' she told him not to go, he said he wasn't feeling well, he said I'm going," said Billy Sheffield, who's the brother of David.

That was the last time family members saw him.

Then came the devastating news that David had died during the recovery effort. Family members found some comfort knowing he was giving of himself to help rescue someone else. "He died doing what he loved, he loved SCUBA diving and he was good at it, he just liked helping other people, anybody needed any help, he would do it," Billy Sheffield added.

Vincent Sheffield, who's David's nephew, showed us the go-cart that his uncle bought him when he was in a competition. He says every time he sees it, it will be a reminder of how special he was. "I'm sensing a peace because I know he's in heaven right now, so that's probably the only way my family can get through," said Vincent Sheffield.

Family members tell us the funeral is set for Sunday at the McNeece-Morris funeral home in Fulton. Visitation is also at the funeral home from five until nine Saturday.

### **Missing Smithville teen's body found**

[http://www.picayuneitem.com/statenews/local\\_story\\_143200137.html](http://www.picayuneitem.com/statenews/local_story_143200137.html)

May 23, 2009 AP

**HAMILTON** — The body of a Smithville teenager has been recovered from the Buttahatchie River in Monroe County.

County Coroner Alan Gurley says the body of 14-year-old Taylor Smith was found Friday about a half mile south of where he was last seen May 15 while swimming with friends.

Gurley says an autopsy will be conducted.

Sheriff's Department officials say Smith's friends told them Smith was floating down the river when he went under water near the Cockerham Bridge in south Monroe County and never surfaced.

A volunteer diver with the Itawamba County Dive Team died Wednesday while searching for the body. Monroe County Coroner Alan Gurley says 44-year-old David Sheffield, of Tupelo, was in the water for an hour or two when he surfaced, unable to breathe.