
REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, 15/A

LIST OF THE LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH ANNIVERSARIES FOR THE MONTHS OF MAY AND JUNE:

June 8, 1932 - Rusk, Charles Roland - Fire Fighter - Sta. 14
June 13, 1902 - Johnson, Clifford W. - Driver - Sta. 8
June 22, 1929 - Hendricks, Rudolph "Rudy" - Fire Fighter - Sta. 25
June 30, 1962 - Hopkins, Claude Jackson - Chauffeur - Sta. 2
May 1, 1924 - Harold A. Denny - Fire Fighter - Sta. 9
May 3, 1971 - James Louis Walls - Fire Fighter - Sta. 51
May 21, 1962 - Don J. Contorno - Fire Fighter - Sta. 37
May 25, 1912 - Herman J. "Dutch" Wagner - Captain - Sta. 8

For updated retired Fire Fighter deaths refer to:

<http://www.houstonfirememorial.org>

Click on Recent Houston Fire Fighter Deaths.

LIST OF FIRE FIGHTERS WHO HAVE RECENTLY DIED:

Lawrence "Larry" Noel McDuff served HFD 1961 to 1978.
Died on April 22nd 2004.

Kevin Wayne Kulow served HFD 2003 to 2004.
Died on April 4th 2004.

James Daniel "Danny" Hutchins served HFD 1956 to 1988.
Died on April 2nd 2004.

David Bethel Mize served HFD 1969 to 1990.
Died on April 1st 2004.

Johnnie Leggio served HFD 1948 to 1978.
Died on March 25th 2004.

Frankie Elmo Gore served HFD 1977 to 2004.
Died on March 15th 2004.

I work on my articles a few months ahead of time and sometimes have several in various stages of completion. I was working on this month's article at the time of Kevin Kulow's death. Strange as it may seem, the subject matter was that of dealing with Fire Fighter line-of-duty deaths.

The morning of Kevin's death, I began to write the article that was published in the April paper.

Seems like lately I have been inundated by emails from "The Secret List" telling of another Fire Fighter dying in the line-of-duty. "The Secret List" is an email newsletter that I subscribe to that, among many other things, notifies me of line-of-duty deaths of Fire Fighters from around the country. A line-of-duty death is very hard to bear even if you did not know the Fire Fighter.

On Friday, December 3rd, 1999, six Fire Fighters from Worcester, Massachusetts died in a warehouse fire. Back then, I thought it would be tough to endure six line-of-duty deaths much less one. They just lost six of their brother Fire Fighters and then were faced with attending six funerals, which I am sure some of the Worcester Fire Fighters did not attend all six, but I can be pretty sure that their fire chief attended all six. Then two months later we lost two of our own.

Kim and Lewis died early Monday morning on February 14, 2000. Their memorial service was held that next Friday and Lewis' funeral was held that afternoon. The next day, Saturday, was the day of Kim's funeral. That afternoon there was the several hour trip to the cemetery in Refugio, Texas.

I remember looking at the Fire Chief's face after Kim's funeral and could easily see the pain on his face. All week he had endured many things including dealing with the families, the deluge of the news media and dealing with the details of the investigation, which always follows when a Fire Fighter dies in the line-of-duty. Plus,

every night the rest of the week, he had the monumental task of trying to sleep and get enough rest to be able to deal with everything the next day.

Attending the funeral of any Fire Fighter is excruciating at best. Attending the funeral of a Fire Fighter who died in the line-of-duty is made much more tougher because there is the news media and there is always the Fire Fighters who come from out of town, out of state and even from a foreign country to pay their respects. Walking in formation from the Warwick Hotel to Rice for Lewis and Kim's memorial service, walking from Station 2 to the church for Jay's service, and then the same for Kevin's funeral 29 months later was very painful to endure. It is a great honor to be able to participate, but it is the hardest thing that I have done in my 29 years in the fire service.

What happens when you attend a line-of-duty funeral or a funeral of a retired Fire Fighter is that it helps the family deal with the death of their loved one. If there is a large turnout, the family will never forget the support that they got from their family members and brother and sister Fire Fighters. I get e-mails and comments from family members about the showing of uniform Fire Fighters at their loved one's funeral. All of them comment on how great it was to see so many Fire Fighters present to honor the life of their loved-ones.

I will be the first to say I don't like funerals. Who doesn't? I feel attending the funeral of our brother Fire Fighter is necessary, because it lends support to the families. After all, we are all in this together.

If you have not been to my memorial web site, the address is www.houstonfirememorial.org.