

06-14-2016 Honolulu HI – Clifford Rigsbee – FF Surf Rescue Training Accident

Honolulu Firefighter training exercise goes horribly wrong

<http://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/32221832/honolulu-firefighter-cliff-rigsbee-dies-following-training-accident>

Tuesday, June 14th **By HNN Staff By Chelsea Davis, Reporter**
HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) –

A veteran firefighter has died following a rough water training accident off Diamond Head.



Clifford Rigsbee (Photo: Honolulu Fire Department)

The Honolulu Fire Department says 63-year-old Clifford Rigsbee died on June 16th. On June 14th, Rigsbee and another firefighter were apparently training on Jet Skis in rough surf at about 10:45 a.m. when something went wrong and Rigsbee went unconscious.

In a news conference Wednesday, Honolulu Fire Chief Manuel Neves said that Rigsbee was on the Jet Ski's "sled" as an attendant when the two hit the big wave. That's when the operator looked back and noticed Rigsbee was unconscious in the water.

Rigsbee's friends were shocked to learn the veteran firefighter and accomplished athlete ran into trouble at the surf break known as "Suicides." They say Rigsbee is a nationally-ranked triathlete who is now a triathlon coach and a firefighter engineer.

"He was my primary trainer and coach and mentor. He had such a special place in my heart and with the people involved in the triathlon community and the athletic community," said Debbie Hornsby.

Rigsbee was a US National Master's Triathlon Champion. He represented the United States at the International Triathlon Union World Championship and set a record for his age group in Ironman Hawaii.

On top of being a world class athlete he was also a skilled firefighter. Before working at Station 7 in Waikiki he spent a portion of his 21 year career in the training bureau.

"He was so knowledgeable. He served in our medical branch helping teach all of the firefighters about medical techniques. His legacy will carry on for many years because of all the folks he mentored throughout the department and the skills and knowledge he bestowed upon all of us," said HFD Chief Manuel Neves.

The second firefighter involved in the crash was also from the Waikiki fire station.

"We have great concern for both of those involved," said Fire Capt. David Jenkins.

"There is an inherent danger in firefighting. Although, we do take all appropriate, necessary precautions to keep ourselves safe."

Witnesses said they spotted the firefighters struggling in the waves, but weren't sure what happened.

"One of the other surfers started paddling over cause the guy had his face down the water. He was looking kind of limp," said witness Drew Farwell.

"All of a sudden you see the helicopter coming around and all the fire trucks coming in so it looked heavy. Everyone in the line up right now kinda spooked," he said.

Firefighter dies of injuries from training exercise

<http://www.staradvertiser.com/2016/06/17/breaking-news/firefighter-dies-of-injuries-from-training-exercise/>

June 17, 2016 By Gregg K. Kakesako

A 63-year-old firefighter and Tinman Triathlon athlete died Thursday from injuries he sustained during a rescue watercraft training exercise earlier this week near Diamond Head.

Firefighter Clifford Rigsbee, who was a 21-year veteran with the Honolulu Fire Department, was on a sled being towed by a watercraft operated by another member of Engine Company 7 around 10:45 a.m. Tuesday. The rescue watercraft training exercise was being conducted at the surf break known as "Suicides."

The cause of the accident is under investigation, according to Fire Chief Manuel Neves.

Neves said the operator of the personal watercraft looked back and saw Rigsbee floating unconscious in the ocean.

He was rescued and brought to shore by fellow firefighters, including an off-duty fire fighter. The operator of the watercraft also was treated at a hospital and released.

Rigsbee was treated by firefighters, Ocean Safety personnel and paramedics and then taken to Straub Medical Center in critical condition where he died late Thursday night.

Rigsbee joined the fire department in July 1995 and was promoted to Fire Fighter 3 in October 2004.

"Cliff was also a well-known and nationally-ranked triathlete who had won several Tinman Triathlon competitions," Neves said.

While off duty in October 2012, he rescued an injured hiker on the Koko Crater Trail and carried her down from the top of the trail to waiting fire rescue personnel and paramedics, Neves said. Rigsbee received an HFD Certificate of Commendation for his actions.

Funeral services are pending.

Firefighter dies from injuries sustained during rescue training

<http://khon2.com/2016/06/17/firefighter-dies-in-the-line-of-duty-from-injuries-sustained-during-training/>

June 17, 2016 By Web Staff

A firefighter who was hospitalized in critical condition after a rescue exercise off Diamond Head Tuesday has died.

The Honolulu Fire Department confirmed Clifford Rigsbee, 63, died from his injuries Thursday night.

The department says Rigsbee lost his life in the line of duty from injuries sustained during rescue watercraft training near the surf spot known as "Suicides."

Rigsbee was a 21-year veteran of the department and was stationed in Waikiki.

HFD says his family, who flew in from the mainland, is having an extremely difficult time and ask that the public respect their privacy.

Fire Chief Manuel P. Neves said the death of Rigsbee deeply impacts the department. "He was in our training bureau for a very long time, trained many of our folks, even participating in our recruitment for new firefighters. He set up a program for wellness and fitness for aspiring women that be part of our fire department.

"I've known Cliff Rigsby for almost 21 years, and for the entire time that he's been in the department, I was totally surprised that he was 63 years old. He has the physique and the mentality and energy of someone that's half that age."

Neves said an internal department investigation has already started.

"Maybe more training is needed, but for right now our training is very solid," he said. "We're one of the few departments that are accredited in the nation and also in the world."

In addition to being a veteran firefighter, Rigsbee was known to many as an elite triathlete and coach.

Like Rigsbee, Raul Boca is an elite triathlete who also completed more than a dozen Ironman races, as well as numerous Tinman Triathlon races.

He says Rigsbee is probably the best Hawaii triathlete ever, who in many ways helped put local triathlons on the map here in Hawaii.

"Cliff was very important for my decision of staying in Hawaii as a friend as a competitor in the training partner," he said. "I appreciate his style. He was very passionate and free-spirited and enjoyed doing triathlons, so it was fun to train with him."

Memorial plans are pending.

Honolulu firefighter Cliff Rigsbee dies following training accident

<http://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/32247662/honolulu-firefighter-cliff-rigsbee-dies-following-training-accident>

June 17th 2016 By HNN Staff

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) –

A veteran firefighter has died following a rough water training accident off Diamond Head.

Honolulu Firefighter training exercise goes horribly wrong

The Honolulu Fire Department says 63-year-old Clifford Rigsbee died on June 16th.

On Tuesday, Rigsbee and another firefighter were apparently training on Jet Skis in rough surf at about 10:45 a.m.

Honolulu Fire Chief Manuel Neves said that Rigsbee was on the Jet Ski's "sled" as an attendant. That's when the operator looked back and noticed Rigsbee was unconscious in the water.

An off-duty firefighter who was nearby helped to bring the two firefighters to shore.

Paramedics treated Rigsbee and transported him to Straub Hospital in critical condition.

The two worked at the Waikiki fire station.

Rigsbee joined the Honolulu Fire Department in 1995 and was promoted to Firefighter III in 2004. He was also a well-known and nationally-ranked triathlete who won several Tinman Triathlon competitions.

Funeral arrangements have not yet been finalized.



Mayor wants review of HFD safety, training in wake of rescue-related accidents

<http://khon2.com/2016/10/06/mayor-wants-review-of-hfd-safety-training-in-wake-of-rescue-related-accidents/>

October 6, 2016 **By Gina Mangieri**

Honolulu's mayor is calling on the Honolulu Fire Commission to ask for a review of the fire department's training and safety procedures in the wake of two accidents in the past few months.

Mayor Kirk Caldwell's request comes a day after video surfaced of a firefighter falling from a helicopter rescue net, an accident that left him with serious injuries.

That accident, and the death of a firefighter during a rescue watercraft training in June, have sparked allegations that the fire department isn't doing enough to address safety concerns for firefighters.

Always Investigating spoke with all sides of an increasingly public dispute between the firefighters union and the Honolulu Fire Department.

The Hawaii Fire Fighters Association union tells us management is putting firefighters in even more harm's way than the job usually entail, while others say it's a nationally accredited department with high expectations that is trying to do the best for all workers and the public.

Witness video revealed just how serious the firefighter's fall was during a Diamond Head rescue on Sept. 2.

"Gina, the video you showed is very troubling for me," Caldwell said. "The good news is the firefighter is out of the hospital and recovering, but I do think more needs to be done."

The mayor said he wants the fire commission to get involved.

"They need to ask that the fire department review their training procedures, their safety procedures, make sure everything is updated, and everything is being done that should be done," Caldwell said.

The mayor also wants to make sure answers are thorough, and that lessons are learned.

"The fire commission should make sure there's a thorough investigation of the incident, maybe internally or an outside entity, and see what comes out of that," Caldwell said.

Witness video given to Always Investigating has us asking even more questions of HFD Chief Manuel Neves.

"A lot of those detailed questions are going to be covered in the investigation and we don't want to jeopardize the investigation or anything else by speaking out of turn," HFD spokesman Capt. David Jenkins told us, referring to a National Transportation Safety Board review of the helicopter accident.

Always Investigating asked, as to the topic of safety in general, when will we get answers and assurances from the chief on how the workforce, and those they're rescuing, are being kept safe?

"We have a news conference scheduled for tomorrow (Friday) afternoon," Jenkins said. "We're bringing in some subject matter experts within the department so we can answer all questions and address all issues of that nature, which is so important."

The HFFA union says it's still waiting for answers in the death of firefighter Cliff Rigsbee in June after an injury during rough-water rescue training. The fire

department and Hawaii Department of Labor and Industrial Relations tell me their investigations have not been completed.

Meanwhile, the union says training continues with no changes.

"We know what injuries he had that killed him," HFFA president Bobby Lee said. "We don't know how he sustained the injuries. We could actually have a guy die again tomorrow because we don't know how Cliff Rigsbee actually sustained those injuries."

But what they've gleaned so far worries many workers.

"There were others who sustained the same type of injuries over the past few years that was bad enough to take them out of work, but not bad enough to kill them," Lee said.

The chief did address training at an annual award event hosted by the 200 Club, a group that supports the fire department. Neves talked about all 1,100 firefighters finishing a ground survival program.

"We did that in 2015," Neves said. "We took it up a notch in 2016."

This year's major program focused on something called rapid intervention training. "If you hear over the radio, or a call for help that someone else is needing help or another fire company is in trouble, you have the techniques and skills now to respond and to save that other crew," Neves said.

But before the first session could get underway, the union tried to block it at the Hawaii Labor Relations Board over lack of consultation. Lee says they had safety concerns because it was such a physical program and everyone from drivers to captains to non-rescue staff would have to do it.

The labor board found in favor of the employer, but the department still compromised and said people could opt to observe if they felt it could be too strenuous.

"We had some guys that went through and still got hurt, and others who said, 'No, I'm not going to do these particular exercises,'" Lee said. He says there were a lot of strains, sprains, and muscle injuries, and even a staff member who was out of work for a time over claustrophobia from the intense rescue scenarios.

The union is appealing the labor board decision in court.

That case is just one in a string of board matters the union has brought since this chief came aboard in 2013, four of which the union has later withdrawn. The rapid intervention training case was decided in the city employer department's favor, and cases from 2014 and 2015 are still pending.

"Whatever allegations they have, they need to stop," said Honolulu Fire Commission member MaryJean Castillo. "For me, the taxpayers are also paying for all these lawsuits. We're wasting the city's money answering all these allegations."

"The real problem is our fire chief is so focused right now on fighting us, fighting the union, that whenever we bring up an issue, the answer is no," Lee said. "He's going to go the opposite way. It doesn't matter if it's right or wrong."

Always Investigating asked Lee, couldn't the same be said of the union, that it wants to fight the chief as well?

"No, we're defending what we have," Lee said, "because he makes the kind of decisions to take away stuff from us, not recognize us, or not recognize what the purpose of the union is."

"Something has to give," Castillo said. "There are two sides of a story all the time, and if one keeps throwing punches, what would happen to the other person? The department, I think, is beat up to the max to the point that it affects the morale in the fire department."