


08-16-1970 Florida – W.D Sims – VOL SAR – Recovery DEEP Trapped**Wythe Davis Sims**

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00073793/00190/6?search=orlando+otters+scuba+club>



IN MEMORIAM
Wythe Davis Sims, II

The profession in Florida will mourn the loss of its colleague, Wythe Davis Sims, II, AIA, who drowned on Sunday, August 16, 1970 while probing the depths of a sinkhole for the body of another diver. Wythe was a member of the Orlando Otters Scuba Club.

Wythe Davis Sims, II for many years faithfully served his profession on a local and state basis. He served as President of the Mid-Florida AIA Chapter and was currently serving on the Board of Directors of the FAAIA. He was the current President of the Construction Specifications Institute (CSI) Orlando Chapter.

His memory will be with us. Our deepest sympathy to his family.

W.D Sims

http://www.thediversassociation.com/index.php?/incidents/&sortby=col_1&sortdirection=desc&page=1

W.D Sims aged 44, Rescue diver looking for the body of 16 year old sports diver Fred Schmitz (Apparently blacked out and then disappeared into the depths) who was diving with 31 year old Hal Watts (Who suffered a DCI and was treated in a DDC for 5 hours at Cape Kennedy during the SAR operation), both were members of the Orlando Otters SCUBA Club diving in a 400' deep sinkhole looking for equipment lost on earlier dives.

Speculated that the rescue diver, Sims, suffered from nitrogen narcosis, got entangled in safety ropes, ran out of air and drowned.

Rescue operations were then called off pending the use of deep diving equipment. Unclear if this was a 'professional' or amateur rescue attempt.

St. Petersburg Times

Search Continues For Scuba Diver, Navy Flying In Deep-Diving Gear

The search continued late Thursday night for the body of a 16-year-old scuba diver who drowned in at least 350 feet of water in a sinkhole off Fairbanks Avenue Thursday afternoon while seeking lost life vests.

The victim was identified as Fred Schmitz, member of a scuba diving club and one of four persons in the Orlando area qualified for diving at the 350-foot level.

Authorities said Schmitz was diving in the sinkhole known as Emerald Springs at 850 W. Fairbanks Avenue. The hole is said to be 500 feet deep.

SGT. GEORGE Barge of the Orange County Sheriff's Department said the Navy will send a "Heli-Ox" diving unit to help recover the body. The team and equipment will be flown from Charleston, S. C., today.

The equipment mixes helium and oxygen, enabling divers to go as deep as 600 feet for as long as an hour.

In addition, the sheriff's office was calling throughout Central Florida late Thursday night trying to locate deep diving equipment to continue the search.

Barge said Schmitz apparently blacked out as he and Hal Watts, who leased the sinkhole for scuba diving training and who also operates a diving gear store, became entangled in guide lines.

THE TWO DIVERS were at about the 150-foot level and coming up when they became entangled in the lines, Barge said.

Watts said they cut themselves loose but when he looked back he did not see Schmitz. He said he saw a light Schmitz had been carrying sinking to the bottom.

The diver said he swam toward the light but was unable to reach it before it went out at about the 300-foot level.

Watts said he blacked out momentarily from the pressure at

that depth but managed to make it to the surface.

BILL THOMPSON and Wythe Sims, specially trained to dive at great depths, attempted to locate the body at 375 feet but were forced to surface after 40 seconds because of the pressure.

Sims said the visibility is "fair" at the 200-foot level but the sinkhole is bell-bottomed. He estimated that nearer the sides of the hole the depths could reach 500 feet.

A needle on Sims' depth indicator was jammed at the 350-foot reading, the deepest depth recorded on the instrument.

Barge said dredging operations would be impossible because of the size of the hole, which is about 75 feet in diameter. Schmitz' depressurized body, weighted down with diving belts and tanks, will not surface, he said.

THE WATER level in the sinkhole is below the water table, Barge said. Several visible springs around the steep 100-foot embankment above the water level trickle into the hole.

The property is owned by William Cornett and is popularly known by divers as "Mystery Sinkhole."

Watts, 34, holds the record of 380 feet for diving in scuba gear with compressed air. It was set in 1967 in the Atlantic Ocean.

Suspended Jane Asks Trial Delay

The attorney for suspended Seminole Constable Bob Jane Thursday asked for a continuance of Jane's Sept. 14 trial in circuit court at Sanford on a perjury charge.

James C. Dauksch Jr. claimed the defense would be unable to prepare for trial by that date and said he has 10 other cases scheduled for trial that week.

The 33-year-old Jane was indicted by the Seminole County grand jury on charges of perjury, assault and battery, and two counts of falsifying public records.

CIRCUIT COURT Judge William Akridge granted a state motion shifting all but the perjury charge to Seminole County Court for trial.

Jane allegedly beat Joseph J. Surprenant, 67-year-old retired South Seminole engineer, Dec. 26, 1969, and then arrested him on a public drunk charge.

The suspended constable is charged with falsifying reports to say Surprenant was arrested at Regency Square, in Casselberry, when the alleged incident took place in the district of another constable.

Jane pleaded innocent to the charges when arraigned Monday.

Missing Boy Found Unharmed

Roy Alex Sandage, 10, object of a widespread search in the Union Park area after he disappeared from home at 6 p.m. Wednesday, was located at 2:35 a.m. Thursday and returned to his parents.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Roy



https://www.newspapers.com/clip/18072221/sinkhole_closed_for_diving_1_of_2/

Sinkhole Remains Mystery

By ANDY WILLIAMS
Staff Writer

"It's not a sinkhole, it's a lake."

"More correctly, it's a limestone sink," said Mrs. William Cornett, owner of the deep body of water at 850 W. Fairbanks Ave. that claimed the lives of two scuba divers.

IT'S CLOSED now for all diving — a deep pool of water that has become a grave for the unrecovered bodies of the two divers.

But that doesn't keep away the "vultures," as Mrs. Cornett's husband refers to them.

These are the curious sightseers, who have no interest in swimming or scuba diving, but who want to see the place that claimed two lives.

THEY HAVE climbed the fence around the lake, called Emerald Springs, and they haven't asked permission, said Mrs. Cornett.

"The problem we have had with the public is almost unbelievable," she said.

"You would be surprised how many people will go over the fence, even with a locked gate," she said.

AUG. 13, 16-year-old Fred Schmidt of Orlando drowned while scuba diving in the lake with Hal Watts, owner of Hal Watts Diving Supply, 1300 N. Mills St., who leased the right to use the water for deep diving instruction.

Three days later, Bud Sims, 43, 1731 Winchester Drive, Winter Park, drowned during the ex-

tensive search for Schmidt's body.

At the same time, Watts, 35, suffered the bends while trying to save Sims and nearly died himself. He was rushed to Kennedy Space Center hospital and placed in a recompression chamber. From there, Watts went to Orange Memorial Hospital. He is now at home, recuperating.

managed to stop near the surface, although he was already suffering from the bends. Watts had to stay under water for some time until an ambulance was summoned and arrangements made to get Watts to a recompression chamber.

BARGE SAID Sims was already dead before he hit the boat, by ascending too fast and not letting the pressure inside him be equalized.

Schmidt also became entangled in lines, and Watts turned back to help him when Schmidt went to the bottom. Watts reported seeing only Schmidt's light as it sank. He could not find Schmidt.

HOW DEEP the lake is, is anyone's guess.

Mrs. Cornett said the lake was studied by the U. S. Department of Interior Geological Survey team in 1950 and in 1966 by the U. S. Navy sonar research department.

Both groups reached similar conclusions: They could only estimate the maximum depth at over 500 feet. The minimum depth, she said, is 330 feet.

(SINKHOLE—Continued
On Page 2A)



Pollution Hits Peak

MADRID (UPI) This city's "Fountain of Health," hailed for its curative powers for generations, was declared polluted today by the city government.

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