

02-26-1976 Grey River New Zealand – Alan Robert Liddell – LEO – Investigation Swim



Constable Alan Robert Liddell

<http://www.police.govt.nz/constable-alan-robert-liddell>

Constable v

Died: 26th February 1976
Greymouth

Drowned in the Grey River helping to recreate a crime scene.

New Zealand Police Museum

<https://www.facebook.com/NewZealandPoliceMuseum/photos/a.541792835850954.104671362.540803395949898/1128664747163757/?type=3&theater>

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Today we remember our colleague Constable Alan Liddell on the 40th anniversary of his tragic death while performing his duty. Our thoughts are with his family, friends and work mates.

Name & rank: Constable Alan Robert LIDDELL

Police number: 5073P

Born: c.1954

Years in New Zealand Police: 13 months

Died: Drowned on duty 26 February 1976

Age: 22

Alan's story:



A West Coast boy, Alan came from a well known and respected family of Atarau near Greymouth. He went to a Christchurch boarding school for his secondary education. His outgoing personality and sense of humour quickly earned him popularity and respect amongst his police colleagues and the general public alike, and it soon became apparent that his energy and enthusiasm for the practical aspects of police work were boundless. In the ten months he had spent at Greymouth after graduation from Trentham, Alan had made friends with everyone. He was known for his wit, diligence and willingness to help. He was described universally as 'a top bloke'.

He was a senior grade rugby player of some note and a member of the Blaketown Rugby Football Club. He took an interest in Police Association matters and was a member of the Grey District Committee.

On the night of 8 February 1976 Alan had volunteered to drive Ronald Bailey and his four children to Christchurch after Mrs Bailey drowned at the Grey River at Kiwi Point. Alan returned to Greymouth the following day, to him just another job out of the way.

Within days of that trip to Christchurch a full-scale inquiry into the circumstances of Mrs Bailey's death was under way and on 26 February Alan Liddell was to become involved with the Bailey's in a way that would lead to his own death. It was decided that a series of tests were to be carried out in the Grey River to determine just how the woman met her death. The tests were to be based on the statements made by Ron Bailey. Constable Sue Walker, a strong swimmer with lifesaving experience and who was about the same build as Mrs Bailey was to be the main player in the re-enactment. Alan Liddell was nominated to play the part of Ron Bailey in the tests. He readily agreed and at the same time confirmed that he could swim quite well.

The tests started about 18:00. Sue Walker entered the water from the point Mr Bailey had indicated his wife had fallen into the river and Alan waded out and dragged her ashore. This test was carried out successfully twice. The officers were asked to re-enact the event slightly differently a third time, with Sue Walker moving further out into the river before being brought ashore. Both Alan and Sue agreed.

Tragically, the current carried them both down-stream and towards the opposite bank and Alan got into difficulty. Two of the Police party on shore quickly leapt in the water to assist Sue who was struggling to get Alan to shore but the current was quickly taking them away. Alan went under the water several times and swallowed a considerable amount of water and Sue was rapidly becoming exhausted. She decided to let him go while she removed her trousers as they were hampering her movements. Alan drifted away and Sue was unable to get to him again. Another party member continued to try and reach Alan but as Sue struggled to catch her breathe she heard the would-be rescuer call out "He's gone! He's gone under!"

A search by jet-boat until nightfall and along the shore failed to find any sign of him. For the next two days the banks and the bed of the Grey River was scoured, the searchers making use of jet-boats and local divers. Eventually Constable Alan Liddell's body was found not far from where he was last seen.

An inquest later found that Alan had died by drowning. No blame was attached to any of those involved. Constable Walker's actions were carried out with total disregard to her own safety in endeavouring to keep Constable Liddell afloat until she could get him to the bank.

Alan was survived by his mother, father, two brothers and a sister.