

Hazing Rite 'Burial' Kills Jersey Student

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By Joseph F. Sullivan Special to The New York Times

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LONG BRANCH, N. J., Nov. 12—William Flowers, a 19-year-old Monmouth College student, suffocated early today when a sandy "grave" he was forced to dig in the rainswept beach as part of a fraternity initiation collapsed as he was lying in it.

The victim of the hazing incident, was reported to have been the first black allowed to pledge for the fraternity.

Seven fraternity members who were said to have ordered the initiation rite were arrested and charged with manslaughter.

Although the victim managed to kick his legs nearly clear as sand potted into the five-foot-deep hole, neither the students at the scene nor the first patrol man to arrive were able to extricate him from the heavy, wet mound of sand that covered him, according to a police spokesman.

It was not until a fire truck and first-aid squad arrived that Mr. Flowers was pulled from the hole, more than 15 minutes after the cave-in. He was unconscious.

Dr. Stanley Becker, a Monmouth physician, pronounced Mr. Flowers dead at the Monmouth Medical Center at 1:50 A.M. He said death had been caused by asphyxiation due to "aspiration of sand and compression of the chest."



Credit...The New York Times Archives

The police said the young man was the first black student allowed, to pledge for the small, but active, Zeta Beta Tau fraternity, one of seven fraternities and two sororities at Monmouth College.

The seven fraternity members who reportedly had ordered Mr. Flowers and four other pledges to dig graves in the beach sand and to lie in them were charged with manslaughter and released in \$2,500 bail each for a preliminary hearing Nov. 25 by Monmouth County Judge M. Raymond McGowan.

Detective Capt. Michael A. Irene identified the fraternity members as Howaid P. Raff, 21 years old; Richard A. Pierce, also 21, and Glen A. Hart, 19, all residing, at the fraternity house at 310 Ocean Avenue; Brian M. Seiler, 19, of Paramus; Robert Caemmerer Jr., 19, of Wall Township; Frank E. Yavalone, 19, of Neptune, and Corey S. Wilson, 19 of Oceanside, L.I.

The death during a prohibited type of “hazing” ritual shocked students and college officials and those who had known Mr. Flowers when he was an honor student at Christian Brothers Academy in nearby Lincroft.

Dr. Richard J. Stonesifer, Monmouth College president, called the student's death “a senseless tragedy” and called for an end to fraternity initiations at all colleges “if we are to be civilized, truly civilized.”

“Many of us hoped that World War II had put an end to the traditional fraternity hazing nonsense,” Dr. Stonesifer said in a statement. “Indeed, the aftermath of World War II, Korea and then Vietnam did put an end to most of it; men who had been through the hell of war didn't put up with the adolescent rites of passage. But now we seem, perhaps to be reviving the old initiatory rites, and with it the inevitable catastrophes that always occur.”

Dr. Stonesifer also expressed concern for students who conduct initiation rites designed to test “endurance of pain and fright.” School regulations specifically ban rites that include “abusive mental or physical activities.”

Flag at Half-Staff

“Who's to blame?” the college president asked.” Well, in the first instance a group of young people who didn't think sufficiently. But in placing the blame on them, all of us must look to a culture that glorifies the absurd.”

The school flag was ordered flown at half-staff through the scheduled funeral for Mr. Flowers on Friday. The young man, who was majoring in chemistry, transferred to Monmouth College in September from St. Peter's College in Jersey City.

He was described by those who knew him as friendly and outgoing and a neat dresser.

“He was very popular, or he wouldn't have been asked to pledge for the fraternity,” one fellow student said.

Dr. Marilyn Parker, the head of the college chemistry department, said Mr. Flowers was “extremely bright, but he was all wrapped up in joining that fraternity.”

The hazing incident cast a pall over active supporters of the fraternities, who recalled how Zeta Beta Tau, with only 15 active members, had organized the annual dance marathons at the college over the last three years that raised more than \$25,000 for charity.

Brother Benedict, guidance director at the Christian Brothers Academy, was shocked by the news of the hazing death.

“Something like this shakes everyone after it happens, but it doesn't bring back the life,” he said.

He recalled that Mr. Flowers was an honor student who took 10 accelerated mathematics and science courses in addition to playing football and intramural basketball and joining the chess club at the academy.

“He was not an extrovert or an introvert,” Brother Benedict said. “He was friendly and got along with all of his classmates.”

The Long Branch police who have tried to reconstruct the events surrounding the incident said that fraternity members and the five pledges, including Mr. Flowers, went to the beachfront area in front of the fraternity house sometime after midnight for the initiation ceremony.

The pledges were made to dig their own “graves” and forced to lie in them while the fraternity members tossed handfuls of sand on them, according to a police spokesman.

At about 1:15 A.M., as some of the fraternity members stood around the hole in which Mr. Flowers was lying, the walls collapsed, burying the student within seconds, the police said.

Mr. Flowers's mother, Dorothy E. Flowers of Neptune Township, has worked as a clerk in the township office of code enforcement for three years. The student is also survived by a brother, Curtis, 17.