

Barrow boy survives freezing waters

A mixture of good luck, a keen eye and modern technology combined to keep two Barrow cousins alive two weeks ago.

The boys, Earnest and William Ekowana, were playing near the ice which is still just a few feet off the Barrow shoreline when 14-year-old Earnest fell in.

According to Barrow Volunteer Fire Chief Tom Opie, William tried to rescue him and also fell into the freezing water. A 15 year old girl walking by, Mary Beth Vandenberg, managed to pull the younger boy from the water but Earnest was pulled into an ice cave by fast-moving currents.

Other children ran to call the fire department and a crew of Emergency Medical Technicians arrived and began the search. Carl Hild, an EMT in Barrow for several years, said he watched for bubbles being released from the boy's trapped clothes and after a few minutes, when searchers were starting to look down the beach where the current would carry a body, he

saw bubbles.

Hild dove into the icy water and found the boy.

He was not breathing and when he was brought into the hospital his body temperature was 83 degrees according to Hild.

"Three years ago, no attempt to revive the boy would have been made," said the young EMT, "but from what we know about frozen water drowning, we kept on working on him."

The rescue personnel gave Earnest cardiopulmonary resuscitation all the way to the hospital and kept on working over him as warm packs were applied to his body. After more than an hour, a slight pulse was detected.

Inside of three hours, his pupils began to respond to light.

A Wien commercial passenger jet bound from Prudhoe Bay to Anchorage was diverted to Barrow voluntarily by the company and the boy was taken to the Alaska Native Treatment Center. He was released Tuesday.



CARL HILD

Hild said that the art of reviving persons who have "drowned" in freezing water has been developed tremendously in the past three years so that "we just keep working on people who have come out of frozen water."

He said the body immediately shuts down and shunts all blood to the brain to keep it functioning when it is quickly emerge in freezing water. It is this defense mechanism that kept the boy alive.