

12-22-2003 Bandon OR – Russell Simpson – Surf Rescue Attempt



OFFICER DOWN MEMORIAL PAGE



REMEMBERING ALL OF LAW ENFORCEMENT'S HEROES

<http://www.odmp.org/officer/reflections/17069-reserve-officer-russell-hayden-simpson/75>

		<p>Reserve Officer Russell Hayden Simpson Bandon Police Department, Oregon End of Watch: Monday, December 22, 2003</p>
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Bio & Incident Details

Age: 51
Tour: 4 years
Badge # 725
Cause: Drowned

Reserve Officer Russell Simpson drowned while attempting to rescue a teenage boy who had been swept into the ocean while walking his dog along the beach.

The officer had responded to the scene and was part of a rope-chain of people attempting to reach the boy. Reserve Officer Simpson was also pulled under by the strong current and swept into the ocean. The boy was rescue a short time later by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Reserve Officer Simpson had served with the Bandon Police Department as a Code Enforcement Officer and a Reserve Officer for 4 years. He was a retired firefighter from the Los Angeles County, California, Fire Department. He is survived by his wife, mother, and brother, who is also an officer with the Bandon Police Department.

Officer lost, boy saved in ocean rescue effort

http://theworldlink.com/news/local/officer-lost-boy-saved-in-ocean-rescue-effort/article_04a7f630-3978-5533-b5de-4bb22713c731.html

Dec 23, 2003 By Mary Schamehorn, For The World



Steven and Dee Leaf and their 20-year-old son, foreground, are still in shock moments after their 13-year-old son, Zebedee, was plucked from the ocean by a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter, at right. Bandon Police Department reserve officer Russ Simpson, 51, died while trying to save the boy. In the background, rescuers work on the scene. World Photo by Mary Schamehorn

BANDON - A Bandon Police Department reserve officer drowned Monday morning as he and other rescuers tried to reach a 13-year-old boy who had been swept out to sea near the South Jetty beach.

Officer Russell "Russ" Simpson, 51, was pronounced dead after he was pulled from the surf and emergency medical technicians were unable to revive him.

Simpson was swept under while assisting Police Chief Bob McBride and Bandon Firefighter Roger Cram, after the men had waded into the pounding surf in an attempt to save Zebedee Leaf. A U.S. Coast Guard helicopter crew later rescued the boy, who was visiting from the Seattle area.

A Coos County Sheriff's Office dispatcher received a call for help shortly before 9:30 a.m. and called out Bandon's cold water rescue team. McBride and Simpson reportedly responded to the scene, and Cram - who had donned a wet suit - also arrived on the beach to assist.

"There were even a couple of citizens who tried to help," said one firefighter. Former reserve officer Jim McDowell said McBride, Cram and Simpson were tied together with a long rope, while others held onto the line.

"A big wave hit Roger and knocked him over, and when that happened it pulled Russ in, too," McDowell said. Simpson was found a short time later entangled in the ropes and being tossed by the waves.

"It was insane out there. Just pure chaos," McDowell said. "It was a monster surf." The waves were pounding the beach with unusual force, throwing logs around like twigs, and on several occasions onlookers said they could not see the men as huge waves sucked them under. Monday morning's high tide was one of the highest of the year reaching 8.7 feet at 10 a.m.

Leaf, his parents, Steven and Dee, and an older brother had arrived in Bandon the previous night from their home in Maple Valley, Wash., a small community outside of Seattle. They were vacationing at a home on Sixth Street at the beach, just south of the jetty.

The boy's father said Zebedee had taken the family dog for a walk on the beach. Zebedee's 20-year-old brother said he did not see what happened, but heard his brother's cries for help, and found that he had been washed out to sea.

While rescuers tried to reach the boy from shore, a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter hovered above Leaf as he clung to a log about 100 yards offshore. The crew dropped a basket and he was able to scramble aboard and was lifted to safety, according to Coast Guard spokesman Kevin St. Pierre, at the Group North Bend Air Station.

St. Pierre said the helicopter, on routine patrol along the coastline, was only five minutes away when the dispatch came in at 9:44 a.m. The boy was estimated to have been in the water for 15 minutes before the helicopter crew got to him. "He apparently did not hesitate to get into the basket," St. Pierre added.

The chopper landed at the Bandon State Airport where it was met by Bay Cities Ambulance, which took Leaf to Southern Coos Hospital and Health Center in Bandon.

Chief McBride and Cram also were taken to the hospital and remained there under observation Monday afternoon. They were treated for mild hypothermia and released.

Simpson was the city of Bandon's code enforcement officer and a reserve police officer. He and his wife moved to Bandon in 1997 after he retired from the Los Angeles Fire Department. He took the job as the city's code enforcement officer in 1999.

Simpson is survived by his wife, Gale; his mother, Joyce Simpson; and his brother, Bandon Police Officer Forrest Simpson.

The Bandon Police Department has a police chief, five full-time sworn officers and a contingent of reserve officers. The Coos County Sheriff's Office volunteered to cover for the police department for at least 24 hours, and firefighters from the North Bend Fire Department brought a truck to Bandon to stand by as police officers and firefighters tried to cope with the loss of one of their own.

"How much can our department take?" lamented Officer Larry Lynch. He was referring to the recent death of Sgt. Carl Nayaert and the troubles plaguing the chief who may face decertification after being found guilty of several misdemeanor game violations.

Bandon man remembered as a hero

http://theworldlink.com/news/local/bandon-man-remembered-as-a-hero/article_0b22f77f-7674-5ac6-b16c-6511d54fd5a0.html

Dec 24, 2003

BANDON (AP) - At high tide, 13-year-old Zeb Leaf was throwing sticks for his golden retriever along a scenic stretch of beach, when a giant breaker roared up and crashed down on the dog.

The boy didn't think twice about running in after his dog, even as the waves tackled him.

Nor did Russell Simpson, 51, a Bandon police officer and volunteer firefighter, who drowned in the raging shallows Monday, trying to save the Maple Valley, Wash., boy.

"I want to make sure he's remembered as a hero," said Bandon Police Chief Bob McBride, who was with Simpson when the officer dove in. "By God, that's what he was."

Monday morning began like Mondays often do here. McBride and Simpson drove to the post office to pick up the mail.

Meanwhile, Zeb Leaf was throwing sticks for his dog, Osa.

He went under wearing thick rubber boots, a leather jacket and blue jeans. "The undertow took me right out," Zeb said Tuesday.

Just as McBride and Simpson left the post office, Simpson's pager went off. Leaf's mother had called 911. McBride flipped on the lights and the pair raced down to the beach.

They were the first emergency officials to arrive. The boy was just past the breakers, bobbing up and down in the water. The chief quickly donned his wet suit and tried to rush in after Leaf.

But the waves were big. So Simpson clipped a rope to the chief and served as anchor.

This time, McBride swam past the first round of waves, but he was nowhere near the boy.

"The only time I could see anything is if I rolled back, and looked up at the sky," McBride said. "It was impossible to swim out there."

A Coast Guard helicopter was minutes away when the dispatch call went out. By the time McBride made it past the breakers, Leaf was already climbing into a basket dropped to him from the air.

Leaf survived, and so did the dog, who swam back to shore.

But at the beach, Simpson and another helper were struggling to hang onto McBride's line. Then another giant wave knocked the men off their feet. Simpson was yanked out to sea.

As other rescuers grabbed the line and pulled in McBride, Simpson was drowning in the breakers. Rescuers pulled him out and performed first aid. The officer was pronounced dead at Southern Coos Hospital and Health Center shortly thereafter.

On Tuesday, Forrest Simpson, the officer's brother recalled a man who dreamed of being a firefighter since junior high school and who saved his first life before that, even.

One summer overseas, the two brothers were playing in the ocean, when Forrest walked into a hole and sank into the water. "Russ reached down and pulled me out," he said.

Russell Hayden Simpson

http://theworldlink.com/news/local/obituaries/russell-hayden-simpson/article_cb22c1df-dc05-5e0a-8014-f1ff036763a1.html

Dec 26, 2003

Oct. 1, 1952 - Dec. 22, 2003

A memorial service for Russell Hayden Simpson, 51, of Bandon, will be held at 2 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 27, at the Bandon High School Gymnasium. Burial will be at Bandon Pioneer Cemetery.

He was born Oct. 1, 1952, in Aberdeen, Md. He died in the line of duty on Dec. 22, 2003, in Bandon.

During his early childhood, he lived in England, while his father served in the military. Later, Russell served in the U.S. Army and moved to California following his service. There he began working as a firefighter and served 25 years in Del Mar and 15 years in San Marcos, before moving to Bandon six years ago. Russell worked as a code compliance officer as a reserve officer for the Bandon Police Department and as a volunteer for the Bandon Fire Department.

He was an avid bass fisherman and a lifetime member of the Bass Club.

He is survived by his wife, Gale Simpson; mother, Joyce Simpson; brother, Forrest Simpson; and special Rottweilers, Ivan and R.J.

The family suggests memorial contributions to the Bandon Fire Department, in care of Amling/Schroeder Funeral Service, P.O. Box 363, Bandon, OR 97411.

Arrangements are under the direction of Amling/Schroeder Funeral Service, Bandon Chapel, 347-2907.

Memorial honors drowned officer

http://theworldlink.com/news/local/memorial-honors-drowned-officer/article_20d0a24c-8e18-5a7c-a5fa-ac01d6fbdf66.html

Dec 29, 2003 Mary Schamehorn, For The World



A photograph of Bandon Reserve Police Officer Russell Simpson, along with a bouquet of flowers and programs at the memorial service, graced a table at the VFW Hall, at a reception following Simpson's memorial service. World Photo by Mary Schamehorn

BANDON - Hundreds of firefighters, police officers, family members and friends braved a fierce rainstorm Saturday afternoon to pay their final respects to Russell "Russ" Simpson. The 51-year-old Bandon Police Department reserve officer and volunteer firefighter died Dec. 22 trying to rescue a 13-year-old Washington boy who had been swept into the surf at the South Jetty.

Fire and police departments from two states were represented at Simpson's memorial service held in the Bandon High School gym.

Retired Bandon Police Reserve Steve Casey opened the solemn ceremony. "We've come to pay our respects to someone Mayor (Joe) Whitsett correctly called a bona-fide hero. Russ Simpson died a hero, but it should come as no surprise, because he lived (as) a hero," Casey said.

"Russell's life was one of service to his community - often placing himself in peril to assist others."

Casey asked the audience members to look around at the service where they would see other heroes ... "members of police and fire agencies from throughout Oregon and beyond - all here out of respect for a fallen comrade."

Five speakers, each of whom knew and loved Simpson in their own way, described him as a caring and compassionate man who was always there when someone needed him.

Bandon Fire Chief Lanny Boston was the first to speak, but overcome with grief, he had a difficult time delivering his remarks. Recalling something that Russ Simpson's

brother, Forrest, said, Boston told the audience that Russ had saved Forrest's life when he was 10 years old, and he'd gone on saving people.

"On the day Russ died, he wasn't wearing a police hat; he wasn't wearing a fire hat; he was wearing the Russell hat," Boston said, too choked up to continue.

Firefighter Anthony Zunino read "The Fireman's Prayer," followed by remarks from Bandon Police Chief Bob McBride.

"He was caring and compassionate, and always wanted to do the right thing," said McBride, who along with firefighter Roger Cram, risked his life with Simpson in the rescue attempt.

"He had a lot of empathy for people, and was always there when an emergency arose," McBride said. "Russell Simpson, you are a true hero."

Mayor Whitsett said Simpson gave his life exemplifying the values of service to others, a sense of duty, honor and commitment. Whitsett later presented Simpson's widow, Gale, with an Oregon flag that flew over the Capitol building in honor of her husband.

Prior to moving to Bandon in 1997, Simpson worked for the Del Mar, Calif., Fire Department. Del Mar Captain Jim Bingham, who also was at Saturday's ceremony, described Simpson as one of the kindest and most gentle people he had ever met.

"He touched a lot of lives," said Bingham.

Federal Judge Joe Schloss of Portland, who also worked with Simpson when he volunteered at the city of San Marcos (Calif.) Fire Department for 18 years, described the fallen officer as always going the extra mile.

"If you ever had a friend you could count on and trust, it was Russ," Schloss said. "With his gentle manners and genuine ways, he was our friend, our partner, our fishing buddy, our teacher ... and now our hero."

A private graveside service for local police and fire personnel and family members followed at the Pioneer Cemetery. Simpson was laid to rest next to his late father, Herbert, in a burial plot overlooking the Coquille River. Bagpipers from the "Guns & Hoses" band, made up of people from the Portland Police Bureau and the Tualatin Valley Fire Department, performed during the service.

Also present were members of the Oregon Public Safety Honor Guard, who escorted the family from the service.

A motorcade of police cars, fire trucks and ambulances made its way slowly through Bandon Saturday afternoon, following a memorial service for Russell Simpson, 51. He died on Dec. 22 while trying to save a 13-year-old boy from drowning off the South Jetty.

http://theworldlink.com/news/local/a-motorcade-of-police-cars-fire-trucks-and-ambulances-made/article_b3a9632d-277a-5295-9f8f-2ee6ee7901cf.html

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