

# Emerald Society Pipes and Drums Medal

## FIREFIGHTER THOMAS F. SULLIVAN

### MARINE COMPANY 1

September 2, 2008, Box 352, Hudson River, Manhattan, 300 feet off 1st Avenue, Hoboken, New Jersey

*Appointed to the FDNY on October 24, 1993. Previously assigned to Engine 93. Brother, FM Brian Sullivan, is assigned to BFI, City-Wide North Command. Member of the Emerald and Holy Name Societies. Recipient of several unit citations. Holds a Captain's License from the United States Coast Guard. Resides in Port Washington, Long Island, with his wife, Sue.*



The members assigned to the FDNY Marine Division have a unique job. They perform firefighting duties onboard various marine vessels and along the waterfront, effect numerous rescues and provide assistance to people in the water. These members provide long periods of patrol; they never let their guard down because the unexpected can occur at anytime.

On September 2, 2008, the members of Marine 1 heard a report over the SOD radio of a person in the Hudson River, north of the Lackawanna pier in New Jersey. This location is almost directly across from Marine 1's quarters, so Captain Richard Johnson radioed the Manhattan dispatcher that they were responding, using Marine 1's smaller, 27-foot Safe boat.

As they left the dock in Marine 1-Alpha, the members heard a report from the Hoboken Fire and Rescue over the VHF radio, confirming the prior report. Additional reports indicated that this person was distraught and involved in an incident with the Hoboken Police Department. He had jumped into the river, trying to evade the police.

Aboard Marine 1-A were Captain Johnson, who was monitoring the various radios, FF Michael Krol, who was piloting the vessel, and FF Thomas F. Sullivan, who was donned in a Mustang Cold Water Rescue Suit and tying the necessary knots for attaching himself to a tether line. When the boat arrived at the reported location, members of the Hoboken Fire and Police Departments were pointing to the area where the individual had jumped into the water. The person then was swept under a pier by the fast-moving north-bound current.

The large pier at the location was under construction and measured approximately 300 by 150 feet. There were no lights and it had many work-type floating docks around its perimeter, making the fireboat's approach difficult. The pier's surface was dangerous, preventing the land-based units from operating on it. The Hoboken Fire Department (HFD) also had a small boat and Captain Johnson coordinated the positioning of the two vessels.

FF Krol carefully piloted Marine 1-A toward the last noted location of the victim. Maneuvering slowly in the tight space was even more difficult because the high tide allowed a space of only 18 inches between the water and underside of the pier. Captain Johnson shined a light under the pier when he saw the outline of a person struggling to stay afloat, about 100 feet away. He made several attempts to call out to him, but received no response.

Fearing that time was running out for this struggling and fatigued individual before he would go underwater, Captain Johnson made some final adjustments to the tether line attached to FF Sullivan and had the Firefighter enter the water. FF Sullivan was fully aware of all the dangers--instability of the troubled victim, a fast current, low headroom, construction hazards of the large pier and operating in total darkness--involved with this rescue, but he entered the water anyway.

FF Sullivan swam to the victim while negotiating through debris and tight spaces. He found a male barely afloat, clinging to a piling. The rescuer brought a torpedo float can with him and used it to gain control of the male, keeping his head above the water. FF Sullivan decided to swim with the victim another 25 feet to exit from under the pier to the HFD boat, rather than make the grueling trek back to Marine 1-A.

The victim acted erratically and actually broke free from FF Sullivan's grip--nearly submerging--until the rescuer was able to regain control of him and calm him down. FF Sullivan was so far away that Captain Johnson could not see him or the

victim and the tether line was nearing its end. Fortunately, FF Sullivan and his victim reached the HFD fireboat and were assisted onboard. Out of danger, the victim was brought to Jersey City Medical Center for treatment.

FF Sullivan's quick and deliberate actions in dangerous conditions saved the life of a distraught drowning victim. For his heroic actions, FF Thomas F. Sullivan is awarded the Emerald Society Pipes and Drums Medal.--AP



FF Tom Sullivan was among the first responders removing passengers from the plane that landed in the Hudson River on January 15, 2009.