



0. LIFE and DEATH at the OIL RIG - Story Preface

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After an initial explosion which killed 11 of 126 workers aboard *Deepwater Horizon*, the offshore oil rig—which was positioned in the Gulf of Mexico—had another massive explosion on April 22, 2010. This photo depicts the second explosion which caused the rig to sink. Click on the image for a full-page view.

Mike Williams had no choice but to jump from the burning oil rig. [He describes](#) his ten-stories fall:

I remember closing my eyes and sayin' a prayer, and asking God to tell my wife and my little girl that Daddy did everything he could and if, if I survive this, it's for a reason. I made those three steps, and I pushed off the end of the rig. And I fell for what seemed like forever. A lotta things go through your mind.

Williams had the presence of mind to [jump feet first](#):

I went down way, way below the surface, obviously. And when I popped back up, I felt like, "Okay, I've made it." But I feel this God-awful burning all over me. And I'm thinking, "Am I on fire?" You know, I just don't know. So I start doin' the only thing I know to do, swim. I gotta start swimmin', I gotta get away from this thing. I could tell I was floatin' in oil and grease and, and diesel fuel. I mean, it's just the smell and the feel of it.

Williams saw the [water on fire](#). In his fear, he began to think he might have been better-off staying on the platform:

And I remember lookin' under the rig and seein' the water on fire. And I thought, "What have you done? You were dry, and you weren't covered in oil up there, now you've jumped and you've made this, and you've landed in oil. The fire's gonna come across the water, and you're gonna burn up." And I thought, "You just gotta swim harder."

So I swam, and I kicked and I swam and I kicked and I swam as hard as I could until I remember not feelin' any more pain, and I didn't hear anything. And I thought, "Well, I must have burned up, 'cause I don't feel anything, I don't hear anything, I don't smell anything. I must be dead."

*And I remember a real faint voice of, "Over here, over here." I thought, "What in the world is that?" And the next thing I know, he grabbed my lifejacket and flipped me over into this small open bow boat. I didn't know who he was, I didn't know where he'd come from, I didn't care. I was now out of the water. * * (See 60 Minutes' Program Transcript, at [page 4](#).)*

Eleven other people were not so fortunate. Adding to the anguish of their families is the fact that their bodies have never been recovered.

The *Deepwater Horizon* Eleven are:

Jason Anderson - age 35

Dale Burkeen - age 37

Donald Clark - age 48

Stephen Curtis - age 40

Gordon Jones - age 28

Roy Wyatt Kemp - age 27

Karl Dale Kleppinger - age 38

Blair Manuel - age 56

Dewey Revette - age 48

Shane Roshto - age 22

Adam Weise - age 24

Adding to the anguish of the survivors, who were mostly aboard the *Damon B. Bankston* after being rescued from the burning rig, was the fact that they were ordered (by the Coast Guard) to stay in the area for such a long time:

Sitting there hour after hour watching the conflagration with all its cascading smaller explosions was "one of the most painful things we could have ever done," said Randy Ezell [Deepwater Horizon's senior toolpusher].

"To stay on location and watch the rig burn. Those guys that were on there were our family. It would be like seeing your children or your brothers or sisters perish in that manner. And that—that put some mental scarring in a lot of people's heads that will never go away. I wish that we could, to the bare minimum, have moved away from the location or something where we didn't just have to sit there and review that many hours. That was extremely painful." (See "Report to the President," at pages 34-35 of the online PDF version.)

At 1:27 AM on Thursday morning—about 28 hours after the rig exploded and their crewmates died—Horizon's survivors were finally allowed to step ashore at their home base of Port Fourchon, Louisiana.

They were met with a table of forms, company managers, uniformed officials ... and ... portable toilets, lining the docks, waiting for them to self-administer drug tests. (See *Black Beaches and Bayous: The BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Disaster*, edited by Lisa A. Eargle and Ashraf Esmail, at page 81.)

While the shocked and filth-covered survivors were still at sea, corporate lawyers were assembling on land. Among other things, they were drafting a document for the survivors to sign. Among the words, in this waiver, were these:

I was not a witness to the incident requiring the evacuation [of Deepwater Horizon] and have no first-hand or personal knowledge regarding the incident

I was not injured as a result of the incident or evacuation.

Following a catastrophic explosion and forty sleepless hours, many survivors signed the document. Some later said they'd felt coerced into doing so. (Move this video forward to 1:58 for that discussion.)

According to one of the experts (Dr. Bob Bea), who was asked to investigate the accident, if Transocean's plan been followed, Deepwater Horizon's explosion may not have occurred:

In finishing the well, the plan was to have a subcontractor, Halliburton, place three concrete plugs, like corks, in the column. The Transocean manager wanted to do this with the column full of heavy drilling fluid - what drillers call "mud" - to keep the pressure down below contained. But the BP manager wanted to begin to remove the "mud" before the last plug was set. That would reduce the pressure controlling the well before the plugs were finished.

Had the "mud" remained in the column, according to this analysis, there wouldn't have been a blowout. Because there was a blowout - however it was caused - eleven people died, others were injured, the rig sank after it exploded and oil - via three original leaks, gushing from the uncapped well - began flowing, unchecked, into the Gulf of Mexico.

**** NOTE** - Mike Williams, who earned \$80,000 a year doing his job for Transocean, filed a lawsuit against Transocean, BP and Halliburton nine days after the explosion. His complaint alleges that all three companies were responsible, in various ways, for the disaster on board Deepwater Horizon. He is seeking \$6 million in compensation.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/LIFE-and-DEATH-at-the-OIL-RIG-Deepwater-Horizon-Disaster-in-the-Gulf>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/LIFE-and-DEATH-at-the-OIL-RIG-Deepwater-Horizon-Disaster-in-the-Gulf>





Deepwater Horizon Victim - Jason Anderson

Quoted passages from *Bloomberg*.

Image online, courtesy Transocean's condolences web site.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Deepwater-Horizon-Victim-Jason-Anderson>



Deepwater Horizon Victim - Dale Burkeen

Image online, courtesy Transocean's condolences web site.

Quoted passages from the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Clarion-Ledger*.

Passages quoting Burkeen's cousin, from *WTOK, News 11*.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Deepwater-Horizon-Victim-Dale-Burkeen>



Deepwater Horizon Victim - Donald Clark

Image online, courtesy Transocean's condolences web site.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Deepwater-Horizon-Victim-Donald-Clark>



Deepwater Horizon Victim - Stephen Curtis

Image online, courtesy Transocean's condolences web site.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Deepwater-Horizon-Victim-Stephen-Curtis>



Deepwater Horizon Victim - Gordon Jones

Image of Gordon Jones with his son Stafford, online courtesy Transocean's condolences web site. The picture was taken on April 15, 2010.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Deepwater-Horizon-Victim-Gordon-Jones>



Deepwater Horizon Victim - Karl Dale Kleppinger

Image online, courtesy Transocean's condolences web site.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Deepwater-Horizon-Victim-Karl-Dale-Kleppinger>



Deepwater Horizon Victim - Shane Roshto

Image online, courtesy Transocean's condolences web site.

Statement of Natalie Roshto, online courtesy Committee on Energy and Commerce, U.S. House of Representatives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Deepwater-Horizon-Victim-Shane-Roshto>



Deepwater Horizon Victim - Roy Wyatt Kemp

Image online, Memorial Page at [Young's Funeral Home web site](#).

Referenced information from the *Natchez Democrat* story, 2 May 2010, and Young's Funeral Home.

Statement of Courtney Kemp, online courtesy Committee on Energy and Commerce, U.S. House of Representatives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Deepwater-Horizon-Victim-Roy-Wyatt-Kemp>



Deepwater Horizon Victim - Blair Manuel

Image online, courtesy Transocean's condolences web site.

Quoted passages from NPR.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Deepwater-Horizon-Victim-Blair-Manuel>



Deepwater Horizon Victim - Dewey Revette

Image online, courtesy Transocean's condolences web site.

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Deepwater Horizon Victim - Adam Weise

Image online, courtesy Transocean's condolences web site.

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