

# SWIMMING RESCUES BY IRISH POLICE OFFICERS

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## Abstract

This paper contains an analysis of 82 rescues carried out by members of An Garda Síochána (police officers) between 2000 and 2006. It concludes that most rescues took place close to river bridges and that the casualties had deliberately entered the water. The majority of casualties were male and the events took place mostly on week-end nights between 10.00pm and 3.00am with over one-third of casualties having consumed alcohol beforehand. The officers involved acted decisively and displayed great courage and teamwork, making excellent use of available rescue aids. All rescuers and casualties were subject to cold injury and it should be made clear to lifesavers that they should never enter water without knowing beforehand where they will exit the water

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This paper contains an analysis of 82 separate water rescues carried out by 134 serving officers of An Garda Síochána (Ireland's police service) between the years 2000 and 2006 inclusive. Ninety members of the public were rescued from drowning by the police officers. This is believed to be a significant proportion of rescues by members of the police force. A 2004 report<sup>1</sup> concluded that at least 20 water rescues are made by Irish police officers annually.

Available rescue reports, award citations and newspaper cuttings from An Garda Síochána, Irish Water Safety and Comhairle na Míre Gaile (Rescue Awards Council) were analysed and the following information extracted.

## Location of Rescues

The following table shows the location of the 82 rescues;

<b>River</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>(80.4%)</b>
<b>Pier/harbour</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>( 9.7%)</b>
<b>Beach</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>( 4.8%)</b>
<b>Canal</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>( 3.6%)</b>
<b>Reservoir</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>( 1.2%)</b>
	<b>82</b>	<b>(100%)</b>

## Deliberate or accidental entry?

In **49** (59.7%) out of the **90** persons rescued (100%) it was determined that the person rescued had deliberately entered the water, in **5** (5.5%) that the entry was accidental and in **6** (6.6%) that the person entered the water to rescue someone else and got into difficulty themselves. In the remaining **30** (33.3%) cases it was not possible to say for certain whether the entry was deliberate or not but the circumstances in many suggested that the person had deliberately entered the water. The 5 accidental entries were: a boy fell into a canal / a boat sank / a sailor fell into a harbour / a car accident / a tired swimmer bathing in the sea.

## Entry point of casualty

It was possible to establish the place where a casualty entered the water in 75 of the 82 rescues. Entry from a bridge was the most frequently used site followed by riverside or riverbanks (often close to a bridge).

<b>Bridge</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>(39.0%)</b>
<b>Riverside</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>(31.7%)</b>
<b>Pier/harbour</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>( 9.7%)</b>
<b>Canal bank</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>( 3.6%)</b>
<b>Car off bridge/pier</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>( 3.6%)</b>
<b>Walkway</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>( 2.4%)</b>
<b>Reservoir side</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>( 1.2%)</b>
<b>Unknown</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>( 8.5%)</b>
	<b>82</b>	<b>(100%)</b>

## Number of officers involved in each rescue

A single garda officer acting alone initiated the rescue attempt in **34** (41.4%) of the rescues and in **48** (58.5%) two or more officers acted together as a team. No officer died as a consequence of a rescue attempt. Two (2) officers were seriously injured but both subsequently returned to duty

following periods in hospital. Forty two 42 officers swam in their uniforms. One sergeant, a veteran of past rescues, who removed his trousers before entering the freezing water is quoted as saying ‘ It’s very hard to swim in garda trousers.’ In 15 rescues it wasn’t necessary for the officers to actually swim to the casualties. (see Appendix 1)

<b>Number of gardai</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Number of rescues</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>

**Gender of the casualties**

Of the ninety persons rescued **58** (64.4%) were male and **32** were female (35.5%).

**Ages of the casualties**

It was possible to place 80 of the 90 persons rescued into the following age ranges. If a person was called a young man or young woman they were placed in the 15 – 35 age range and if described as being middle-aged they were placed in the 36 – 60 age range.

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>15 - 35 years</b>	<b>36 - 60 years</b>	<b>Age Unknown</b>
<b>Number of casualties</b>	<b>53 (58.8%)</b>	<b>27 (30.0%)</b>	<b>10 (11.1%)</b>

**Gender of those in the 15 – 35 year age range : 35 male (38.8%) and 18 female (20.0%)**

**Gender of those in the 36 – 60 year age range : 16 male (17.7%) and 11 female (12.2%)**

**Day of Rescue**

It was possible to establish a day in 73 of the 82 rescues

<b>Day of Rescue</b>	<b>Number of Rescues</b>
<b>Thursday</b>	<b>9 (10.9%)</b>
<b>Friday</b>	<b>7 ( 8.5%)</b>
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>16 (19.5%)</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>18 (21.9%)</b>
<b>Monday</b>	<b>9 (10.9%)</b>
<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>9 (10.9%)</b>
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>5 ( 6.0%)</b>
<b>Unknown</b>	<b>9 (10.9%)</b>
	<b>82 (100%)</b>

**Time of Rescue**

It was possible to determine the starting time of the incident in 51 of the 82 rescues

9 - 10 pm	2	3 - 4 am	4	9 - 10 am	2	3 - 4 pm	1
10 - 11 pm	2	4 - 5 am	3	10 - 11am	2	4 - 5 pm	2
11 - 12 am	3	5 - 6 am	0	11 - 12 pm	0	5 - 6 pm	1
12 - 1 am	6	6 - 7 am	0	12 - 1 pm	1	6 - 7 pm	4
1 - 2 am	4	7 - 8 am	2	1 - 2 pm	2	7 - 8 pm	1
2 - 3 am	6	8 - 9 am	1	2 - 3 pm	2	8 - 9 pm	0

**Rescues at night (in the dark)**

It is important to take account of the fact that one continuous period of darkness straddles two days (the end of one day and the beginning of the next day). If the information available for the 51 rescues is organized to allow for this fact we get the following;

**Thursday night into Friday morning :**

Thursday (9 – midnight) **1** + Friday (midnight – 5 am) **3** = **4** rescues

**Friday night into Saturday morning :**

Friday (9 – midnight) **1** + Saturday (midnight – 5 am) **6** = **7** rescues

**Saturday night into Sunday morning :**

Saturday (9 – midnight) **1** + Sunday (midnight – 5 am) **8** = **9** rescues

**Sunday night into Monday morning :**

Sunday (9 – midnight) **2** + Monday (midnight – 5 am) **3** = **5** rescues

**Monday night into Tuesday morning :**

Monday (9 – midnight) **1** + Tuesday (midnight – 5 am) **1** = **2** rescues

**Tuesday night into Wednesday morning :**

Tuesday (9 – midnight) **1** + Wednesday (midnight – 5 am) **0** = **1** rescue

### Wednesday night into Thursday morning :

Wednesday (9 – midnight) 0 + Thursday (midnight – 5 am) 1 = 1 rescue  
Night rescues 29 rescues

### Day rescues

22 rescues  
51 rescues

If we assume that the unknown times are most likely similar to those known to us and if the unknown 31 rescue times are divided according to the ratio 29 (night) : 22 (day) we get the following estimated totals of **47** night and **35** day rescues. This supports the common belief among police officers that the majority of rescues take place at night, in the dark.

1. Saturday night into Sunday morning = **9** rescues
2. Friday night into Saturday morning = **7** rescues
3. Sunday night into Monday morning = **5** rescues

The majority of night rescues (where time and day are known ) took place at week-ends (**21**). During the week-end six hour periods of darkness between the hours of 10 pm and 4 am there were (18) rescues. The sun never rises before 5 am in Ireland and sets before 10 pm ([www.sunrisesunset.com](http://www.sunrisesunset.com)). The garda work shift change at 10 pm appears to have little or no impact on the number or outcome of rescues.

### Alcohol

Alcohol consumed is a major factor in many drownings and suicides<sup>2</sup> and **35** (38.8%) out of the **90** (100%) persons rescued were known to have consumed alcohol before the incident. In a good number of other cases prior alcohol consumption was suspected but no definite determination was recorded. There is much evidence to support the belief that many casualties attempt suicide immediately following a binge drinking session.<sup>2</sup>

### DISCUSSION

#### Statistics

The 59.7% garda suicidal rescue figure is much higher than Irish Water Safety's 48% national suicide figure for 2005 drowning causes and the 33.3% cases where it was not possible to say for certain whether the entry was deliberate or not is double the Irish Water Safety 2005 national undetermined percentage figure of 16%. The gender percentages of 64.4% male and 35.5% female are close to the national percentages of 68.4% male and 31.5% female for all drowning deaths in 2004 (inclusive of accidental drowning deaths) but are much higher than the 2004 suicide and undetermined drowning percentages on their own of 42.2% male and 25.5% female.<sup>3</sup> These facts support the belief among gardai that the majority of those they rescue have deliberately entered the water with the intention of killing themselves. It should be noted that with one exception there was no mention of any of those rescued having previously tried to kill themselves and this could support the claim of many suicide support agencies that if persons, who survive a suicide attempt, receive professional help they are unlikely to attempt suicide again subsequently.<sup>4</sup>

The garda figures differ greatly from the published Irish national drowning figures in the field of age ranges. The garda figure of 58.8% for those in the 15 - 35 age range is over 3 times the national figure of 15.2% for suicides in the 15 - 39 age range in 2005 ( the 2003 – 2005 figures varied between 15 – 22% in this age range) and those for the 36 – 60 age range, although higher than the national 2005 figure of 21.3%, are much less than the 2004 figure of 38.2% (the 2003 – 2005 figures varied from 18 – 38% in this range). Adding the numbers for undetermined drownings does not change the situation to any great degree so it would appear that gardai rescue a much higher percentage of young casualties than the national drowning averages. That said it must be remembered that the garda figures are for rescues and the Irish Water Safety figures are for drownings.

In relation to the prior alcohol consumption figures the garda percentage of 38.8% for rescued casualties matches the Irish Water Safety 2002 figure of 37% for known alcohol consumption for all drowning casualties in 2002.<sup>3</sup>

#### Suicide

The causes of suicide are multi-factorial and the act itself is often linked to mental illness and alcohol consumption and a latent predisposition towards killing oneself can be triggered by a single event. There is much evidence that a bout of binge drinking can precede a suicidal act.<sup>2</sup> Because of this persons attempting suicide can be equivocal about the act itself – their determination may waver and they frequently will not resist being rescued. There are examples of this behaviour in Appendix 4 (Actions of Casualties) and Appendix 10 (Communication between casualty and rescuer). The concentration of rescue incidents over week-end nights is supported by the actions of one of Ireland's most successful water rescue units – Foyle Search and Rescue –

who have saved over 800 lives from suicide driven drowning in the River Foyle, Northern Ireland. The volunteer suicide prevention organisation operates a land patrol and water rescue service between the New Foyle Bridge and Craigavon Bridge and the 1.5 mile riverside between the bridges on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights from 9.30pm to 3.00am ([www.foylesearchandrescue.co.uk](http://www.foylesearchandrescue.co.uk)).<sup>4</sup>

### Cold Shock

Most rescue reports end with a statement that the casualty and rescuer were taken to hospital and treated for hypothermia. The fact is that the majority of those involved were not in the cold water long enough to suffer from the clinical condition of hypothermia (confirmed in a private e-mail from Admiral Frank Golden) but there is no doubting their experiencing cold shock and severe chilling as described in Appendix 3 (Effects of the cold). Time and again reports describe rapid loss of consciousness and swim failure, consequences associated with immersion in very cold water. These are exacerbated by the danger of bare hands sticking to freezing cold ladders as described in at least one rescue report.

### Rescue Aids

The most frequently used rescue aids are ropes and ringbuoys.\* The attempted use of ringbuoys is mentioned in 12 reports (the absence of them in 3 others) and ropes by themselves in 8 reports. Appendix 2 (Ringbuoys) contains accounts of the use and mis-use of ringbuoys. There are numerous accounts of members of the public throwing buoys into rivers and either missing the casualty or the casualty being unable to grasp it. One problem seems to be the knotting of ropes attached to the ringbuoys and rescuers believing (rightly or wrongly) that they do not have time to unknot the rope and so they throw the lot into the water. This means that should they miss and they mostly do – there is no way of recovering it for a re-throw. Police officers successfully used the buoys either as buoyant aids in a swimming rescue, threw the buoy to a rescuer returning with a casualty or an officer holding the end of a rope pulled a colleague holding on to the buoy to safety. There is no doubting the benefit of having a buoy but there needs to be further research into overcoming the problem of knotted ropes. Ropes, frequently supplied by the fire service, were often used to lower rescuers over bridges or down riverbanks and then to hoist casualties up to safety. While there was no mention of throw bags in the reports studied I understand that some patrol cars carry them and that others were supplied to the force by Irish Water Safety on a pilot basis. Their use would help overcome the knotted rope problem.

\* An Irish ringbuoy (also called a lifering or lifebuoy in rescue reports) is usually 18 inches in diameter, weighs 1 Kilogram, is polyurethane foam filled, has a positive buoyancy of 50 Newtons and is normally attached to 25 – 30 metres of 6mm polypropylene rope. ([www.iws.ie](http://www.iws.ie))

### Actions of Gardai

It is clear that in most rescues the officers involved were unhesitatingly willing to risk their own lives to save those of others, even when they knew that the people were trying to kill themselves. When, on a few occasions, casualties resisted being rescued, the officers persevered and successfully removed the person from the water. Because there is a trauma associated with not having the body of a loved one to bury, it is worth noting that in all 82 rescues the gardai successfully recovered the person and in only one incident was the person dead on removal from the water and in another the person died later on in hospital.

Gardai showed a decisiveness in their actions – when others around them appeared unsure of how to proceed a garda present often took the initiative and acted. When a plan wasn't working out it was quickly modified or even scrapped and another approach tried.

Officers on patrol at night carry flashlights and this appears to be a crucial piece of equipment. Rescuers and casualties can become disorientated in the dark as they focus on their immediate surroundings and on those in the water with them. Time and again reports mention that flashlights were used to find casualties, keep them in view, guide rescuers, communicate with others i.e. swim over here, there is help available. The sight of a light often reminding the swimmer that he was not alone.

Time and again gardai displayed teamwork and an ability to use their collective knowledge, experience and swimming ability to best advantage. Officers mention that they acted with confidence knowing that help was on the way or that they were not alone and if needed others would and did join them in the water. Local knowledge of one or more officers present often allowed them to quickly move about in the dark. Sharing out tasks according to ability – the strongest swimmer among them going into the water – one officer holding on to the end of a ringbuoy rope and towing the second back to safety when the casualty had been secured. A rescuer knowing that when he was in the water his colleagues were focused on him until he was safe again. There was a clear chain of command when decisions were being taken – sergeant to gardai or senior garda to junior garda.

Communication was often crucial - using their radios to call for help before acting and knowing when taking action that help was there or on its way. Using radios to communicate when searching for a casualty – splitting up until the person was found and then quickly coming together to act as a unit, thereby maximizing the use of available personnel. Because of the number of rescues taking place there is a good chance that one or more of the gardai present will have been involved in a previous rescue and will bring what was learned then to bear on the current situation.

All of the above meant that officers could and did act in ways that were often courageous without being reckless whereas, were a member of the public, acting alone, to act in a similar manner it could be construed as being potentially unsafe or unwise. A key factor in how the police officers acted was the knowledge that they were not alone.

#### Removing casualties from the water

Accounts in Appendix 9 (Problems exiting the water) draw our attention to the fact that a rescue does not end when the casualty is made buoyant and able to breathe – they still have to be removed from the water. Numerous reports state that the officer who carried out the rescue itself was exhausted on reaching the riverbank and had to be assisted from the water. Again there are statements that first attempts to extract those in the water from it failed and alternate means had to be found. It is important that lifesavers are made to understand that they should not enter water unless and until they are sure of where and how they can get out of it.

#### Conclusion

Rescuing someone from drowning is fraught with many difficulties that can result in the death of a would-be-rescuer. In these reports no rescuer died but two officers were seriously injured and six (6) persons who entered water to save someone else had to be rescued themselves. In Ireland, during the five year period 2001 to 2006 eight (8) persons drowned whilst involved in rescue attempts. There is much that lifesaving teachers and lifeguard trainers can learn from police officers and further research in the area is very desirable.

## APPENDII

**In order to gain access to certain confidential documents it was necessary to give an undertaking of confidentiality. Therefore no names are used in any of the following appendii but each bullet point in any one appendix refers to a separate incident to the others in that appendix.**

### Appendix 1

#### Garda Non-swimming Rescues

- the garda tied a rope around himself and then descended down the ladder into the fast flowing river where he removed the rope from himself and placed it around the waist of the young man who was then pulled up out of the water. The garda then climbed back up the ladder unaided.
- the four gardai waded through waist deep mud in the estuary to reach and remove the man from the water
- The gardai climbed over the railings and stood on a ledge, barely 18 inches wide, with a sheer, slippery drop down a bank to the river. They formed a human chain down to the man below and eventually hauled him to safety. He was deemed a danger to himself and others and taken to the garda station.
- the garda commandeered a rowing boat and proceeded to rescue the woman and the three would-be-rescuers in the river
- two gardai waded into the river and spent a long time trying to remove the young man from the crashed car. The man was dead when eventually removed.
- two gardai waded out to waist depth and threw a lifebuoy to the young woman
- although he was alone the garda waded out into the river to rescue the unconscious man
- knowing there was no time to waste the garda descended into the deep culvert and waded into the flood water to reach the semi-conscious man. He spent 30 minutes in waist deep cold water keeping the head of the man out of the water until help arrived.

- the young garda lowered himself 25 feet from the bridge on a rope into the river to tie a rope around a casualty who was pinned against a bridge leg by the force of the river. He managed to keep her face out of the water while awaiting the arrival of a rescue boat.
- One of the gardai dived underwater to remove a woman from her car which was submerged in the pier
- Two gardai commandeered a small inflatable boat and rowed out into the fast flowing river to rescue the drowning man
- Three gardai supporting each other waded out into the river and rescued the man
- One garda was lowered down the steep sides of the canal on a rope and into the water to tie a second rope around the body of the unconscious boy
- Three of the gardai waded out under the bridge to rescue the man but had to be rescued themselves by two other gardai when the river knocked them over. The man was eventually rescued.
- One of the gardai carefully walked across a narrow pipe over the river, which was in flood at the time, to reach the youth who was clinging to branches in the water. He succeeded in pulling the youth up out of the water.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Ringbuoys**

#### **Successful use of a Ringbuoy**

- The garda took a lifebuoy and swam 60 to 70 metres upstream to the man. Using the lifebuoy he managed to keep the man's head above water. He lost hold of the buoy for a short time and it took all of his strength to keep the man afloat until he caught the lifebuoy again.
- A second garda, known to be a strong swimmer, had been called to the scene. On arrival he took hold of a lifering before entering the water. It took the garda some time to swim to the man who was clinging to the side of the riverbank. Once he had hold of the man they were pulled to safety by the first garda who had been holding on to the end of the lifering rope.
- The garda kicked off his boots and took off his hat. He then slid down into the water and swam out to the woman grabbing a floating lifering on the way to her. Before he reached her she disappeared underwater so he had to dive underwater with the lifering to find her. When he found her he used the lifering to keep her afloat as he made his way to the riverside.
- Other attempts having failed and the youth appearing lifeless they decided to make a swimming rescue using the strongest swimmer of the five gardai. Using a lifebuoy the garda swam out into the river, against the pull of the tide, and in a heroic feat managed to bring the youth to a jetty where he was removed from the water by the other gardai.
- The garda climbed over the river wall calling to her partner to look for a lifebuoy. She entered the water and swam to the drowning woman who had disappeared underwater again but not before the garda managed to grab hold of her clothing and pull her up to the surface. She swam towards the shore keeping the woman's face out of the water. By this time her partner had found a lifebuoy which he threw to her. She caught the lifebuoy and was pulled to the riverbank where the woman was lifted to safety.
- He found a lifebuoy with a rope attached at a rescue post in the dark and brought it with him. When he got to where they believed the young man to be he threw the buoy into the river which was 15 feet below the riverbank. He threw the buoy upstream and allowed it to float down to the young man. The man grasped it and was told to hold on to it. Informing his colleague that he had the man his colleague left his side of the river and

crossed the bridge to join them picking up another lifebuoy on the way. They were aware that the man wouldn't be able to hold on to the buoy for long due to the cold and force of the water. It was agreed that the first garda would enter the water with the second lifebuoy and support the man, while the second officer would hold on to the two ropes. They did this and there was a successful outcome to the rescue.

- The two gardai waded out to waist depth and threw a lifebuoy to the young woman.

#### **Unsuccessful use of ringbuoys**

- Following a number of failed attempts by those present to throw a lifebuoy to the man the garda volunteered to make a swimming rescue.
- On arrival at the scene and noting that the civilians had thrown all of the lifebuoys into the river with no success the garda entered the water and swam to the woman in the middle of the river.
- The garda said that they had at first tried to throw the man a lifering but when his head began going under the water there was no alternative but to go in after him.
- We ran along the boardwalk and tried to throw a lifering to her but the current took it. We tried another one but she was struggling so much that she couldn't get it.
- The second garda located a lifebuoy and threw it to the second man in the river but he was unable to catch it.
- When the gardai arrived at 4.15am the girl was in the water and a lifesaving ringbuoy had been thrown to her. The force of the current meant that she lost her grip on it.
- Gardai and other rescue services were on the scene quickly as were a number of civilians. A number of attempts were made to throw the man a lifebelt. The man came close to the shore but the rescuers were unable to get to him.
- Passers-by had thrown lifebuoys into the river but the woman was unable to reach them. By the time the gardai arrived all of the lifebuoys had been thrown into the river without reaching the drowning woman.
- Two liferings had been thrown to them in the water but they weren't even reaching for them.
- The firecrews threw him a number of lifebuoys but he was not able to reach them.
- The man was struggling in the river and even though two buoys had been thrown to him he had been unable to grab them.

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Effects of the Cold**

- It was extremely difficult to hold on to him due to the cold and strong currents
- When the young man had grasped the lifebuoy he was told to hold on to it and to be calm. By now they estimated that the man had been in the water for at least 15 minutes and that he would most likely let go of the lifebuoy. They couldn't see him due to the dark and the distance between the riverbank and water and had great difficulty getting any response from him so it was decided that one of them would enter the water with the second lifebuoy and hold on to the man using the two lifebuoys for buoyancy. The garda lowered himself into the river while his colleague held on to the ends of both lifebuoy ropes. The man relaxed once the garda took hold of him and said that he couldn't feel his arms and legs....When the man was removed from the water after 30 minutes in the river he was unconscious but he made a full recovery.
- The woman was holding onto a ladder but was in the water up to her neck. She shouted that she was frozen and couldn't move.

- “ I was frozen to the bone and had convulsions of shivers but it didn’t take the ambulance staff long to warm me up.”
- The garda’s hand was stuck to the steel ladder due to the cold.
- “ Upon entry to the cold water my lungs and my head felt like they were about to split open with the cold and I swallowed water with the shock of it.”
- At 4.00am the 17 year old man was rescued by the gardai and thought to be dead as he had been in the water for a considerable time. He appeared to be lifeless – no breath, no pulse or response to light shone into his eyes. A local doctor and a lifeboat crewmember worked on the youth for a long time with the assistance of ambulance crew. They managed to restore his breathing after about 30 minutes. He was transported to hospital where he made a full recovery.
- He swam towards the man who, at this stage, was motionless in the water.

#### **Appendix 4**

##### **Actions of Casualties**

- The gardai had been informed that a man had jumped into the river and when they arrived at the scene they saw a body floating in the middle of the wide river and thought that it was a corpse. A young garda entered the river and swam to the body only to realize on reaching it that the man was alive and conscious and didn’t want to come out. The garda spoke to him and managed to persuade him to allow himself to be rescued. Reluctantly the man agreed to leave the river. A few weeks later he wrote to the young garda thanking him for rescuing him.
- Three gardai answered a call that a woman had jumped into the river – it was evening time. On arrival they found a woman in distress at the end of a ladder in wet underclothing at the waters edge. She was crying and stating that she wanted to be left alone to die. They told her to keep hold of the ladder. As one of the gardai descended the ladder the woman became hysterical.
- The garda saw the woman jump in but after she had submerged a number of times she became distraught and didn’t resist being rescued but was unable to help the two men trying to save her.
- The garda found a ladies bag and coat on the footpath and saw a woman in the water. She was holding on to a ladder but was in the water up to her neck. She shouted that she was frozen and couldn’t move. The garda climbed down the ladder in full uniform believing that he had no time to remove any of it. The woman had come away from the ladder and had submerged so he entered the water and grabbed hold of her. She struggled but he managed to keep his grip on her and to keep her head above water. He towed her back to the ladder where he held on to the ladder with one hand and the woman with his other hand. She struggled and tried to break free so he manoeuvred himself so so that he could pin her to the wall. He had to wait for the arrival of the fire brigade who lowered a rope which he tied around her and she was pulled up and out of the water.
- Cries for help were heard coming from the river in the early hours of the morning. The gardai were called and they found a woman clinging to a branch in the water in a part of the river away from any walkways. When rescued the woman refused to give her name or to explain how she got where she was. She was taken to hospital by ambulance.
- They were informed that a 15 year old youth had jumped into the river – they discovered the young man clinging to a branch on the opposite side of the river. He was in a very distressed condition.
- The two gardai went to the river where they found a man in the water. At this stage the man was near the bank of the river but then started to swim out. The garda tried to persuade the man to come back. There was no lifebuoy available but a passer-by gave her a rope. The man refused to take hold of the rope which was thrown to him at least three



times. The current started to take the man downriver fairly quickly. He was now getting tired and he sank under the water a number of times. The terrain of the riverbank made reaching him very difficult. The garda then decided to enter the water and make a swimming rescue. The young man now appeared very distressed. She entered the water and swam to him. On reaching him she explained what she was going to do. The man was very tired and didn't put up a fight. When she got close to the riverbank her colleague threw the rope to her and pulled them to safety.

- At 2.20am two youths, both of whom had consumed a lot of alcohol, jumped into the river which was in flood and running a strong current. One youth was pulled out of the river quickly by a visitor but the other young man was in great difficulty. He had been holding on to ivy but let go and drifted into the centre of the river. Attempts to reach him using a ladder failed and eventually he drifted down the river and under a bridge heading towards the bay. ( He was rescued later by a garda swimming out to him.)
- Gardai received a communication that two men had just jumped into the river at a bridge. Arriving there the two gardai confirmed the details and asked for assistance. One garda descended a nearby ladder and entered the river. He managed to grab one of the men and tried to pull him towards the ladder but the man resisted and refused help. The man then made every effort to go underwater. The garda lowered himself in the water and managed to manoeuvre himself under the man and use his shoulder to push him to the ladder.

## **Appendix 5**

### **Actions of Gardai**

- The man lost his grip on the ladder (lowered over the bridge by the fire brigade) and drifted out into the middle of the canal. He was struggling to keep his head above water. The garda removed his jacket, placed a rope around his waste and went into the canal against the advice of the fire brigade personnel who felt that it was too dangerous. Having entered the water the garda could not see the man. He dived underwater a number of times in an effort to locate the man. The water was very dirty which prevented him from seeing very far in front of him. Fire brigade personnel, using the light from their torches, pointed to an area of the canal where they thought the man had gone. The garda swam to this area and dived underwater. He could see the man just under the water so he grabbed him by the collar and pulled him up to the surface. He swam to a ladder that had been placed in the canal by the fire brigade. He removed the rope from around his own waist and tied it around the man who was then pulled up out of the water. The man was taken to hospital where he died a short time later.
- The fire crew threw a number of lifebuoys to the man in the river but he was not able to reach them. The garda saw a metal ladder going down the quay wall into the river further down the quayside. He went to the ladder and climbed down it. He could see the man coming down the river towards him and jumped into the river. He was not a strong swimmer and the river was fast flowing and dirty. He swam to where the man was (about 15 metres from the riverbank), grabbed hold of him. He pulled him over to a ladder and waited holding on to the, by now unconscious man, until two of his colleagues arrived, descended the ladder and entered the water with each one holding onto the ladder with one hand. They took the unconscious man from the rescuer, tied a rope around him and the fire crew pulled him up the ladder to safety. When it was his turn to climb the cold ladder the garda discovered that one of his hands was stuck to it and he had the skin torn from his hand in order to get out of the water.
- Heading there (river) alone he saw a man submerged in the water 20 feet from the bank. He instinctively dived into the water despite being a poor swimmer. He was a bit nervous getting into the water but thought it was the only option as there was no one else around at the time.
- While observing the body in the river he noticed a slight movement of the head. He immediately climbed down the 60 foot slope, through briars and bushes, towards the ' body ' and waded into the river.
- Gardai were told that there was a man in the river but when they arrived at the scene they found two men in the water. They observed that the men were being carried downstream by a strong current and were bobbing up and down before disappearing under the water.

Both men were locked in a tight embrace. A garda entered the water and had to dive underwater to locate them. Having brought them to the surface he managed to separate them but in doing so one of the men grabbed him by the wrist and they began to sink underwater. He eventually managed to get both men to the ladder and was told that a third man had jumped into the river and was being swept downstream. Leaving the two men clinging to the ladder with his colleagues he swam after the third man. On reaching him he grabbed him and brought him back to the ladder where he now had the three of them holding on to it. He talked to them to keep them conscious but one of them slumped forward and his face entered the water. The garda had to tilt his head backwards and hold it there until they were removed from the water.

- The alarm was raised at 2.00am and a number of emergency services rushed to the scene including 4 gardai. The river was at high tide and fearful of losing the man two of the gardai dived into it and managed to rescue the man.
- He went to the pier where he made his way into the water to save the drowning woman. “ I could see her head just above the water and then she disappeared.” After making his way into the water he realized that the ground had disappeared from under his feet so he swam to where the woman had been. After going under the water he pulled the woman to the surface where she regained consciousness. “ After coming to she began to panic and we both went down for a few seconds but then I calmed her down and brought her to the shore.”
- Two gardai were taken to hospital after rescuing a man from the river. They were passing by in their patrol car around 4.30am when they were told that a man had just jumped into the river. Seeing the man in the water one garda kicked off his shoes, took off his jacket and dived into the freezing water where he swam about 60 metres to the man. The second garda, having called in the incident and seeing his colleague in difficulty dived into the river and together they dragged the man to the quayside. The fire brigade arrived and hoisted the man from the river. Both gardai were assisted from the water and taken to hospital where they were released after being treated for hypothermia.
- “ I’m not a strong swimmer but I figured that if I didn’t act quickly the young man would have been dragged out into the bay by the strong currents and die. It was one of those split decisions – I never really thought about the risk to my own life.”

## **Appendix 6**

### **Teamwork**

- He stated that he was not a hero and only did it because he knew that his companions would be there to help him.
- The man jumped into the river. One garda rushed to the side of the bridge and shone his torch on the man in the river while his partner ran across the bridge and clambered down the riverbank and entered the water. He could see the man in the torchlight and he waded out into the river and grabbed hold of the man who was now in a very distressed condition. Once he had hold of the man his partner left the bridge and came down to the riverside to help lift the man out of the water.
- Looking over the bridge parapet they saw that the river current was bringing the man down river towards the bay so while one garda radiod for help the other two jumped off the bridge into the river. When they reached him he offered no resistance and was in a very distressed condition and extremely difficult to hold due to the cold and the strong currents. Working together they managed to bring him to the riverbank where their colleagues helped them to remove the man from the river.
- He radiod the second responding garda to approach the river from the opposite bank.
- The second garda, having called in the incident, and seeing his colleague (in the river) having difficulty rescuing the man dived into the river and together they dragged the man to the quayside.

- “ One guy (garda) was getting ready to go in but he said he wasn’t a strong swimmer, so I said I’ll go in. I trained as a lifeguard.”
- “ I brought him back to a chain which he clung on to. I was wearing all my garda equipment which was weighing me down so I had to struggle to keep my head above water. I held on until two members of the emergency response unit came to our assistance and pulled us up the ladder to safe ground
- A 17 year old youth jumped into the river from a bridge at 4.00am. A garda decided to jump into the river to rescue him but was advised against it by his sergeant on the grounds that this was a particularly dangerous part of the river. Instead they planned to form a human chain further down river and get to him that way. A garda was sent down to the edge of the river to shine his flashlight on the youth, who was under the bridge at this time, and to guide the other gardai to him. Three of them formed a human chain on the other side of the bridge but a surge of water knocked them off their feet and they had to be assisted out of the river by two new gardai who had just arrived at the bridge. Two were sent looking for a boat without success. By now the youth had come out from under the bridge and moved into the middle of the river so a new plan was made – their strongest swimmer would enter the river and make a swimming rescue. ( this plan worked)
- The five gardai present formed a human chain to drag the intoxicated man out of the river.
- When the garda reached the riverbank with the woman it was necessary for a colleague to enter the water to assist him to lift her up within reach of their two colleagues on the riverbank. The second garda had to assist the rescuer out of the river due to his exhausted state.
- “ I had to go in as I knew that I was a stronger swimmer than the other two.”
- The garda plunged into the icy waters of the river to rescue a woman who had just jumped from the bridge..... The water pulled her into one of the tunnels under the bridge so he went in after her and eventually managed to get her to the riverbank.
- Up to their waists in mud the four gardai attempted to get the unconscious man up a ladder at the quayside but the cold slippery mud and the fact that the man was in a bad way made this impossible. After struggling for several minutes with a lot of pushing and shoving it was decided to put him on board a small private dinghy. A local man took the rope and towed the dinghy across the mud to where other gardai were at the quayside. The gardai were in the cold water for 20 minutes.

## **Appendix 7**

### **Non-garda Rescuers**

- Another three (3) people jumped into the river from the quays in an effort to save the woman. A combined operation including local gardai, fire service and the coastguard helicopter managed to rescue all three would-be-rescuers and the woman.
- A man entered the river to help her but he was soon struggling. “ I stripped off my gear and went in after them. We’re told not to jump in but to try and throw something or to wade in but none of these were an option for me so I went in after them.” Once the garda took the woman off the man he was able to keep himself afloat so all of them managed to get to the rescue boat.
- “ An elderly man jumped into the river to rescue the woman in the water. He was struggling to support her. I took her off him and she didn’t resist my help. Once she was out of the water I helped the old man out too.”
- Having secured the first man both officers again descended the ladder. The first garda entered the water for the second time and swam to the second man who accepted his help and was assisted up the ladder to the footpath. He informed them that they had been drinking heavily and when his friend jumped into the river he had followed him in order

to save him. He had difficulty holding him up as he wanted to drown. He then had to concentrate on saving himself and was grateful for the help from the gardai.

- A woman fell into the river and two men who had been partying with her jumped in to save her. All three got into difficulty. One of the men sank very quickly and when he was rescued it turned out that he was wearing heavy boots

## **Appendix 8**

### **Movement of bodies in water**

- At first they could not see the man in the water but after some time he appeared from under the bridge floating along in the river. He was under O Connell Bridge (wide 8 lane bridge) for about 10 minutes. He disappeared under the water twice.
- Gardai received a call that a man had jumped off the bridge. On arrival they found that a large crowd had gathered and were informed that a man was in the water under the bridge.
- ...the youth had been holding on to ivy but let go and drifted into the centre of the river. Attempts to reach him failed and eventually he drifted out of sight down river and under the bridge, heading towards the bay.
- The man jumped into the river at the bridge. When the gardai arrived they saw the young man about 70 metres from the riverbank. One garda entered the water, swam out to the man and brought him back to the riverbank to a point which was about a half-a-mile from where he entered it.
- Looking over the bridge parapet they saw that the river current was bringing the man down river towards the bay...
- ...they were told that a man had just jumped into the river (from the bridge). Seeing the man in the water one garda kicked off his shoes, took off his jacket and dived into the freezing river where he swam 60 metres to reach the man.
- ... when they arrived they found two men in the water. They observed that they were being carried down river by a strong current and were bobbing in the water before disappearing under it.
- ..he discovered that a third man had jumped into the water and was being swept downstream.
- “ I could see him coming down the river. The current was very strong and it was quite hard to get him back to the ladder. ” The garda went down the ladder and jumped into the river. He swam to where the man was (about 15 metres from the bank).
- The garda plunged into the icy waters of the river to rescue a woman who had just jumped from the bridge..... The water pulled her into one of the tunnels under the bridge so he went in after her and eventually managed to get her to the riverbank.

## **Appendix 9**

### **Problems exiting the water**

- Up to their waists in mud the four gardai attempted to get the unconscious man up a ladder at the quayside but the cold slippery mud and the fact that the man was in a bad way made this impossible. After struggling for several minutes with a lot of pushing and shoving it was decided to put him on board a small private dinghy. A local man took the rope and towed the dinghy across the mud to where other gardai were at the quayside. The gardai were in the cold water for 20 minutes.
- He lowered himself 25 feet from the bridge into the fast flowing freezing water below. The girl had already gone under water but he managed to get a grip on her and tie the rope around her and hold the girl against the parapet of the bridge for 5 minutes. It was getting to the stage where he couldn't hold on any longer because of the cold and rope

burns on his hands. The rope cut tracks through the skin on both hands along the forefingers and thumbs. The river rescue boat arrived and a diver in a wetsuit helped him but they had to go downstream to get out because there were 25 foot walls on either side of the river.

- When the garda reached the riverbank with the woman it was necessary for a colleague to enter the water to assist him to lift her up within reach of their two colleagues on the riverbank. The second garda had to assist the rescuer out of the river due to his exhausted state.
- With one garda pushing and the other garda pulling the man they managed to get him up the ladder and on to the footpath where he had to be restrained.
- By the time the woman realized what was happening the garda had pulled himself up the ladder under her and pinned her to it. The two gardai managed to pull and push the woman up the ladder to safety. She struggled all the way and had to be restrained on the footpath.
- As he approached the riverbank he wondered how they were going to get out. A fire engine arrived and a fireman entered the river to assist him. A ladder was lowered and all three were removed from the river.
- " I brought him back to a chain which he clung on to. I was wearing all my garda equipment which was weighing me down so I had to struggle to keep my head above water. I held on until two members of the emergency response unit came to our assistance and pulled us up the ladder to safe ground

## **Appendix 10**

### **Communication between casualty and rescuer**

- The alarm was raised by a passer-by who heard the man calling for help.
- The first call said that the man had fallen from a bridge but which bridge? There were 5 bridges in their area so they had to check them all because for some reason they couldn't ring back to establish which bridge. Having checked all 5 bridges and found nothing they started all over again but this time they stopped the car engine at each bridge until they heard faint calls for help. ...When he arrived at the scene he could hear the injured man (fractured skull) calling in the darkness but could not see him through the thick undergrowth. As the man lay semi-conscious in the water below the garda climbed down the muddy bank to reach the distressed victim. But on realising the danger both men were in he immediately called for assistance. He grabbed hold of the man and struggled for almost a half-an-hour to prevent him from being washed away with the current.
- A call was received saying that a girl was standing and sitting on the bridge threatening to jump in...by the time a car got to the bridge she had jumped in.
- When the young man grasped it (ringbuoy) he was told to hold on and to be calm...they had great difficulty getting any response...He lowered himself into the water ...the man relaxed once the garda took hold of him and said that he couldn't feel his arms or legs. He said that his uncle had died the previous day and he had decided to 'end it all' ....the man had been in the river for 30 minutes and was unconscious when removed.
- The man told the taxi driver that he was going to the river to jump in and kill himself.
- The two gardai were instructed to go to the quayside where a man was threatening to jump into the river. On arrival they saw the man standing on a steel ladder going down into the river. The man shouted to them to keep back, that ' he was fed up with life and was going to end it all.' The gardai spoke to him trying to calm him down but he appeared to get more agitated and he climbed further down the ladder. Then he started to cry..
- She entered the water and on reaching the youth explained what she was going to do. He was tired by this time and didn't resist being rescued.

- Two gardai in a patrol car received a call that a man was sitting on a bridge. On arrival at the bridge they saw the man with his feet dangling over the side of the bridge. They approached the man and spoke to him but he just muttered a few incoherent words to them and jumped into the river.
- On arrival at the bridge they saw the man sitting with his legs dangling over the side. As they approached he shouted to them to keep back or he would jump. One of the gardai recognized him and attempted to talk to him when suddenly without warning the man jumped into the river.
- He succeeded in locating the man under the bridge and noted that he was in a weakened state. He talked to the man continuously in an effort to keep him conscious.
- Cries for help were heard coming from the river in the early hours of the morning. The gardai were called and they found a woman in the water clinging to a branch in a part of the river away from walkways. When rescued the woman refused to give her name or to explain how she got where she was.
- The gardai had been informed that a man had jumped into the river and when they arrived at the scene they saw a body floating in the middle of the wide river and thought it was a corpse. A young garda entered the river and swam to the body only to realize on reaching it that the man was alive and conscious and didn't want to come out. The garda managed to persuade him to allow himself to be rescued. Reluctantly the man agreed to leave the river. A few weeks later he wrote to the young garda thanking him for rescuing him.
- Three gardai answered a call that a woman had jumped into the river – it was evening time. On arrival they found a woman in distress at the end of a ladder in wet underclothing at the waters edge. She was crying and stated that she wanted to be left alone to die. They told her to keep hold of the ladder. As one of the gardai descended the ladder the woman became hysterical. Another garda – a female- talked to the woman trying to both calm her down and distract her at the same time as her colleague on the ladder managed to slip down into the water under the woman. By the time the woman realized what had happened he had pulled himself up the ladder underneath her and pinned her to it.
- ..they drove to the bridge where they saw the two men in the water. The men had separated with one drifting down river. One garda ran down steps at the quayside and shouted at the nearest man to swim towards him. The man did as he was told and when he was within reaching distance the garda grabbed him and pulled him to safety.
- The garda proceeded to remove some of his clothing and shoes and with the assistance of a rope obtained by a colleague he lowered himself into the river. He succeeded in locating the man under the bridge.... He tied the rope around the man but an attempt to have him lifted out of the water failed. He then towed the man back under the bridge to one of the pillars where there was a small ledge. Using the ledge and a lifering he kept the man afloat until the rescue boat arrived when the man was lifted into the boat.

## **Appendix 11**

### **Rescue techniques used**

- The garda lowered himself into the water and managed to manoeuvre himself under the man and use his shoulder to push him up the ladder where his colleague grabbed him.
- ..they drove to the bridge where they saw the two men in the water. The men had separated with one drifting down river. One garda ran down steps at the quayside and shouted at the nearest man to swim towards him. The man did as he was told and when he was within reaching distance the garda grabbed him and pulled him to safety. Meanwhile the other garda had located a lifebuoy and threw it at the other man but he was unable to catch it. The current was very strong and the man was drifting into the open harbour so the garda removed some of his clothing and jumped into the river. He swam towards the

man who at this stage was motionless. He caught hold of the man and began swimming towards the riverbank.

- The garda proceeded to remove some of his clothing and shoes and with the assistance of a rope obtained by a colleague he lowered himself into the river. He succeeded in locating the man under the bridge.... He tied the rope around the man but an attempt to have him lifted out of the water failed. He then towed the man back under the bridge to one of the pillars where there was a small ledge. Using the ledge and a lifering he kept the man afloat until the rescue boat arrived when the man was lifted into the boat.
- He waded chest high in freezing water to pull the young man to safety overcoming the strong currents in the river which was in flood at the time.
- The garda stripped to the waist and jumped into the river. A rope was lowered to him. He swam under the two persons with it and surfaced next to the woman (the original casualty) and tied the rope around her waist. She was pulled ashore by his colleague. He then assisted the elderly man to the wall and pushed him up to within reach of his colleague.
- “ When I swam closer I saw a man having difficulty staying afloat – he was in real trouble. I’ve had lifesaving training so I knew what to do. When I got close to him he was really panicking and he grabbed me by the neck. I eventually managed to calm him down and bring him to the shore.”
- Two garda units arrived and a garda entered the river and held the man’s head in order to keep him afloat.

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