

National Cave Rescue Commission
Caribbean Region

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Efrain MERCADO, Coordinator

Introduction

This year was productive in terms of training. At the same time it was sad because of the lost of one of our friends. We are recovering from that and looking for new ways to face this tragedy. At the end we are loaned to this planet, so to this life. But surely will keep doing our best to get the goals and to save lives.

National Seminar

NCRC National Seminar was held in the Ramey AFB, in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. It was successful and gives us an opportunity to measure our strengths and to work with those things that need improvement. We kept as close as possible to the budget and while there were no substantial earnings bills were paid and goals were met.

Certainly there are things that cannot be changed. Geography is one of those. There are no big national parks where the caves are but we managed to do our best, even including transportation. Realities are part of every nation and country, even in close counties. I think that our team truly deserves to be recognized for its hard working and for being there, where people really need them.

Puerto Rico is a real option for National Seminars. We proved that. It's time to get out of the micro cosmos and to deal with different caves and installations. It's time to get in the reality of a worldwide neighborhood. It's time to reassure the unexplored possibilities of training beyond our frontiers.

I would like to thank NCRC BORC and officials for their patience and for trusting us. There were students that do a lot of sacrifices to be there, especially those from mainland. They deserve my respect and recognition. I truly know that. I've been traveling to US from 1989. It's not easy but those students have commitment and this is what we are looking for.

So it's long travel...Folks, I've travel 20 hours in a plane following 7 hours by car to teach cave rescue in a place struggled by enormous financial problems and enjoy it. They have nothing but commitment and this is what we are looking for. Y'all' have it.

So if it's too cold in your place to teach, just remember that we have a warm and cozy place in our hearts in Puerto Rico for you.

Tragedy strikes us

On November 19, 2006, at approximately 1155 hrs., Rio Camuy takes the life of our beloved Paramedic and Cave Rescuer Wilfredo Lopez Luquis. To those who did not know him, let me talk straight forward about him: he was an extraordinary caver and friend that years ago tell me that he wants to be cave rescue instructor. I just tell him: join our team and follow the instructions.

Wilfredo finished his IQ level in Aguadilla in April, his last national. That day of November he was guiding a group of local tourist thru Rio Camuy, at Resurgencia area (resurgence). Somewhere at morning he was advised by one of his teammates to change to another area. The river roars at 200 cubic feet per second. But he was not sure of that. They've traveled long distance to get this extreme experience.

Rio Camuy is essentially a channel with walls up to 40 ft high, the day before it was raining hard in the river basin. The group was composed of 13 people, most of the youngsters and some kids. Three of them were adults. They rappel the 40 ft wall down a river ledge. The rope was long enough that they decided to do a body belay for one of the guides to look better at both sides of the river while being in the water. They need a escape route. Carlos clip on, using his caving harness and move near a 6 ft waterfall (hydraulic). The fact is that they do not want the group to be exposed to that area.

For some reason we really do not understand Wilfredo decides to have a look and to clip into the belay line. He was advised three times not to clip in and the consequences of doing that. He did it and suddenly falls into the water. The tension on the line makes Carlos to fall also and in seconds both were down behind the waterfall hydraulic.

Carlos managed a way to make a rooster tail over his back in order to get a breath. Wilfredo do not have the chance. Both struggle for their lives but Wilfredo did not succeed. Carlos tries 5 times to reach Wilfredo while attached to the line and in three occasion touch him but was unable to bring him back to the surface. At the same time the tension makes the line get stuck and the belayer was not able to take the line out of the biner on time to free them. Eventually that happened, but was too late.

Carlos and Wilfredo were washout and another guide jump into the water to help. Carlos managed to untie himself and Wilfredo and take him up a rock ledge, starting CPR but he do not respond. Carlos get out of the river, ran and make a phone call. The message was clear: there was an accident and Wilfredo drowns.

It was 1209 hrs. I respond and at the same time activate the emergency system. We managed to bring up 13 people and to recover his body later on. It was long day. All his friends, the ones that for years have practiced and work with them were there. The recovery runs smooth and on time, the same way we know he will like. We stopped at 4:00 PM and make a minute of silence to honor him. I was supposed to have him back in the phone at that time informing that everything was fine. It was not.

Next 15 days were very difficult for me. We all need post trauma assistance and recovery and peace of mind was returning slowly. It's hard but it is life. We will remember him. A building was named Wilfredo Lopez Luquis, the one that belongs to the volunteer paramedics that he works for. A plaque should be posted sooner at his burial place and in Rio Camuy.

As Caribbean Region Coordinator I recommend BORG to name him instructor postumely to honor his memory. In the reality he was working hard for that and spends a lot of years working in Latin America and Puerto Rico.

Varia

Caribbean Region team decides not to have regional trainings this year. We will emphasize in river rescue, basic cave rescue operations and NASAR search and rescue. It does not mean we would not continue but certainly needs a break.

We will attend the 11th. UIS International Cave Rescue Congress to be held in Hungary in May. They also will invite Spanish cavers in order to have short and comprehensive training on European cave rescue techniques.

FEALC, UIS and FSUE will meet in Puerto Rico next August 2007. This is a great occasion for NCRC to get in contact with them and their rescue parties in order to have a sort of information exchange.