

Swimmer drowns in quarry

By GEORGE OLSEN
Of The Morning Call

A Slatington man drowned yesterday while swimming in an abandoned quarry outside the borough.

Michael Williams, 19, of 614 W. Washington St. was swimming with two friends in the Pennsylvania Quarry at about 12:30 p.m. when he "experienced some sort of distress," said Trooper Ralph D. Fiorena of the state police criminal investigation unit.

The two friends tried to rescue Williams but were unsuccessful, Fiorena said. They ran into Slatington for help after Williams disappeared beneath the water.

Firefighters from five boroughs and workers from the Red Cross and the Lehigh County Civil Defense unit were called, but most could only sit and wait for divers to arrive and search for Williams' body.

The quarry reportedly is 200 feet deep in places.

Lehigh County Coroner Robert Weir said an autopsy confirmed Williams had drowned.

Eight men in a rubber boat criss-crossed the water's surface and looked for Williams' body as spectators watched from the quarry's walls. In the distance, a bulldozer ploughed a road through the forest for the emergency vehicles.

Fiorena interviewed Williams' friends — one 19 years old, the other 15 — in a small grove of trees while firefighters stood nearby talking.

"You can't keep the kids out of the quarries," one firefighter said bitterly. "They keep saying, 'It couldn't happen to me.'"

About 2 p.m., a state police helicopter made several low passes over the quarry, trying to sight the body



Morning Call photo—Bob Houck

Drowning victim's body recovered from Slatington quarry

from the air. State police divers arrived soon afterwards.

Four divers slowly descended into the water but soon reappeared. Below 25 feet, the water was pitch-black, and they needed lights to explore the many small underwater caves.

During the second dive, they found Williams' body on a ledge 30 feet underwater.

On a bluff overlooking the divers, four teen-age boys stood silently watching the divers drag the body aboard the rubber boat. Nearby a slightly older teen-age couple clung to each other, crying softly.

Down the road four teen-age girls watched the fire trucks and police cars drive away after the body had been picked up. "I'm not going near the quarries any more," one said.