

'I couldn't pull him up': Wife's agony as she abandons her husband after he is shot by Mexican pirates while jet-skiing

By [Daily Mail Reporter](#)

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A young wife has told of her agony after she was forced to abandon her dying husband and flee for her life when the couple were attacked by Mexican pirates.

Tiffany Hartley, 29, said she and husband David, 30, were jet-skiing on a lake that straddles the U.S.-Mexico border when they were ambushed on Thursday.

Her husband was shot in the head, she said. When she leapt into the water to save him, the pirates began firing at her.

She then made the heart-wrenching decision to abandon her husband and flee to safety.



Impossible choice: Mrs Hartley tried to rescue her husband after he was shot in the head by pirates - but was forced to abandon his body when they began shooting at her



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Heartbreak: Tiffany and David Hartley in an undated image from Facebook. Mrs Hartley has spoken of her agony after she was forced to abandon her husband when he was shot by Mexican pirates

Yesterday search teams were combing the U.S. side of Falcon Lake in Texas for Mr Hartley's body - but authorities said he was being presumed dead.

His body has still not been found. American authorities are having to rely on Mexican police, who said they were unable to search as their boat's engine was missing.

Now Mrs Hartley is having to wait and hope that her husband's body floats over to the U.S. side of the lake.

Her devastating story emerged today.

She said the couple - who had been high school sweethearts, married for eight years - had been sight-seeing on their jet-skis when they were set upon by pirates in three speed boats.



Happy: The couple had been high school sweethearts and were married for eight years

'We saw that they had guns, so we started racing away from them,' she told the Denver Post.

But the pirates opened fire - and a bullet struck husband David in the back of the head.

He fell into the water, Mrs Hartley said.

She doubled back and flung herself into the water in an attempt to pull her husband on to her jet-ski. There was a bullet hole in his head, she said, and his body was limp.

She struggled, but his 250lbs body was too heavy for her 105lbs frame - and by then the pirates had reached them.

'I tried pulling him up but I couldn't,' she told the Denver Post, which said her voice was shaking.

Feeling she had no choice, she abandoned her husband and clambered back on to her jet-ski in a desperate bid to save her own life.

Bullets whizzed by her as the pirates opened fire once more, giving chase for what were the most harrowing moments of her life.



Tragedy: The couple had posted many photographs of their happy life on Facebook. Now Mrs Hartley is struggling to come to terms with her husband's death - and the loss of his body

A bass fisherman within sight said at least one boat followed her right into U.S. waters.

But she made it to the U.S. shoreline and phoned police.

Zapata County Sheriff Sigifredo Gonzalez said Mrs Hartley's story was so incredible that at first he wondered if she had concocted it as a cover story after murdering her husband himself.

But, he said, further investigation placed her in the clear.

He said she was unable to stop sobbing when he spoke with her on Thursday afternoon, and kept asking where her husband's body was.

'She was terrified,' he told the newspaper. 'At this time, I can safely say she had nothing to do with her husband's death.'

He said she told police that the couple rode their jet skis for sightseeing and to take pictures of a famous church in Old Guerrero.

They were riding back when they saw the armed gunmen on the boats, and immediately began racing back to U.S. waters.

Gonzalez said he had contacted the Mexican consulate to ask them to search for Hartley on its side of the lake - but their boat's motor had been removed.

'They are outgunned,' he said.



Popular spot: The Falcon Power Plant dam on the Rio Grande River between Texas and Mexico. The lake is popular with fishermen and sightseers, but authorities have been warning people away from it as attacks increased recently



Ambush: Tiffany Hartley has told police that she and husband David were jet-skiing in Falcon Lake when they were attacked by Mexican pirates. David was shot in the back of the head, she said. Search teams are combing the lake after he disappeared

Texas officials have been warning against activity on the lake after at least five reported run-ins with pirates this year. Previous hold-ups have never been deadly.

'I'm not trying to place the blame on her or him,' Gonzalez said. 'But we've told people not to go over there, and now this happens.'

He told the Post: 'When I asked if she knew how dangerous it was to go to Mexico, she quickly changed the subject.'

'I didn't pursue it. I didn't want her to feel guilty.'

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department spokesman Mike Cox said Friday that the state planned to issue a fresh warning to boaters about staying on the U.S. side of the lake.

The last warning came in May, and some campers on the lake have taken to arming themselves.

Falcon Lake is a dammed section of the Rio Grande that straddles the border. The border is marked by 14 partially submerged concrete towers that mark the Rio Grande's path before the lake was created in 1954.

Cox said Mrs Hartley estimated that the shooting took place about five to six miles from the Texas shoreline where she parked and called for help.

In April, pirates robbed another group of boaters who also went to Old Guerrero to see the church.

Cox said the most recent reported pirate sighting had been August 31, when boaters saw gunmen riding a small skiff with 'Game Wardin' misspelled in duct tape on the side of the vessel.

Cox said it appeared the pirates were trying to imitate state game warden boats they have seen patrolling the lake.

Gonzalez has previously chalked up the dangerous waters as the product of fighting between rival Mexican drug gangs.

Violence on the Mexican side of the lake has been climbing for several months, as a fractured partnership between the region's dominant Gulf Cartel and its former enforcers, the Zetas, plunged many of the area's Mexican border cities into violence.

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Her story sounds a bit suspicious to me.

- Bill the Builder, Bristol, 2/10/2010 16:57

Hmmm...I watch too much Law & Order, but I think something isn't quite right here.

Kate, US, 2/10/2010 19:52

I don't accuse her of lying but there's something missing in the story. She knew it was not a safe area so she ignored the story and changed the subject.

- Jeannette Clemson, Pennsylvania, 03/10/2010 03:24

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- Elise, St Augustine, Florida, 2/10/2010

Where in Erin's comment does she say she is an expert on mexican border problems.

Of course she knows about the problems on the border she lives in the USA and everyone knows what the problems are.

I'm surprised that you don't.

- K. Thornton, OK, USA, 03/10/2010 03:20

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Political Correctness is preventing the USA from cracking down on Border violence. The Mexican Government is so corrupt that they don't know who in their police and armed forces is affiliated with drug lords. Because of Political correctness our President will do nothing about Illegals. Now it is spilling over into the USA. What does this administration do? Have Attorney General sue Arizona because they pass a law that allows to check for Illegals. It is a mess and this incident is a harbinger of things to come.

- bernard expat, myrtle Beach, SC, 03/10/2010 03:01

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- Bill the Builder, Bristol, 2/10/2010 15:57

When all the investigations are over you will probably be proven right.

Drugs couldn't get into the country with out someone on this side of the border helping them.

- K. Thornton, OK, USA, 03/10/2010 02:56

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Her story sounds a bit suspicious to me.

- Bill the Builder, Bristol, 2/10/2010 15:57

You really are a twit.

- Max Wilson, Dallas,Tx., 03/10/2010 02:25

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Mexico sucks!!

- Marion, San Diego, USA, 03/10/2010 02:21

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