

## Sergeant Alane M. Stoffregen

<http://www.odmp.org/officer/15399-sergeant-alane-m.-stoffregen>

Chicago Police Department

Illinois

End of Watch: Friday, June 2, 2000

### Biographical Info

Age: 50

Tour of Duty: 22 years

Badge Number: 1203



### Incident Details

**Cause of Death:** Drowned

**Date of Incident:** Friday, June 2, 2000

**Weapon Used:** Not available

**Suspect Info:** Not available



Sergeant Alane Stoffregen, a department scuba diver, was participating in a Marine Unit training exercise when an accident occurred and the sergeant died in the performance of duty. Sergeant Stoffregen and another officer were conducting deep water dives in Lake Michigan. The sergeant, who was considered a master diver, was pronounced dead at the scene.

Sergeant Stoffregen was a 22 year veteran of the Chicago Police Department.

## Police Diver Dies in Accident

<http://www.worldnews.com/?action=display&article=2214634&template=worldnews/search.txt&index=recent>

*The Associated Press, Fri 2 Jun 2000*

**CHICAGO (AP)** — A veteran police department diver died Friday after experiencing problems during a practice deep-water dive in Lake Michigan, police said.

Sgt. Alane Stoffregen, 50, a diver for the police marine division, reported trouble at around 12:30 p.m., police spokesman Pat Camden said. Her partner took her back to their boat about a mile from shore and began administering CPR, Camden said.

She died less than an hour later at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. The cause of death is being investigated, Camden said. Stoffregen was rated as a master diver and dove frequently on her own time, he said.

Stoffregen's partner, a 50-year-old man whose name was not released, was also taken to the hospital and was in good condition.

The incident was under investigation.

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On Friday, June 2 Sgt. Alane Stoffregen died and another police officer was injured in a training exercise in Lake Michigan, near the Jardine water purification plant.

Sgt. Stoffregen, who was pronounced dead at approximately 1320 Hrs. was a recent member of the departments dive team. The other officer was in good condition at Northwestern Hospital. No additional information was given about the incident.

## **Police diver is killed during deep-water training exercise**

<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/dive03.html>

*June 3, 2000* **BY FRAN SPIELMAN CITY HALL REPORTER**

A Chicago police sergeant recently assigned to the Marine Unit died Friday during a deep-water training exercise in Lake Michigan about a mile off Navy Pier.

Alane Stoffregen, 50, was newly assigned to the unit, but that may not have been a factor in her death since she held the title of master diver, officials said. "We have no idea what happened, but to assume it was an accident is premature," police spokesman Pat Camden said. "What if she had a heart attack or an embolism or aneurysm? We have to wait and find out what the medical examiner says."

Stoffregen had been on the force since February 1978 and was promoted to sergeant in June 1999. She was assigned to the Marine Unit about a month ago.

Another officer involved in the training exercise, also 50, was expected to be released Friday from Northwestern Memorial Hospital after being treated for exhaustion for trying to rescue the woman who died.

## **OFFICER'S DEATH IN DIVING EXERCISE PROBED**

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/metro/chicago/printedition/article/0,2669,SAV-0006040057,FF.html>

*June 4, 2000* **By Michael Higgins, Tribune Staff Writer. Tribune staff writer David Heinzmann contributed to this report.**

A Chicago police sergeant who died Friday in a scuba-diving exercise was new to the department's marine unit but was a longtime diving enthusiast who had earned certification as a master diver.

Police on Saturday continued to investigate the death of Alane N. Stoffregen, 50, during a training exercise in Lake Michigan about a mile offshore. Stoffregen and her partner, whom police would not identify Saturday, were diving in 30 to 35 feet of water. About 12:30 p.m., something went wrong. "She started experiencing some problems during the dive," said police spokesman Joseph Bourgoyne. "There's a lot of [information] we don't have."

The boat rushed both divers back to shore. Stoffregen died less than an hour later at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. Her partner also was taken to the hospital and was reported in good condition.

Marine unit officers would not comment on the incident Saturday. The Cook County medical examiner's office is conducting an autopsy, police said. Stoffregen grew up on Chicago's Southwest Side, graduating from Jones Commercial High School and St. Xavier University, said her sister-in-law, Debbie Stoffregen.

Alane Stoffregen joined the police force in 1978 and worked as a patrol officer, a 911 operator and a youth services officer, her sister-in-law said. Stoffregen received a fitness award, 47 honorable mentions and four complimentary letters from her superiors, police said. She became a sergeant in June 1999.

Stoffregen joined the marine unit about a year and a half ago but had to leave when she became a sergeant because the unit could have only so many officers at that rank, her sister-in-law said. Weeks ago, she was able to rejoin the unit. "She really wanted to be on the marine unit," Debbie Stoffregen said.

Master divers have completed two to three months of training, can dive in all depths of water and know how to perform underwater rescues, said Chuck Miller, president of the Illinois Council of Skin and Scuba Divers.

Equipment failures are relatively rare in diving, Miller said. He said divers sometimes suffer heart or other medical problems while exerting themselves. Stoffregen was a member of the Beverly Theatre Guild, sometimes dancing or acting in guild performances, her sister-in-law said. "You could always count on Alane if you ever needed anything done," Debbie Stoffregen said. "I'm sure that's why she got into the Police Department--community service, helping out."

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### **Full-honor burial now considered for officer**

<http://www.dailysouthtown.com/southtown/dsnews/053nd9.htm>

*June 5, 2000 By Kristen McQueary Staff Writer*

Chicago police officials said late Sunday the department may indeed bury an officer with full honors who died Friday in a diving exercise.

Family members of Sgt. Alane Stoffregen, 50, a 22-year department veteran, were upset after learning that Stoffregen's death was being classified as a performance-of-duty death, rather than a death in the line of duty.

A performance-of-duty death does not merit full honors by the department, which includes a special ceremony and the police department covering the cost of the burial.

But Chicago Police Department spokesman Matthew Jackson said police Supt. Terry Hillard may overrule the decision to bury Stoffregen without full honors. Her funeral is scheduled for Wednesday. "The superintendent has the right to override that decision," Jackson said. "It's being discussed. The department is looking into it. I'm almost certain (Hillard) will speak out on this."

A death in the line of duty occurs when an officer is killed by an act of violence committed by another person. If an officer dies in a nonviolent

situation, like a traffic accident or a heart attack on the job, the death is considered a performance of duty death, Jackson said.

Stoffregen died Friday afternoon during a training exercise about a mile east of Navy Pier in Lake Michigan. An experienced diver, Stoffregen started showing signs of distress after signaling she was coming to the surface, police officials said.

She was given CPR immediately and rushed to Northwestern Hospital where she was pronounced dead at 1:17 p.m.

She began her career with the department in 1978 and was promoted to sergeant in June last year. She was recently reassigned to the marine unit after requesting the transfer.

Police officials said it was highly unlikely she drowned, because of her experience in diving. Autopsy results are pending.

## **Hillard changes mind on diver's funeral**

<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/diver06.html>

*June 6, 2000* BY FRANK MAIN CRIME REPORTER

A Chicago police sergeant who died last week in a deep-water diving exercise in Lake Michigan will get a full-honors funeral, after all.

The family of Sgt. Alane Stoffregen had complained, along with a group that represents sergeants, after being notified over the weekend that she would not receive the high-profile send-off. The holdup, they were told, was that Stoffregen was not officially "killed in the line of duty," in an act of violence. That automatically accords an officer a full-honors funeral.

Stoffregen "died in the performance of duty," the result of a nonviolent incident. But police Supt. Terry Hillard said he would give her an honors funeral anyway. "There are no words or sentiments that make the loss of Sgt. Stoffregen any less painful," Hillard said Monday.

The 50-year-old officer died Friday afternoon about a mile off Navy Pier during a police marine unit exercise.

## **Police diver likely exhausted**

<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/dive15.html>

*August 15, 2000* BY FRANK MAIN STAFF REPORTER

Chicago police diver Alane Stoffregen drowned in Lake Michigan in June probably after becoming exhausted in a struggle to board a boat during a

training exercise, a pathologist in the Cook County medical examiner's office said Monday.

Dr. Scott Denton said the circumstances of Stoffregen's death raise questions about training procedures. But the Police Department said it would not comment until reviewing the medical examiner's report.

Stoffregen died June 2 during deep-water training about a mile off Navy Pier. The 50-year-old sergeant had joined the police Marine Unit about a month before her death and was listed as a master diver.

She came to the surface while her male diving partner was about 35 feet under water, Denton said, adding that another diver was waiting in a boat. "He did not know she was there until she yelled his name," Denton said. "She may have been struggling before he helped her."

Stoffregen's respirator was out of her mouth as she fought 2- to 3-foot-waves on the lake, but the diver in the boat was unable to pull her out of the water, Denton said.

Another boat arrived "several minutes later" to remove her, he said. Tests showed Stoffregen's equipment was working properly and that no drugs or alcohol were in her system, Denton said.

Dr. James Caruso of the U.S. Navy hospital in Pensacola, Fla., reviewed the case and agreed she accidentally drowned at the surface, probably because of exhaustion, Denton said. "I would think this would have some implications in the future for training," Denton said.

Dr. Peter Bennett, a Duke University professor and president of the Divers Alert Network, said divers over age 40 are most prone to surface drowning. "This is certainly something diving pathologists know about," he said. Bennett said a common cause of surface drowning is heart trouble triggered by the change in surface temperature on a diver's face. But any changes in Stoffregen's heart rhythm before she drowned were not detected in the autopsy, Denton said.

Bennett said one or two U.S. divers each year drown at the water's surface.

## **Police looking at Marine Unit after diver's death in June**

<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/div06.html>

*September 6, 2000* BY FRANK MAIN CRIME REPORTER

Police Supt. Terry Hillard is exploring whether more officers and equipment are needed for the department's Marine Unit after the death of a police diver this summer.

Sgt. Alane Stoffregen drowned June 2 about a mile off Navy Pier as she struggled to board a boat during a training exercise. "The superintendent is reassessing staffing and equipment for the Marine Unit" because of the accident, Tom Needham, Hillard's chief of staff, said Tuesday.

Her death raised questions about whether enough officers were in place to support Stoffregen and another diver in the water, officials said. An officer manning the boat was unable to pull her to safety.

Another boat took several minutes to come to the rescue, investigators found. The police Marine Unit, which patrols Lake Michigan and the Chicago River, has five boats, two of which are being repaired, and about 25 divers, Sgt. Robert Vanna said.

## **PANIC, FATIGUE CALLED FACTORS IN JUNE DEATH OF POLICE DIVER**

<http://www.chicago.tribune.com/version1/article/0,1575,SAV-0008160178,00.html>  
*August 16, 2000* By **Diana Strzalka** Tribune Staff Writer

Rough waters, exhaustion and panic contributed to the drowning earlier this summer of a 50-year-old diver with the Chicago Police Department's Marine Unit, according to the findings of the Cook County medical examiner's office and a U.S. Navy doctor.

The information was provided to the Chicago Police Department, which is reviewing the circumstances of the June 2 death of Sgt. Alane Stoffregen, who drowned during a diving exercise 1 mile off the Lake Michigan shoreline. Chicago police spokesman Pat Camden said Tuesday that proper procedures were followed, "but anytime there's a death in a training exercise, obviously, you need to look at the causes."

Dr. James Caruso, a pathologist with the U.S. Naval Hospital in Pensacola, Fla., studied the autopsy report and a police report and concluded that Stoffregen probably was exhausted as she tried to board a boat bouncing in 2 to 3 foot waves.

At the surface, she failed to follow a standard safety practice of keeping her oxygen regulator in her mouth, and she likely panicked as she tried to breathe while waves were beating at her face, he said. "She took a bit of a beating trying to get into the boat," Caruso said.

Serious scrapes and bruises on her head and neck were apparently caused from her body colliding with the boat, said a spokesman for the medical examiner's office. Her rescue was also delayed by a few minutes because the officer on the boat was unable to lift Stoffregen, who weighed almost 200 pounds, out of the lake until another boat was summoned to assist, he said.



Stoffregen was a master diver, and she met the swimming qualification to work with the Marine Unit, Camden said. Employees with the Police Department are not required to meet any height or weight standards, Camden said.

Stoffregen, a 22-year police force veteran, had joined the Marine Unit a month before her death, Camden said.

## **Family fights to have officer's star retired**

<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/star31.html>

January 31, 2001 BY FRANK MAIN STAFF REPORTER

Relatives of a Chicago police sergeant who drowned in a diving accident are urging Supt. Terry Hillard to retire her star--almost eight months after they successfully battled the department to give her a full honors funeral.

Her family hopes Hillard will place Sgt. Alane Stoffregen's star in a display case at headquarters at 35th and Michigan, even though department policy limits the honor to officers killed in shootings or other violent acts. "She was doing her job," said her brother, Ron Stoffregen, a Chicago firefighter. "What other recognition would we expect?"

The department did not put her star on display, because she died in the "performance of duty" and was not killed in the line of duty, said Sgt. Robert Cargie, a police spokesman. "This is not to diminish the importance of Sgt. Stoffregen's contribution to the department," Cargie said. "In fact, we extol that contribution."

The department originally denied Stoffregen an honors funeral on the same basis. But Hillard changed his mind after her family and a sergeants group complained.

Officers are killed in the line of duty when they die from an act of violence committed by another person, Cargie said. An officer dies in the performance of duty from a nonviolent cause such as a heart attack or car accident, he said.

Stoffregen, a 22-year police veteran, died June 2 in Lake Michigan during a training exercise for police divers about a mile off Navy Pier. She became exhausted while trying to board a boat and drowned, the Cook County medical examiner's office ruled.

Ron Stoffregen said the department contacted his family Friday and told them his sister's star would not be retired. Representatives of the Chicago Police Sergeants' Association said they met Monday with Hillard. "His argument was that Alane did not die at the hands of another," said Sgt. James McMullin, chairman of the association. "We are very upset."



McMullin said the superintendent should decide whether to retire a star on a case-by-case basis, instead of relying on a narrow definition. But Cargie said the definition is intended to avoid confusion.

Family members said they were particularly upset when they were invited to an Oct. 7 ceremony dedicating a new display case for retired stars. They were disappointed when Alane Stoffregen's star was not there, Ron Stoffregen said. "The invitation was in deference and respect" to Stoffregen's family, Cargie responded.