



REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, 15/A

LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH ANNIVERSARIES FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER:

October 13, 2001
Jay Paul Jahnke
Captain - Station 2

October 19, 1971
Truxton Joseph Hathaway, Jr.
Fire Inspector - Training Academy

October 31, 1954
Delbert Harvey Sherfy
Chauffeur- Station 17

RETIREEES WHO HAVE RECENTLY DIED:

Eugene W. Pilkerton
served HFD 1966-2000. Died September 11, 2003

Eugene C. "Duke" Jahnke
served HFD 1955-1995. Died September 14, 2003

Fred P. Lallier, Jr.
served HFD 1950-1976. Died September 25, 2003

Gay V. Simmons
served HFD 1958-988. Died September 26, 2003

Ellmo P. Delasbour
Served HFD 1974-2003. Died September 30, 2003

Please visit my web site for more information on these Fire Fighters and many others that have made the ultimate sacrifice.
www.houstonfirememorial.org

When deciding on the topic of October's article, I had planned on doing the article on Jay Jahnke and have his mother be a co-writer. Last week the plan changed because I heard that Chief "Duke" Jahnke was very sick and might not be around much longer. After "Duke's" death I changed the subject matter of the article. The new subject of the article is the Jahnke's, a "Band of Brothers."

Jay Jahnke followed in the footsteps of three of his uncles and his dad. His dad, Claude, entered the HFD in 1953. He was the second youngest of the Jahnke firefighter brothers. I first met Claude in early 1980 when he was newly assigned to Station 28 as my shift's District Chief. I had only been in the fire department 5 years and never met a Jahnke, I soon realized I was working with a special person. I had the privilege of working with Claude for almost 5 years. He died while still on active duty in 1984 after serving the HFD for 31 years.

Chief Val Jahnke was the oldest of the firefighter brothers. He entered HFD in 1940 and retired in 1977. He served as the training chief, taking over the reigns from HFD's first Training Chief, Grover Cleveland Adams. Chief Val opened up the new Fire Training Academy in 1969 and was later honored by having this facility bear his name. He died in 1989 at age 76.

"Roe" the second oldest of the four brothers entered the HFD in 1947 and like all the brothers obtain the rank of District Chief. Chief "Roe" worked in the northwest part of Houston since 1975. "Roe" like his brother's touched the lives of the fire fighters he worked with. His son and his son-in-law also joined the fire department. The son-in-law recently retired after long career fighting fires in the Third Ward (near downtown Houston).

"Duke", the youngest of the four, entered the HFD in 1955 and retired after 40 years of service in 1995. He was an assistant chief for several years before he retired. While working on the 1995 year-book, I had the pleasure of being assigned to his office for about 5 months. After knowing his brother Claude, I realized that the kindness and comfort I saw in "Duke" was a definite family trait. "Duke" was the last survivor of a large family, 10 children, 3 girls and 7 boys. "Duke's" son and twin grandsons are helping to carrying on the fire department Jahnke tradition.

On a personal note, while attending Chief "Duke's" funeral, I found myself at the back of the group walking to the graveside. As I was coming up to where everyone was standing, I spotted a female firefighter that I have known for years. She had been held over at the fire station and was standing in the back because she did not have time to change into her dress uniform. She also brought her Dalmatian with her. The first thing she said to me was, "This is "Domino". Chief Jahnke helped me pick her out of the litter." When she said that I realized how much she cared about "Duke" and "Domino". And now "Domino" was a direct connection to the Chief she cared about and respected.

In closing, "Duke's" family asked me to share this letter that "Duke" wrote for everyone a few months ago.



July 17, 2003
To Those I Love;

If I should ever leave you, whom I love, to go along the silent way, grieve not, nor speak of me with tears, but laugh and talk of me as if I were beside you there.

I'd come, could I but find a way! But would not tears and grief be barriers?

And when you hear a song or see a bird I liked, please do not let the thought of me be sad . . .

For I am loving you just as I always have. You were so good to me!

There are so many things I wanted to still do.

So many things to say to you . . .

Remember that I did not fear.

It was just leaving you that was so hard to face . . .

We can not see beyond.

But this I know:

I love you so t'was heaven here with you!

Duke