

Three lost their lives caring about others

By Rick Sauder
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Bruce Ditlow, 24 and Kevin Weatherlow, 22 were best friends. They attended Penn Manor High School together, they competed in sports together, they took medical classes together and they were saving lives together.

One Saturday, June 13, they died together.

Jeffrey Jones, 18, had always wanted to be a fireman. He passed up an opportunity to become an Eagle Scout to join the Bausman Fire Company, enlisted in the US Air Force two years later and then returned to Lancaster to once again become a volunteer fireman.

On that fateful Saturday that Ditlow and Weatherlow lost their lives, Jones also died in a gallant attempt to save them.

The three men---all praised by their colleagues for their dedication---were victims of lethal methane gas that overcame them as they tried to rescue an eight-year-old boy trapped in a septic tank in Lancaster Township.

Also participating in the daring heroics of local rescue workers at the scene was 18-year-old Mark Rhinier, a volunteer with the Wheatland Fire Company, who entered the tank after the dying man.



BRUCE H. DITLOW KEVIN L. WEATHERLOW JEFFERY W. JONES

Rhinier was in fair condition Sunday at Lancaster General Hospital.

Both paramedics with the St. Joseph Hospital rescue unit, Ditlow, 209 Pearl St., and Weatherlow, 1602 Eshelman Mill Rd., were first to arrive at 161 Hamilton Rd. shortly before 4:30 p.m.

Ditlow entered the dark septic tank, unaware that the "Stuffy" atmosphere he described as he descended would almost instantly rob all of the oxygen from his lungs.

As she slipped into unconsciousness, Weatherlow, the father of a 2 1/2 year old daughter, followed him into the pit and managed to slip a rescue line around young Benjamin Walker, who was also unconscious. Within seconds, Weatherlow, too, succumbed to the deadly gas.

It was ironic that the two men should die in the course of performing the work to which they were unshakably dedicated---saving lives.

"I know the first thing that would have been going through both of their minds was to get the kid out of their," said his widow, Sharon Weatherlow, who also works at St. Joseph Hospital."

They were very dedicated to their job, especially where children are concerned.”

In fact, it was dedication that had them working Saturday, when they had agreed to fill in for other paramedics who were attending a coworker’s wedding.

Along with their dedication, Ditlow and Weatherlow were skilled paramedics, perhaps the best in the state, according to those who had seen them work.

“We have a tragic situation where we lost two of the best paramedics in the state, as far as I’m concerned,” said Dr. Witlaw M. Show, county coroner. “ They were good men. It’s just a tragic situation.”

Equally tragic was the death of Jones, 535B Abbeyville Road, who unlike Ditlow and Weatherlow, was aware as he entered the septic tank that he was risking his life in the atmosphere of poisonous gas.

His father, James W. Jones, was not surprised that his son would risk his life to save three others.

“He always wanted to do something for somebody else. He’d do anything for anybody. Yesterday, he proved it,” he said.

The elder Jones said his son was active in midget football and baseball as a youngster and he recalled how Jeff had given up Boy Scouts before he earned his Eagle Honor in order to join the fire company.

He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force after two years and then returned to Lancaster in January to once again join the Bausman Fire Company.

Jones’ training as a fireman was “exceptional” according to Fire Chief Elmer Reese. “ He was very well-versed in firefighting. He knew his job. Any training we told him to take, he took,” said the Fire Chief.

Jones’ father said his son had been at a training session at the Lancaster County Fire School on Saturday afternoon and he called home just after the emergency alarm sounded to inform his parents he’d be late for dinner.

Young Jones’ dedication as a volunteer firefighter will be recognized by firemen from throughout the county on Tuesday, when he will be given a full fireman’s funeral at St. Philip the Apostle Church, Millersville Pike.

His casket will be carried to the burial site on a fire engine and a total of about 75 pieces of firefighting equipment are expected to join in the funeral procession.

“If he had to go, this was the best way, his father said, emotion muffling his voice. “This is the way he would have wanted it.”

For Mrs. Richard Mumma, the mother of Mark Rhinier, who survived the rescue, the memory of the event is not quite as dramatic.

Her son, who will be a senior this fall at McCaskey High School, was lowered into the deadly

hole of the septic tank because of his slight frame, which could fit through the small opening.

She recalled the condition of her son in the hospital afterward. "Mark was stinking and filthy with grass and hay all over him. As soon as he saw us, he started crying, "mom, pop, I tried so hard to get those kids out. God knows I tried. I lied and told him everybody was fine."

Later, he said, she told him of the deaths.

Wheatland Fire Chief Giordano was impressed with young Rhinier's daring. "The kid was apologizing for not being able to do a better job. That breaks me up," he said.

Both during and after work, Ditlow and Weatherlow were nearly inseparable friends and had been since their high school days at Penn Manor. Ditlow had been best man at Weatherlow's wedding.

They had co-captained the high school wrestling team and since then had frequently gone hunting and skiing together. Ditlow attended nurses training sessions at the Reading Area Community Hospital, where Weatherlow had enrolled last September.

Other members of the St. Joseph rescue unit were shocked by the death of their close friends and colleagues.

"God, I'll miss them," said fellow paramedic Ken Culton. "I've known them for 10 years. You couldn't have had two better paramedics."

Ditlow was born in Lancaster, a son of George H. And Betty Lou Foulke Ditlow

He was a 1975 graduate of Penn Manor high school and had attended Millersville State College.

While in high school, in addition to the wrestling team, he was co-captain of the football team. Also, he was a member of the Key Club, National Honor Society, president of the Concert Choir and a member of the Lancaster Society for the Preservation of Chicken Thieves.

He was a member of the First United Methodist Church, Millersville.

Surviving are his parents at home and the following sisters: June M., wife of John R. McMahon, Towson Maryland; Kathy S., Wife of Stephen R. Eagleston, Sutton, Québec, Canada; Julie L. Ditlow, Annville; and two brothers, Gary S. Ditlow, Wappinger Falls, New York and Tony A. Ditlow, Harleysville.

Weatherlow, also a Penn Manor graduate, was husband of Sharon Croesus Weatherlow and the father of Kristen Lee Weatherlow.

He was the son of David and Wilda Manship Weatherlow, Conestoga R1.

He was on the Dean's list at Reading Area Community College and was active in the National Guard.

Besides his wife, daughter and parents, he is survived by a brother, Michael, 18 and a grandfather, Jules Weatherlow, 1595 Wabank Rd.

Jones was born in Lancaster, a son of James W. And Rosanne M. Bibb Jones.

He was a member of St. Philip Catholic Church and the Knights of Columbus Council 867.

Besides his parents, he is survived by a paternal grandmother, Mrs. Mary E. Jones, Columbia.

This article was reproduced June 13, 2011 by LT. Greg Leaman of the Lancaster Township Fire Department on the 30th anniversary of the Line Of Duty Death of Bausman Firefighter Jeffery W. Jones.

LTFD.org



A memorial brick was placed at the Lancaster County Public Safety Center Memorial Park on the 30th Anniversary of the line of duty death of Bausman firefighter Jeffery Jones.

St. Joseph's Paramedics Bruce Ditlow and Kevin Weatherlow also died in an attempt to save an 8 year old boy.



BAUSMAN
STATION 6-1

WHEATLAND
STATION 6-9



JEFFREY W. JONES
JUNE 13, 1981
"LEST WE FORGET"

HE GAVE HIS LIFE SO ANOTHER MAY LIVE