



# REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, 15/A

## LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH ANNIVERSARIES FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH:

**March 1, 1928**

**GEORGE L. BISHOP, Captain - Station 4**

**March 10, 1953**

**CHARLY A. MIDDLEKAUF, Asst. Chief - Central Sta.**

**March 12, 1951**

**RUFUS J. "BULLET" TEMPLET, Captain - Station 5**

**March 31, 1947**

**JAMES EDWARD LOWTH, Fire Fighter - Station 26**

## RETIREEES WHO HAVE RECENTLY DIED:

**LOUIS BERNAL HALVORSEN**

**Served HFD 1958 to 1990, died February 27, 2004**

**CLAUDE CHRISTOPHER "BUD" SIMONTON**

**Served HFD 1940 to 1980, died February 9, 2004**

**CLARENCE R. HICKMAN**

**Served HFD 1946 to 1985, died January 8, 2004**

*For updated retired Fire Fighter deaths refer to:  
<http://www.houstonfirememorial.org>  
Click on Recent Houston Fire Fighter Deaths.*

About a year ago I joined the Fire Fighters Local 341 Union Yahoo E-Group. My main reason was to "advertise" my memorial web site and to remind everyone to read these articles. I also try to announce, on the e-group, the anniversaries of our line of duty deaths and the deaths of our retired Fire Fighters.

A few months ago, I announced the death of a retiree named of Captain "Red" Richards. The next day I received a comment by a Fire Fighter who knew him and wanted to say some kind words about him. Later I announced on the E-Group that it would be nice if others would comment on a Fire Fighter they once knew who is now deceased. I also announced that I would most likely print some of these comments in union paper column.

In the spirit of my request, I would like to share the following written by Captain Robert "Bob" Parry shortly after the 21st anniversary of Chief Franklin's tragic death:

*District Chief Lonnie Franklin Killed 21 years Ago Tonight*

*When I close my eyes and think about it, it is very hard to imagine that 21 years has passed since the tragic morning of January 4, 1983 when Chief Franklin was killed while enroute to an arson fire. Many of you may or may not know that Chief Franklin was a brother in law to the Jahnke HFD family (Roe, Val, Claude, and Duke) and Jay's uncle and was not only an excellent fire ground commander, but a second father to many of us.*

*It was a typical busy day at 7's (even without the first responder calls back then) and we were preparing for a busy night since the weatherman predicted the low to be in the teens. Around 10:30 pm or so, we caught our first working fire and returned to quarters after midnight. After the hose change and a quick synopsis, we were awakened again by the "booper" around 1:00 am. We returned cold and wet and we met in the kitchen for a*

*quick discussion. It quickly became a discussion on what kind of boat Chief Franklin was going to buy since he was going to retire in a couple of months. After 33 years on the job, he was looking forward to a well-deserved retirement. The last words he said to us were "let's get some sleep and talk about this in the morning." The time was about 04:30. At 04:45, the lights kicked on again with the tone and the dispatcher was announcing a box for Dowling near Drew, just down the street from 7's. I was the first-lineman that night. I slid the pole and pulled the rope for L-7. I walked out while gearing up and could see the smoke through the leafless trees. Others began to come down and I told Captain Beck I could see the smoke. Before the engine and truck started up, I yelled over to the Chief and his driver, Don Sims (now a Captain at 51/B) that we had another fire. Back then and still today in many houses, it was customary to let the Chief pull out first, then the engine, then ladder. However, the strangest event occurred just a few seconds later. Whether it was fate, the cold weather, or whatever, when Don Sims pulled the rope on their bay door to open up, as it has always in the past, the door went only a about 4 feet up and stopped - not enough to clear the light bar on the Ford. Both Chief Franklin and Don Sims got out of the car and pushed the door open while the engine and ladder turned right and headed for the column of smoke. It was a cloudless night. Back then we were allowed to stand up on the battery box on both emergency and non-emergency runs. However, due to the cold breeze, I was looking ahead to the glow through the windshield of the engine.*

*I saw the Chief's car speed past us on the 59 bridge and they only had 4 more blocks to go before a left turn on Dowling and three more to the scene. Suddenly, I saw a flash of light, sparks, and dust and then watched District-7 roll a couple of times. Captain Beck looked at his driver, then to me, to see if I knew what happened. We stopped and jumped off the rig (Mike Wedgeworth, Captain Beck, myself and I regretfully forget who was the E/O that night) and ran to the car. Ladder-7 slowed down and Thomas Morant jumped off. The car was now facing west on Elgin with the driver's side facing us. It did not look that bad. The ladder proceeded to the location. I asked Don if he was ok and he mumbled a few words. I gave the Chief a few pats on the face to try and wake him up. He did not respond. Don was shaking, so I took off my coat and put it on him. Just then, Mike Wedgeworth gave an "expletive" while standing on the other side of the car. The car door was completely crushed (it was hit right on the numbers) We stood there for a minute in shock when finally someone said lets pull him out and work on him. We let Don sit on a curb while we pulled the Chief and began to do CPR and mouth to mouth. We could hear 25's and 8's siren going to the box but wondered "what about us"! We advised F/A we were at Elgin and Hutchins and needed help. It seemed like forever until help arrived. I recall the first ambulance crew tried to intubate him without success. Just then John Crotchett arrived from A-25 (it was a medic unit back then) and he was successful. They rushed the Chief off, then Don, the driver who was complaining about no one taking care of him. We went to the fire scene for a short time and then were sent back to the station. Sr. Captain Hauck had left the scene to go the hospital after hearing how bad the wreck was. It was right around relief time when we received the word Chief Franklin had been killed.*

*The driver of the car was late for work and sped through the stop sign. However, one of the biggest atrocities of this whole tragic event was just a few days earlier, a new Texas law went into effect where it was a capital crime if a police officer or Fire Fighter was killed in the line of duty during a criminal act. The Harris County D.A. Holmes did not want to proceed with a capital crime to the arsonist because Chief Franklin was killed enroute but not at the scene of the crime.*

*I will always remember that there was not a scratch on the Chief, that he looked like he was just napping on Don's shoulder (the impact tore his aorta). You could not ask for a better officer to guide you through thick and thin and I was blessed to have him as my first District Chief. I drove him on Christmas where we "snuck off to the Heights" so he could visit with his wife. In fact, I transferred from "Sweet 16's" in 1981 mainly so I could learn a lot more on tactics by driving him. I learned a lot about fire ground control as one of his aides years before "incident command" was even thought about. However, the thought of why the bay door only went up a few feet and stopped and causing that critical delay in response will haunt me until it is my time . . . MAY HE REST IN PEACE.*

*Bob Parry, 78/B*