



Written by on October 8, 2010

Search for Victim of Pirate Attack on Mexico-Texas Border

An article in the New York Times for October 7 summarized the backdrop behind the apparent killing of an American jet skier, David Michael Hartley, on September 30, as he and his wife, Tiffany, were riding across Falcon Lake, which straddles the U.S.-Mexican border.

In the article, headlined “A Fishing Paradise Gains a Deadly Reputation,” the writer observed: For decades, Falcon Lake was known primarily as an anglers’ paradise, a tranquil reservoir straddling the border with Mexico, where a clever fisherman could catch enormous largemouth bass. These days, however, the lake is developing a reputation for something else: piracy.



As a prolonged conflict between drug dealers and the government has eroded civil order in Mexico, gangs of armed thugs in speedboats have begun robbing fishermen and tourists on the lake.

Last week, gunmen in three boats reportedly shot and killed an American as he and his wife toured the lake on Jet Skis.

The *Times* report quoted Mrs. Hartley’s father, Bob Young, who said that his daughter and her husband had traveled on their Jet Skis to the village of Guerrero on the Mexican side of the lake to take photographs of an old church there. Ironically, the couple had just moved to McAllen, Texas, after finishing a two-year job assignment in Reynosa, Mexico, and their primary reason for leaving was to escape the increasing violence south of the border. The couple planned to move back to their native state of Colorado soon and wanted to take a final excursion on the lake before leaving.

“[Michael told [Tiffany], ‘We might as well go and check out this old church and take the Jet Skis out one more time,’” Young said. “It was just a fluke. Wrong place, wrong time.”

Mrs. Hartley told reporters in interviews that after they visited the church and started back across the lake, armed men in three small boats raced toward them from shore. The couple tried to speed away, but the gunmen opened fire and Mr. Hartley was shot in the head.

She tried to haul her unconscious husband onto her own Jet Ski but was not strong enough. “I tried pulling him up, and you cannot imagine how awful it was not being able to help him,” she told ABC News.

Authorities and others fear that the Hartleys may have inadvertently entered an area of the lake, part of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, that is a battleground between two rival drug gangs, the Gulf Cartel and the Zeta.

Over a week later, neither Michael Hartley’s body nor his Jet Ski has been found. AP, citing Mexican authorities, [reported](#) that hundreds of people using speedboats, helicopters, and all-terrain vehicles have been searching for Hartley, but that the search had temporarily been suspended because of



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threats of ambush from drug gangs.

The report quoted U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, who told reporters about the ambush threat that put a hold on the search: "When darkness was falling [on October 6], they got word that there might be an ambush. People that are trying to do their job on the Mexican side are facing a risk, they're right inside the hornets' nest ... they had to suspend the search."

Cuellar said the search resumed midmorning on October 7.

Texas Governor Rick Perry expressed a less understanding opinion about the interruption in the search for Hartley's body:

I don't think we're doing enough. When you call off the search the way they did ... and give as the reason because the drug cartels are in control of that part of the state, something's not right. We do not need to let our border continue to deteriorate from the standpoint of having drug cartels telling whether or not we can go in and bring the body of an American citizen who was killed. That is irresponsible.

Zapata County, Texas, Sheriff Sigifredo Gonzalez said he has sent word to the Zetas that he simply wants Hartley's body returned and that the gang need not fear prosecution from his office:

We cannot arrest anybody for what happened in Mexico, we cannot prosecute on the state level anybody for what happened in Mexico. We just want a body. I did send word to the drug cartel, the Zeta cartel in Mexico, I sent word to them unofficially. I can't tell you how but I sent word to them."

Gonzalez said he has not received a response to his plea.

In an interview on the CBS program [The Early Show](#), with co-anchor Harry Smith, Rep. Ted Poe, (R-Texas), said that he has made a request to the State Department to permit a U.S. search on the Mexican side.

The Mexican government said yes, then backed off and said, "No, we don't want the Americans over here." We need to use the American resources that we have, because that area of the lake is controlled by the Zetas, there is an island on that lake where the Zetas really operate, the drug cartels. If we mean business about trying to recover David Hartley's body we need American involvement and the Mexican government needs to be relentless to find it. They are intimidated now, they really won't go near the area where the Zetas operate.

Smith added, "We need to stop and pause a second because even the Mexican authorities themselves are clearly not in control. It's the drug cartel that is in control because ... the Mexican authorities backed away when they were threatened."

Poe agreed, saying, "That area of Falcon Lake on the Mexican side, all the way to the American edge of the water is controlled by the Zeta cartels. They bring those drugs into the United States, usually at night by high-speed boats, and they operate — that is their operation — and the Mexican government hasn't been able to stop them, won't stop them, refuses to or cannot, whatever the situation is, and they control that area. The government, neither government, controls that area, the drug cartels. And we're being held really hostage by the drug cartels on that area of the lake."

The [entire interview](#) lends insight into not only the Falcon Lake violence spree, but the overall issue of securing the U.S.-Mexican border against the increasing threat of crime posed by the Mexican drug cartels. The Texas congressman also expressed similar sentiments in another interview with [Fox News](#).



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With the U.S.-Mexican border as porous as it is, the spread of violence over to the U.S. side is inevitable — unless our federal government fulfills its constitutional mandate to defend our states against invasion, or allows the states to do the same, as Arizona has attempted.

Photo: Tiffany Hartley lays a wreath near the site where her husband, David Hartley, was shot last week, on Falcon Lake, Oct. 6, 2010 in Zapata,

Texas: AP Images



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