

08-04-1986 Washington DC -Kevin Joseph Welsh - LEO Bridge Suicide Rescue Attempt



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Age: 34

Rank: Police Officer
Years of Service: 7

Cause: Drowning

JOSEPH WELSH

Department: Metropolitan, Washington D.C., P.D.

End of Watch: August 4, 1986

Description: Officer Welsh drowned while attempting to rescue a woman who had jumped off of a bridge in a suicide attempt.

A highly decorated police officer drowned Monday in the...

<https://www.upi.com/Archives/1986/08/04/A-highly-decorated-police-officer-drowned-Monday-in-the/4785523512000/>

By GREG HENDERSON | Aug. 4, 1986

WASHINGTON -- A highly decorated police officer drowned Monday in the Anacostia River during an attempt to save a woman mental patient who leaped off the 11th Street Bridge and fell nearly 45 feet into the murky river.

The unidentified woman from St. Elizabeth's Hospital, described only as being in her 60s, plunged into the river, but was rescued and taken by helicopter to the Washington Hospital Center shock trauma unit.

She was in critical condition late Monday, a hospital spokesman said.

The body of Officer Kevin Welsh, 34, a recipient of a number of police medals for bravery and assigned to the city's elite Special Operations Division, was located at about 7:30 p.m. The body was to be taken to the D.C. Medical Examiner's office for an autopsy, police said.

'He took off his service revolver, his bullet-proof vest. He dove in the water,' said Police Chief Maurice Turner. 'He was the first one to attempt to save the lady.'

Officer Jerome Fremeau, 35, Welsh's partner, was rescued from the water, treated at D.C. General Hospital and released, police said. A total of eight city, U.S. Park Police officers and D.C. Fire Department paramedics went in the river after the woman.

Welsh and Fremeau were driving over the bridge at about 2:30 p.m. when they saw the woman jump nearly 45 feet into the water, police said. They radioed for help and drove across the 11th Street Bridge to the river bank, diving into the water moments before other officers arrived to help.

It took five hours for some 30 police and rescue divers, hampered by only 1 foot of visibility in the 30-foot-deep river to find the body.

The Anacostia River is a tributary of the Potomac River.

Colleagues Mourn Drowned Officer

https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1986/08/06/colleagues-mourn-drowned-officer/91f27774-36b5-4e13-9d8d-73dbbe4133e1/?utm_term=.7f357c079dd8

By John Ward Anderson August 6, 1986

Kevin Welsh, a man whose partner called him a "100 percent policeman," dove to his death Monday during a rescue attempt in the Anacostia River with the same passion and commitment that marked his entire career.

"He was probably the most involved police officer I have ever met in my life," said a detective who first met Welsh when Welsh joined the Special Operations Division of the department in 1980.

"He lived and breathed his job. He even convinced his two brothers to join the department," the detective said.

"If it didn't involve police work or his family, he wasn't interested, and now he's left behind two kids and an 8 1/2-months pregnant wife.

"Nothing was too small for his attention, from a trash complaint to a murder," the detective added. "Yesterday was the perfect example. How many policemen would have stayed on the shore and waited? The harbor patrol was on the way. There were thousands of rationalizations, but he never hesitated. He just stripped down and went in."

According to Capt. Melvin L. Clark, head of the D.C. police Emergency Response Team, where Welsh was assigned, Welsh in his seven years on the force racked up the type of record most 20-year veterans would be proud of: eight commendations from the police chief, 31 from his commanders for outstanding performances in the line of duty and more than 60 letters of praise sent by residents in appreciation for the assistance he had given them.

"He was amazing. He was involved in everything," Clark said. "This year alone he made 72 felony arrests, placed 91 charges and locked up 33 people on fugitive warrants." Clark said officers make an average of about two felony arrests a month.

"He was 100 percent policeman," O'Dell said. "He had a zest for his job and what that job stood for that was second to none . . . He had the uncanny ability to be hard as a rock when he needed to be, but he had the passion of a missionary."

"Kevin just popped up everywhere," said another policeman, "whether it was being a Good Samaritan or assisting on an arrest."

If there was any complaint about Welsh, the joke around the office went, it was that he occasionally let his police duties get in the way of being an effective gofer.

Twice he was sent from the ERT station house in Southeast Washington to police headquarters to pick up paychecks for his colleagues, and both times he stopped en route to make arrests and arrived back at the office hours late.

About a month ago, according to Clark, D.C. Superior Court officials called with an urgent problem: They were in the middle of a trial, and Welsh, who was a key witness, had disappeared during the lunch break.

It turned out, Clark said, that while outside grabbing a sandwich, Welsh had arrested three people driving a stolen car.

"He was considered an expert in tracking stolen vehicles," Clark said. "He was highly regarded as a police officer, and police from other jurisdictions were always calling him up and asking for his advice."

For many officers, getting involved in a case or making a celebrated arrest is simply a matter of being in the right place at the right time. But, according to his colleagues, Welsh never waited for chance encounters. He seemed to be everywhere, all the time.

At 2:20 p.m., 10 minutes before the shift change, some officers would have been en route back to the station, their radios turned down. But Welsh and his partner were still patrolling Minnesota Avenue SE on Monday afternoon when a radio call went out that a woman had jumped into the murky waters of the Anacostia River.

They drove to the scene, and Welsh kicked off his shoes, laid aside his service revolver and dove in after her. About 10 minutes later and about 60 yards from shore, while others were rescuing the woman, Welsh slipped beneath the water's surface.

"We had our hands full," said Steve O'Dell, Welsh's partner, who was in the water nearby. "We had another officer who was in trouble and we almost lost him. Kevin was worried about everybody else, and he didn't want to take away from our efforts. He was the type of guy who would hold on for as long as he could."

"We were only a few feet away and we lost him," O'Dell said. "But he maintained it right until the end. He never lost it. He fought, but he didn't panic."

Welsh's body was found by divers about four hours later, and the D.C. Medical Examiner yesterday ruled his death a drowning.

The woman, a 64-year-old St. Elizabeths Hospital patient whose name has not been released pending notification of her relatives, remained in critical condition last night at the Washington Hospital Center.

A hospital spokeswoman said she had a heart attack during the incident and had not regained consciousness.

Leo Harrison, a hydrologist for the National Weather Service, said that tidal currents run about 1 mph two to three feet below the surface of the Anacostia, and that Welsh may have been struggling against the rush of water.

"A real good swimmer would have a problem with that velocity," Harrison said. "An Olympic swimmer couldn't swim in conditions like that. It's very tiring."

Welsh lived in Charles County with his wife, Judith, their 3-year-old son, Kevin Jr., and a 14-year-old stepson, Jeff. Other survivors include his mother, Joan, and three brothers, Joseph and Terrence, both police officers, and Richard.

A police spokesman said Welsh's funeral will be held at 10 a.m. Friday at the Holy Family Catholic Church, 2210 Callaway St., Hillcrest Heights, with burial to follow at the Resurrection Cemetery, 8000 Woodard Rd., Clinton.

Staff writer Linda Wheeler contributed to this report.

Police Give a Final Salute To Officer Who Drowned

https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1986/08/09/police-give-a-final-salute-to-officer-who-drowned/9dfca14a-90e7-4b59-a6b7-47028cfb0751/?utm_term=.eea704f2572b

By John Ward Anderson August 9, 1986

Fifty police motorcycles paced the procession with a low, throttled moan. Behind them filed a six-mile cortege of patrol cars, flashing their red and blue emergency lights in silent salute.

They drove slowly past the Emergency Response Team station house at 1901 E St. SE, where Officer Kevin Welsh had worked. Then the motorcade wound its way into the country and to a Clinton cemetery, where hundreds of friends and colleagues gathered in a wooded grove to see Welsh buried yesterday.

"Kevin died as he lived -- helping others," Welsh's commanding officer, Deputy Chief Charles E. Samarra, told mourners at the Holy Family Catholic Church in Hillcrest Heights. "It was the same great passion that drove him into the muddy waters of the Anacostia River to save a drowning stranger."

Welsh, 34, drowned Monday after he dove into the river trying to rescue a woman who had plunged from the 11th Street Bridge. It was the final act of heroism in a career that yesterday was eulogized as one of the most dedicated and brilliant on the force.

Hundreds of District police officers in dress blues with black tape stripped across their badges stood at attention and saluted as Welsh's coffin was carried from the church by the D.C. police ceremonial honor guard, followed by members of the immediate family. About two dozen flags were held aloft by color guards from seven local police departments.

After the service, hundreds of motorists along the 20-mile route between the church and Resurrection Cemetery in Clinton pulled to the side of the road and watched as the motorcade passed.

At the cemetery, Welsh was honored with a three-gun salute and a duet of taps while his wife Judith, who is 8 1/2 months pregnant, his mother Joan and his stepson Jeffry tried to conceal their tears.

Welsh's three brothers -- Terry and Joseph, both D.C. police officers, and Richard -- consoled each other as a police department helicopter flew over the cemetery, hovering briefly above the grave. An honor guard folded the American flag draping Welsh's coffin, and D.C. Police Chief Maurice T. Turner Jr. presented it to Judith Welsh, pausing to whisper a message and kiss her lightly.

Welsh, who lived with his family in St. Charles in Charles County, has been hailed by his colleagues as one of the department's outstanding officers.

In his seven years in the department, he received more than 41 commendations from the police chief and his commanding officers for courageous and outstanding performance of duty, as well as more than 60 letters of appreciation from residents whom he had helped.

ABC-TV last night named Welsh "Person of the Week," a regular feature of the network's Friday night news broadcast.

Welsh, a member of the department's elite Emergency Response Team, was on duty Monday when he responded to a radio report that a woman had plunged from the 11th Street Bridge into the Anacostia River.

Welsh, four other police officers and two ambulance workers from the D.C. Fire Department dove into the water and swam out to the woman, who was about 60 yards off shore.

Photographs taken by a bystander who was watching the rescue effort show Welsh floating on his back, apparently trying to rest, while others were helping the woman and another officer who began floundering in the water, police officials said.

A short time later Welsh yelled for help, but the others were unable to reach him before he slipped beneath the surface of the water. His body was found by divers about four hours later.

Welsh was the 98th D.C. police officer to die in the line of duty since the department was founded 125 years ago and the first since Sgt. Joseph M. Cournoyer was shot to death while trying to catch a robbery suspect outside the Minnesota Avenue Metrorail station stop on Jan. 29, 1985.

At the church service, which was attended by more than 1,500 people, including Mayor Marion Barry, U.S. Attorney Joseph E. diGenova and police officers from as far away as Boston, Samarra said that Welsh's final words to him were: "Chief, I just want you to know that I have never been as happy in my whole life as I am now."

Samarra said that he and Welsh often joked that they were on the same wavelength, "and to the new recruits, Kevin would say, 'Never lose your enthusiasm, your zeal. The most important job that anyone could have is your responsibility.' "

DROWNED POLICE OFFICER HONORED FOR BRAVERY

https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1987/10/15/drowned-police-officer-honored-for-bravery/02cd8222-7063-4d39-b464-e1735627579c/?utm_term=.23b236f12039

By Rene Sanchez October 15, 1987

With crumpled tissue in her hands and pride in her eyes, Judi Welsh stood inside a banquet room at the Omni Shoreham Hotel last week and accepted an award for her husband, a D.C. police officer who died last year while trying to save a stranger from drowning.

"This is so overwhelming," Welsh said. "I'm absolutely delighted "

The story of Kevin Welsh's heroic action, which brought some members of the audience to tears, goes like this: In August 1986, Welsh jumped into the Anacostia River to try to save a drowning woman. The river's current pulled Welsh under the water as he swam toward the woman, who was later saved by other officers. Welsh, 34, an eight-year member of the police department's division of Special Operations, drowned.

For his valor in the line of duty, Welsh was posthumously awarded a gold medal -- the highest honor a District police officer, firefighter or corrections officer can earn -- at the 28th annual Meritorious Service Awards luncheon last week.

More than 700 business and community leaders attended the event, which was sponsored by the Greater Washington Board of Trade.

District firefighter Richard Young also was awarded a gold medal. In October 1986, he stood surrounded by fire and caught a man falling from a tractor-trailer teetering on the edge of the 11th Street Bridge. Nine other District police officers and firefighters were awarded silver medals for similar acts of courage.

City officials and community leaders praised the award winners throughout the ceremony. D.C. Council Chairman David A. Clarke expressed the city's "deep gratitude for the supreme sacrifices" medal recipients made for the community. Mayor Marion Barry hailed the winners as heroic exceptions in a society that is usually "too busy and too big to care about others."

Police officer Robert Remington, who was fatally wounded in May while trying to stop a Georgetown clothing store burglary, was awarded a silver medal posthumously. Four police officers who assisted Welsh in trying to save the drowning woman -- Dana Dewey, Jerome Fremeau, David Hayes and Steven O'Dell -- also received silver medals.

Silver medals were awarded to four firefighters: acting Lt. Everett Cooper Jr. and William Cave, who rescued an unconscious man who was immobilized when his truck struck an electrical power cable; Edwin Lehan, who rescued a person trapped in a burning house, and Kevin Sloan, who rescued an infant from a burning building.



Officer Kevin Joseph Welsh

<https://www.odmp.org/officer/13993-officer-kevin-joseph-welsh>
Metropolitan Police Department, District of Columbia

End of Watch Monday, August 4, 1986

KEVIN JOSEPH WELSH

Officer Kevin Welsh drowned after jumping into the Anacostia River in an attempt to rescue a suicidal woman who had jumped off of the 11th Street Bridge. While in the water Officer Welsh indicated he needed help but went under and drowned before he could be rescued.

Officer Welsh was assigned to the Special Operations Division and had served with the Metropolitan Police Department for seven years. He was survived by his expectant wife and two children.

Metropolitan Police Department, DC

On April 4, 1986, the victim officer and several other officers responded to the call of a female in the water. The female was about 70 yards from the shoreline. The victim officer attempted to reach her and in so doing, drowned before other officers could reach him. The female was saved.

In Memory of Officer Kevin Welsh

<https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/memory-officer-kevin-welsh>



Date of Death: August 4, 1986

I am a TV news photographer retired from WUSA TV living in Memphis and it is 2008. However it seems like just yesterday that we lost a superb officer and gentleman named Kevin Welsh. On that day in 1986, I walked into the newsroom and saw the story being broadcast of how an MPD officer had lost his life trying to save the life of someone attempting suicide. With several thousand officers on the force at that time, I still said out loud, "Oh my God, I hope that wasn't Kevin Welsh or Steve O'Dell," and they then announced the name -- Kevin Welsh.

I hope that wasn't Kevin Welsh or Steve O'Dell," and they then announced the name -- Kevin Welsh.

The fact that those two officers came to my mind was because that's the kind of men that they were, and it is no surprise that they were partners. I had met Steve when we did a story on how he had saved a little girl from a burning house and had taken her under his wing from then on.

Kevin and I met only about six months before his death. I was on stakeout in front of Superior court and Kevin stopped to ask me what was going on. We talked several times after that and I found him to be a genuinely nice person and a real gentleman, just like his partner Steve.

Later, I became aware of what top-rate police officers they both were.

Unfortunately it was just a matter of months before his death. One of the saddest stories I've ever had to cover in my 38-year career was Kevin's funeral. Seeing his widow close to bringing his third child into the world and his two sons had battle-hardened newsmen weeping.

I hope his wife and children are doing well. And, as for me, I'll always be proud that I had the priveledge of knowing both of these men.

— Kline H. Mingle, Bolivar, Tennessee
Submitted February 2008

Date of Death: August 4, 1986

Rank: Officer

Age: 34

Years of Service: Seven

Marital Status: Married

Children: Two

Location of Death: 11th Street Bridge, SE

Circumstance:

Officer Welsh and his partner, Officer O'Dell, answered a radio call for the rescue of a "jumper." The officers arrived on the scene and jumped into the river to rescue the female who had jumped from the bridge. Suddenly, Officer Welsh indicated that he needed help, but went under and drowned before he could be assisted. Officer Welsh's body was recovered four hours later.

The female jumper was a mental patient from St. Elizabeths Hospital.