

05-25-1980 Napa Co CA – James E Healy – LEO Deep OOA



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Reserve Deputy James Edward Healy

Napa County Sheriff's Department, CA

EOW: Sunday, May 25, 1980

Cause of Death: Drowned

<http://api.odmp.org/officer/17409-reserve-deputy-james-edward-healy>

Reserve Deputy Healy drowned while attempting to recover the body of another drowning victim from Lake Berryessa.

Deputy Healy and another member of the agency's dive team had located the sunken boat, attached a line to it, and surfaced to obtain new air tanks. Deputy Healy and another deputy then began to follow the line to the boat. At 96-feet, Deputy Healy met the second deputy and indicated everything was okay, but shortly thereafter, indicated he needed to surface.

As both deputies began to surface, Deputy Healy indicated he was out of air. The other deputy attempted to give Deputy Healy his regulator, but as Deputy Healy attempted to swim to it he accidentally knocked off the mask of the other diver. The other diver could no longer see and was unable to get the regulator to Deputy Healy. The deputy surfaced and immediately reported that Deputy Healy was in trouble.

Another diver immediately suited up and entered the lake. He located Deputy Healy's body approximately 60 feet down. The deputies in the boat were able to pull Deputy Healy to the surface using his safety line and immediately started CPR. He was flown to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead.

At Lake Berryessa

Diver Dies Trying To Locate Body

LAKE BERRYESSA — A Saturday boating accident resulted in the apparent drowning of one person and Sunday took the life of a Napa County Sheriff's scuba diver sent down to find the victim's body.

The first victim's name was not released by the Napa County Sheriff's Department pending notification of next of kin. It is known he was a Mill Valley resident.

The diver, who was coordinating the dive involving several other divers from the sheriff's office, was identified as James F. Healy, 55, of Agua

Caliente Road in Sonoma.

The initial accident took place Saturday at approximately 5 p.m. when three persons were driving their approximately 17 foot boat out of a Lake Berryessa boat ramp.

The boat was approximately 150 feet from the ramp and accelerating when it suddenly overturned and sank. The surviving two members of the

crew told sheriff's deputies the cause of the boat sinking was unknown.

The survivors were able to keep afloat until help arrived, though they suffered injuries as well. The extent of their injuries was unknown at press time. They were taken to St. Helena Hospital.

A special sheriff's diving team was dispatched Sunday

to look for the body of the victim and the boat.

According to deputies, Healy was on his second dive looking for the body when he suddenly ripped his air mouthpiece from his face mask, possibly indicating he had run out of air. He was about 96 feet below the surface at the time.

After another diver helped

(Continued on Page 2)

A Clear Field For Reag



FIGHT FOR LIFE was waged but ultimately lost by James Healy, 55, after he lost his air supply while diving in 96 feet of water at Lake Berryessa Sunday morning. Healy, a Sonoma resident, was searching with other divers from the sheriff's department for the body of an apparent drowning victim in a

Saturday boating mishap. Witnesses told deputies Healy took the air mouthpiece from his mouth and signaled he had gone to the surface. He may have run out of his air supply, deputies theorized, though the exact cause of death has not yet been

determined. Healy was a former diving instructor at Solano College and an ex-U.S. Navy diver. He was the coordinator for Sunday's dive. He was flown by CHP helicopter to Queen of the Valley Hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival.

☆ Drowning

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him to the surface, cardiovascular pulmonary resuscitation was administered and a California Highway Patrol helicopter was used to fly him to Queen of the Valley Hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival. The incident took place at approximately 11 a.m.

An autopsy is being performed this morning to determine cause of death.

Healy was a diver in the U.S. Navy, according to the Sheriff's Department, and taught diving at Solano Junior College.

He was a member of the Sheriff's diving team for two years.

Healy's funeral arrangements are pending at Claffey and Rota Funeral Home.

The body of the Mill Valley man has still not been found, according to the sheriff's office.

Diving Specialist's Death Due to Gear Malfunction?

Equipment malfunction may have caused the drowning death of a Sheriff's diving specialist Sunday and may also have hindered his rescue, according to another diver involved in the incident.

Deputy Randy Fitt, who was diving with James Healy Sunday searching for the victim of an apparent Saturday drowning, today said a preliminary investigation of Healy's air tanks showed they were almost empty when he was taken from the water indicating some sort of mechanical malfunction robbing Healy of air 96 feet below the water's surface.

But "the real question" Fitt said, was what happened to the experienced diver after he indicated to Fitt he was heading to the surface.

The first sign of trouble came when Fitt noticed Healy pulling his air regulator from his face mask, perhaps indicating something was wrong with his air supply. The deputy then offered Healy his own air hose but Healy apparently didn't see the offer in the "black water" at that depth and with Fitt's flashlight pointing in his direction.

But Fitt said Healy didn't signal he was out of air anyway, instead indicating he would begin a free ascent to the surface. Fitt, who had had his mask knocked ajar ac-

cidentally and partially filled with water by Healy, then headed to the surface expecting Healy to follow.

"It was the last I saw of him," Fitt said.

When Fitt arrived at the pontoon platform where others were waiting, Healy had not surfaced and attempts to pull the stricken diver to the surface via his safety line began. But it was a long 10 minutes before five persons could get Healy on board.

Fitt said a combination of the type of safety rope used to hook up the divers and the type of platform they were on delayed the rescue attempt.

"The rope is a cotton rope designed for mountain rescue and it might have stretched," Fitt said.

Also, the platform was unstable, resting on pontoons. As the rescuers pulled on the safety line the platform kept dipping underwater, prohibiting an easy pull-up. It took about 10 minutes to get Healy to the surface, Fitt said.

An ambulance and helicopter were called to the scene and cardiopulmonary resuscitation was given to Healy for 20 minutes until the aircraft could arrive to take him to Queen of the Valley Hospital, but Healy was pronounced dead on arrival.

Though the helicopter arrived approximately five

minutes before the ambulance, Fitt said rescuers delayed moving Healy until the ambulance could arrive under the belief that CPR couldn't be continued by one person on the small helicopter, though the ambulance crew did manage to squeeze someone aboard and continue the CPR.

Fitt said an investigation of the incident is underway and outside diving experts will probably be called in to check the equipment and make recommendations.

Fitt characterized Healy as an experienced diver, who has taught diving at Solano Community College.

"He was a fish," Fitt said yesterday.

The question, Fitt said, is what happened to Healy after he had signaled he was heading to the surface.

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Diver

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He said narcosis, which can disrupt a diver's rational thinking process at that depth, probably was not to blame, given Healy's experience in the water. He said Healy has made dives of more than 200 feet in the past.

May 28, 1980

<https://dr652a.bmiimaging.com/Roll/Roll?datasetName=Napa%20County%20Library%206.5&rollID=540&frameNumber=785>

Man Believed Drowned, But Friends Still Search

LAKE BERRYESSA — A private search is continuing today for former race car driver Dick Workman, who was reported missing following a boat accident Saturday.

Workman, 43, was reported missing after a 17-foot Century Arabian speedboat he was riding in turned over 150 yards from the Lake Berryessa Boat Ramp at 5 p.m. Saturday.

While searching for Workman, a Sheriff's diving specialist, James Healy, drowned. Sheriff's Captain Jim Munk said the search for Workman was called off after eight hours of dragging the lake.

But friends and relatives of Workman believe that he is still alive.

Sam Kelley said that Workman, a veteran

automobile racer who has survived crashes in the past, may be hurt and wandering around dazed. "We just know he is alive somewhere," Kelley said.

Workman raced Formula 5000 cars up until last year, racing at Riverside, and Atlanta race tracks and competing in the Long Beach Grand Prix.

Kelley said people at the

lake may have seen the injured race car driver. She described him at five foot 10, weighing 190 pounds and having red hair.

Kelley said the Workman family has hired a private salvage company and chartered private airplanes to continue the search for Workman and to recover the Century Arabian.

During the search for
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Come Join Us
For
Breakfast

☆ Search At Lake

(Continued from Page 1)

Workman on Sunday, Healy, 55, an Agua Caliente resident who was working with the sheriff's department drowned after his scuba tanks apparently malfunctioned while he was at a depth of 96 feet.

Sheriff's chief deputy coronor Jim York will convene a review board later this week to investigate the death. The board will consist of a professional diver, a pathologist and a representative from the

California Occupational Health and Safety Administration.

York said, "We know that he drowned and that the cause was accidental. What we don't know is why it happened."

The coronor said the review board will interview witnesses, test equipment and reenact the accident at the lake.

It may be three weeks, however, before a report on the accident is prepared, York said.

MAY 1980
CALIFORNIA

A 56 year old volunteer sheriff's dive team member and experienced instructor drowned during a recovery mode operation in a local lake. The diver was utilizing a first stage regulator, which features an audible alarm that sounds when tank air pressure drops to approximately 500 psi. The alarm activates when the diver inhales and works with the primary 2nd stage, but not through the low pressure port containing the alternate/octopus second stage. On the first dive to 97 feet, the diver utilized a standard steel 72 cu. ft. tank. Fifteen minutes into the dive the alarm sounded and the diver surfaced with his buddy. On the second dive to the same depth, the diver utilized a 50 cu. ft. tank of his own rather than the 72s which were available. (He normally taught scuba classes wearing the 50 and felt more comfortable with it.) About eleven minutes into the second dive, the diver examined his pressure gauge and had slightly more than 600 psi. Not realizing that he was utilizing his octopus and anticipating that his audible alarm would sound, he continued searching. Approximately two minutes later he encountered some breathing resistance and signaled to his buddy his intent to ascend. He initiated an emergency swimming ascent by removing his mouthpiece and blowing bubbles as he started to ascend but failed to drop his weight belt. The buddy had his mask knocked ajar by the diver and lost contact during the ascent. During this time the line tender received a "4 pull" signal indicating to pull the diver up. The searchline became snagged and surface personnel were unable to pull the diver up. Initial rescue efforts were slow as the line tender was also the safety diver and was not prepared to immediately enter the water. It should also be noted that there was only 35 minute surface interval between the dives, thus making the second dive a decompression dive.

