



REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by *Scott Mellott, Retired*

I try to write as much as I can about Fire Fighters who I personally think that his or her life made an impact on the world during the time they were here. This impact statement by the Fire Fighter can be a lot of things. The profiles tell a story of the life of a Fire Fighter, at work and/or their life outside of the fire house. An article that I wrote in May of 2003 was the first of these profiles. The Fire Fighter that I chose to write about was Herman "Dutch" Wagner. Captain Wagner stood out during my research in 1987, I read several newspaper accounts written about him and that is probably why he was my first choice.

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Herman Wagner: born 1871 in Chicago, Illinois, joined the Houston Fire Department in 1894 at age 23. He was one of the first men hired to create a paid department that went into full force in August of 1895. He began his career as a Fire Fighter, at Hose Company 3, located (at that time) at 408 Smith. A few years later he was transferred to Fire Station 5, located at 510 Hardy Street. In 1898 he left his firefighting job to work on the railroad, probably for more money and better working conditions.

After almost two years, "Dutch" could no longer resist the calling of the fire service; he rejoined the Houston fire department early in 1900. On his return to the department he was assigned to the Central Station located at San Jacinto and Texas. A year or two later he was promoted to driver and transferred to Station 8, located at 1307 Crawford. By 1905 he had been promoted to the rank of captain and remained assigned to Station 8 until his death.

During his career he had several close calls. He was at the rail road car explosion that killed Chief O'Leary in late 1907. He was involved in a collision between an automobile and the steamer he was driving. He escaped serious injury, however one of the horses pulling the steamer was killed. A few months later the steamer he was driving collided with the hose wagon from his station. In this incident he narrowly escaped injury, however the other driver and all four horses were seriously injured.

Captain Wagner responded to some of the largest fires that occurred in Houston around the turn of the century. Those fires included the Industrial Cotton Oil Mill, located in the Sixth Ward completely destroying the structure, this fire occurred in January of 1912. Captain Wagner was also present at another devastating fire, which broke out during the early hours of February 21st, 1912, in the Fifth Ward. This fire, which is considered the largest fire in Houston's history, destroyed 1 church, 1 school, 21 commercial properties, and 119 homes.

One of the larger fires of that time, the Stowers Furniture Building, 6 stories, built in 1903, located at Main Street and Capitol,

was where he was killed. The fire broke out during the early hours of Sunday morning, May 19th, 1912. The blaze quickly turned into a general alarm, utilizing all the equipment Houston had in service at the time. In addition, the Galveston Fire Department sent, by railroad, three pieces of equipment and 20 Fire Fighters. The fire damaged or destroyed 4 buildings, doing almost a million dollars in damage.

By mid morning, Captain Wagner's crew had began putting out spot fires. Minutes before Captain Wagner and his crew were due to take a lunch break; a heavy timber fell and struck him in the head.

He was taken to St. Joseph's Infirmary where he was in good condition until Friday morning when he took a turn for the worse. His condition was declining rapidly and the doctors decided to do surgery as a last resort to save his life; he never regained consciousness and died at 3:30 Saturday afternoon, May 25, 1912.

After Captain Wagner's death, his wife made a statement to the Fire Chief, that her husband had remarked, "if flames broke out in that building, it would be the death of me."

At the time of his death, he had more years of service than any other Fire Fighter in the department. Fire Chief Ollre considered him one of the finest and most dedicated officers he had ever worked with.

Captain Wagner was survived by his wife, Venia and their two year-old-son, Herman J. Wagner, Jr.



Funeral coach for Herman Wagner.

Photo provided by the Houston Fire Department

Remembering To Never Forget

MICKEY GENE PATE
Served HFD 1979 to 2008
Died April 16, 2008

JOEY SHELDON REED
Served HFD 1989 to 1993
Died April 21, 2008

OTTO W. MUELLER
Served HFD 1956 to 1982
Died March 26, 2008

ARLON FLOYD DRAKE
Served HFD 1953 to 1973
Died March 9, 2008

RICHARD HENRY DECKER
Served HFD 1961 to 1984
Died March 6, 2008

“WHITEY” LESTER O’NEAL MARTIN
Served HFD 1949 to 1988
Died March 2, 2008

ERIC DEWAYNE BRADY
Served HFD 1959 to 1986
Died February 15, 2008

BRICEY EUGENE CHILDRESS
Served HFD 1959 to 1986
Died February 9, 2008

DAVID LEE NORRIS
Served HFD 1975 to 2003
Died February 1, 2008

TED W. SANFORD
Served HFD 1946 to 1974
Died January 26, 2008

LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH ANNIVERSARIES FOR THE MONTH OF MAY

May 1, 1924
HAROLD A. DENNY
Fire Fighter, Station 9

May 3, 1971
JAMES LOUIS WALLS
Fire Fighter, Station 51

May 21, 1962
DON J. CONTORNO
Fire Fighter, Station 37

May 25, 1912
HERMAN J. “DUTCH” WAGNER
Captain, Station 8

Total from January 1, 2008 to present - 10 Deaths

Total for the Year 2007 - 43 Deaths

For current information on deceased Fire Fighters,
please go to my web site

www.houstonfirememorial.org

and click on “Recent Deaths” or email Scott at
scottmel@juno.com

Remembering



Never To Forget

The Faces of Local 341

1932 to 2008

Houston Professional Fire Fighter's Association



*Houston Fire Department 1916 - Central Fire Station at 519 San Jacinto Street
1st Assistant Chief John A. Boyd (Left), Fire Chief Fred C. Siebert (Center),
2nd Assistant Chief W. Edward Franks (Right)*

Photo furnished by the Houston Fire Department



*Houston Fire Department Station 10, 206 Chartres, - July 1920.
Captain Steven Wells, (sitting on right) and John Ruby (far right)*

Photo furnished by the Family of John Ruby

The Faces of Local 341

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HAZMAT HCI Incident October 8, 2003
Captain "Bob" Royall

Photo furnished by Tommy Erickson



2-11 Fire March 1988
Captain Scott Savage and Chief "Birdie" Thompson

Photo furnished by the famil of "Birdie" Thompsson



Engine 93/C (l-r) Matt Lloyd, FF; Captain Robert Russo; Mike Allen, E/O; Joe Reyes, FF - April 3, 2008

Photo furnished by Scott Mellott



Engine 28/B (l-r)Walter Landry, FF; Neil Austin, E/O; Captain Rick Collins; Robert Shadle, FF - April 14, 2008

Photo furnished by Scott Mellott