

inTribute



Parker Turner: An Exemplary Cave Diver

R.W. Bill Hamilton

On 1991 November 17, veteran cave diver Parker Turner, 39, was killed in a freak flow reversal in a water-filled cave known as Indian Springs, located near Tallahassee in northeast Florida. While Parker and his teammate Bill Gavin were exploring deep into the cave a change in hydrostatic pressure caused the exit to be blocked. There is more to the story, but the important part is that it opened up a bit in time for Gavin to get to his next gas tank and out,* but it was too late for Parker. The geological forces at work that caused the phenomenon are under investigation.

My purpose is to say a word about Parker. I am not the person to classify his record of accomplishment as a cave diver, but I can talk about him as a person. Parker came to be a very close personal friend of mine. He got me into this cave diving business about five years ago as a decompression consultant, and he taught me the little I know about it. He constantly challenged me with planning for difficult missions, and occasionally fed my ego by calling me up with a question on diving physiology that I could answer. I welcomed his insightful stories, and learned a great deal from the questions and problems he posed.

Parker never finished college, but he was one of the most polished professionals I have known. He was an absolutely fabulous instructor. A born pedagogue, he had the right demeanor and attitude to teach how things should be done, as well as superb knowledge about what to do or not do. He taught well, and his students knew that. When a stranger calls me with a request, nothing he can say about his skill level does as much good as to tell me he was trained by Parker Turner.

Parker was extremely safety conscious. He was engaged in a dangerous sport, but he did it as well as it can be done—in fact it took something like an earthquake to do him in. When he and his companions went on one of their challenging penetrations I worried a lot about them, but I always felt confident that Parker was going to do it right. Parker was generous. He organized his resources in such a way that he could donate his time to the Academic Diving Program at Florida State University, supplemented by some teaching and funded projects. That is dedication.

Parker was a good family man. His passing leaves a big gap in his little family, but he loved them so much one did not actually have to watch him work to know how careful he was; he would never take an unnecessary risk because of them. Parker had a somewhat wry sense of humor. I knew that if someone in his world of diving did something silly I would get a most entertaining report about it. He was uncomfortable saying bad things about others, but he also had a rather low threshold of tolerance for incompetence or the lack of attention to safety by others; this led to some interesting discussions. He was terribly concerned when someone else did something stupid because he thought it cast the whole cave diving community in a bad light, all of which makes the irony of his death a lot harder to take. We are going to miss him a lot.

A Parker A. Turner Memorial Fund has been established and will provide support for graduate students doing work in underwater speleology. Contributions and information requests should be addressed to: Parker A. Turner Memorial Scholarship, c/o Annette Weglinski, Florida State University, College of Arts and Sciences B-155, Tallahassee, Florida 32306