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David Willman of the Vigilant Volunteer Fire Company recovers in a hospital bed.

Injured Firefighter Recounts Fight For Life After Ill-Fated Rescue Bid

By TOM ERNST

David Willman credits "a little bit of luck and a lot of God's help" for his being alive today after a boating accident on rain-swollen Buffalo Creek in West Seneca claimed two lives Sunday night, including that of another firefighter involved in the rescue.

"I know I'm lucky to be alive. I just feel bad about the other fireman," Willman said from his bed at Our Lady of Victory Hospital in Lackawanna, where he is being treated for injuries suffered in the rescue. For Willman, 24, a volunteer firefighter for the Vigilant Volunteer Fire Company of West Seneca, what began as an attempt to save two boaters

turned into a struggle to save himself after one boater was pulled to safety and it became apparent that the other boater, a young woman, was dead.

Another volunteer firefighter, Louis Flury, 23, of the Union Volunteer Fire Company, died after he was pulled from the creek.

"We weren't close friends, but I knew him and knew he was a damn good fireman," Willman said of Flury.

Willman was listed in fair condition this morning but said he expected to be discharged later today.

He said he's "exhausted" and is being

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Boater Killed; A Firefighter Dies in Rescue

By WALTER FUSZARA

A 19-year-old woman drowned and a 23-year-old volunteer firefighter who had saved her male companion also died Sunday evening after a boating accident in Buffalo Creek.

The dead firefighter was identified as Louis Flury of 2 Preble Court, West Seneca. West Seneca police today identified the drowned woman as Lee Gerwitz, 19, of 12 19th St., Buffalo. Police identified the rescued boater as Mark Cottone, 19, of 99 French Lea, West Seneca.

The woman drowned after the small boat on which she and Cottone were cruising overturned when it plunged over the small falls off the foot of Lexington Green in West Seneca.

Flury, who died later in Mercy Hospital, and another volunteer firefighter were swept into the fast-flowing creek during the rescue attempt. The creek was swollen by a storm just before dawn Sunday. Cottone was listed in fair condition today in the Erie County Medical Center after being transferred from Mercy Hospital Sunday night. Our Lady of Victory Hospital, Lackawanna, reported that the second firefighter, David Willman, was in fair condition today.

Another boating accident — on Cazenovia Creek at about noon Sunday — ended safely for two rafters who were tossed into the storm-swollen creek.

In the Buffalo Creek accident, Lt. John Miskovski of West Seneca said neighbors heard cries for help and found the young woman and man near an overturned boat at the base of the falls. Police were notified of the accident at 6:08 p.m.

"They were caught in the undertow at the base of the falls," Miskovski said. "Both were wearing life preservers but were being continuously knocked under by the strong pull."

Residents said the creek was about 12 feet deep at the base of the falls because of the storm.

"Two firefighters went out on lifelines to rescue them," Miskovski said. After an unsuccessful attempt, rescuers managed to get a float and tow line around the young man, who was pulled to shore, police said.

The other firefighter was knocked over and caught in the turbulence, the lieutenant said. The first firefighter went to his rescue and secured a line by which he was pulled to shore.

"The firefighter who rescued the young man and the other firefighter was himself swept downstream before he headed toward

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