Virginia Firefighter Injured During Storm Dies
By Chase Purdy and Neil Harvey
The Roanoke Times, Va.
Boones Mill Firefighter/EMT John Echternach Jr. was injured Friday night when a tree fell on him while he was assisting a motorist during a windstorm.

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For a crew of Franklin County volunteer firefighters, it was a steady stream of emergency calls that kept their minds off of their grief Monday.

The Boones Mill Volunteer Fire Department lost one of its own Friday night in a windstorm that wreaked havoc across the region and state. Lt. John L. Echternach Jr. was driving down U.S. 220, responding to a fire, when he came upon a car crushed by a tree. It was the last call the Roanoke County man ever answered, said firefighter and friend Steve Mills.

Echternach, 54, pulled to a stop and began helping people from the car, Mills said. During the rescue, a gust of wind brought another tree to the ground. It struck Echternach, critically injuring him.
When another firefighter from Echternach's crew arrived on scene, Mills heard about his friend through radio traffic.

"I could just tell from Stan's voice on the radio that something was dead wrong," he said. "I was trying to get back to Boones Mill, but all the roads were blocked with trees. I could never make it. I never did make it to that scene. I regret that I couldn't."

Franklin County authorities said Echternach died at Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital early Monday morning. He left behind a wife and two adult children, Mills said.

Aside from his volunteer work, Echternach has practiced physical therapy since 1986.

Echternach worked as an academic coordinator of clinical education at Jefferson College of Health Sciences in Roanoke and an assistant professor in the physical therapist assistant department.

He joined the faculty in January, but officials said his family had a long history with the school.

"His father is part of the advisory board for the physical therapy program," said college spokesman Mark Lambert. "His wife taught with the program in different capacities for almost 20 years. They've been very involved with the college for quite a while."

Before joining the Boones Mill fire department, he served with the Clearbrook volunteer fire department from 1992 to 2003.

Mills said he expects a large number of public safety employees from across the region to take part in Echternach's memorial service, which the family has yet to fully arrange.

"There was just never any question that John would pull his duty," Mills remembered. "Even when it wasn't his duty night, there he was, 'Lieutenant Seven, marking en route.'"

It's a voice he'll miss.

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Rest in Peace, FF/EMT John Echternach Jr ...

My thoughts and prayers are with the Echternach family and brothers/sisters in the Boones Mill, VA, Fire-EMS Department.

May God keep you in His loving Hands during this time of sorrow and healing.

Daniel (former Kearsarge (PA) FF/EMT)

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Rest in peace my brother. May GOD be with all of your family and fellow firefighters.

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