



REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, Retired

Monday, February 14, 2000, marked a black day for the Houston Fire Department. Two Fire Fighters lost their lives while fighting a fire at a McDonalds Restaurant. The following article, written shortly after the incident, describes the fire and everything that transpired the following week.

THE FIRE

The 24-hour day for the "A" shift was almost over on the morning of February 14, 2000. The house lights came on at 0433 and the crew of Engine and Ladder 76 woke up to the thought that, given the time of the morning, the call could turn out to be a working fire. They were being dispatched to a building fire at 12602 Bissonnet at Huntington Place just 1.9 miles from Fire Station 76. They manned their apparatus like they had done many times before not realizing that two of their Fire Fighters would not return to quarters with them at the end of the shift. The equipment from Station 76 was the first to arrive at the location, which was a McDonald's Restaurant that they had passed by many times before. The crew of Station 76 began doing their job just like they always did; however, things turned bad very quickly. Soon after Fire Fighters Lewis Mayo and Kim Smith entered the building and headed toward the rear of the restaurant, the suspended ceiling along with the air conditioning ducts fell in first, trapping the two Fire Fighters. Lewis Mayo was covered by the ceiling and was soon located and was transported to Herman Hospital by Medic 75. Kim Smith was also covered by the fallen roof; however, her escape path was blocked. She managed to free herself and head toward the rear of the restaurant desperately, looking for a way out. When the area of the roof containing the air conditioning fell in, this fueled the fire causing it to intensify and engulfing Kim after she was unable to find her way to safety. After she was located just twelve feet from the back entrance, her body was taken out of the still smoldering building. Her fellow Fire Fighters stood in two lines to shield her from the on-looking news media and the public and placed her in Medic 68. Engine 82 escorted Medic 68 to Station 75. Hundreds of Fire Fighters had gathered there for prayer for the two fallen Fire Fighters. When the convoy arrived at Station 75, several Fire Fighters placed flowers in the back of the medic unit. The body of Fire Fighter Kim Smith was then transported to the Harris County Coroner.

THE CAUSE OF THE FIRE

The restaurant had been entered earlier that morning by three teenage males who were attempting to gain access to the safe. The teens had been given a key by an accomplice who was a McDonalds employee. They had taken in with them a cutting torch to open the safe. They had received information that the safe contained the weekend receipts that could total up to \$18,000 dollars. It took them several hours to get the first door of the safe open. An attempt to open the second door of the safe failed. They then allegedly left the restaurant and went to a local 24 hour WalMart and purchased another cutting torch.

After another attempt to gain access to the area of the safe that contained the cash failed this angered one of the youths. They then began to tear up the office in retaliation. One of the teens then



February 14, 2000
LEWIS EVANS MAYO, III
Fire Fighter - Station 76/A



February 14, 2000
KIMBERLY ANN SMITH
Fire Fighter - Station 76/C

allegedly set the storage cabinets in the office on fire and shortly after that they exited the building.

After the arson investigators began to search through the smoldering remains of the restaurant they found the safe. They had determined that the safe was damaged by someone attempting to open it. The investigators then determined who had been at the restaurant working the night before and came up with the name of a 15-year-old assistant manager. The boy was brought to the scene and was able to provide information about his part in the burglary.

Three men were allegedly involved with the actual break-in. They were arrested by HFD Arson that same morning. The youth that was the restaurant assistant manager was charged with burglary. His trial is set for later this year. The other three were charged with arson and murder. The trial began in August 2000 and lasted about three weeks. The three young men were found guilty of felony murder and arson. They received prison sentences ranging from 17 years to 35 years.

THE FIVE DAYS FOLLOWING THE FIRE

After the morning of the fire, the Fire Chief's Staff and the Fire Fighters Union began feverishly organizing a Memorial Service for both Fire Fighters which was soon set for Friday, February 18 at 10:00 am. The service was held at Rice Stadium. A call to the off-duty shift for volunteers was sent out. A large number of Fire Fighters, their relatives and friends came to the call. All of these volunteers were quickly organized to begin planning for the Memorial Services. The volunteers began getting transportation and supplies, getting groups of Fire Fighters to the airports to greet Fire Fighters from all over the country, and getting a group to Rice Stadium to prepare it for the service.

Early Friday morning the Membership of the Houston Fire Department met at Rice Stadium where they were shuttled to the Mecom Fountain. They were met by hundreds of Fire Fighters from other departments. From there, they started their journey to Rice Stadium. Once all personnel were in their seats, the memorial service began.

The funeral service and burial for Lewis was later that afternoon. The service was held at Christ the Good Shepherd, and he was put to rest in Memorial Oaks Cemetery.

The funeral service for Kim took place Saturday morning. A funeral mass was held at St. Michael's Catholic Church. After the service, her family, friends, and a large group of Fire Fighters began the journey to Refugio, Texas where she was laid to rest in the family plot between her grandmother and grandfather. On the three-hour journey, they were greeted by the fire departments, police departments and citizens from each town they passed through.

More Fire Fighter information on page 12

Remembering To Never Forget

TRACY BIRKELBACH

Served HFD 1961 to 1991

Died January 1, 2009

Total from January 1, 2009 to present - 1 Death

Total for the Year 2008 - 39 Deaths

Listed below are the deaths from September 1st to December 31st, 2008

JAMES WESLEY WHILEY

Served HFD 1951-1971

Died December 27, 2008

CHARLES RAY CARTER

Served HFD 1963 to 1987

Died November 5, 2008

LEONARD BYRD

Served HFD 1951 to 1976

Died October 18, 2008

CLIFFORD MCCLAUGHERTY

Served HFD 1953 to 1979

Died December 14, 2008

CHARLES EDWARD BYRN

Served HFD 1964 to 1987

Died October 31, 2008

JOSEPH EDWARD HADLEY, JR.

Served HFD 1986 to 2008

Died October 13, 2008

AUGUSTINE SANCHEZ "A. S. SANCHEZ"

Served HFD 1965-1988

Died December 7, 2008

ROBERTO SANCHEZ

Served HFD 1962 to 1984

Died October 22, 2008

JIMMY FRANKLIN MARTIN

Served HFD 1965 to 1987

Died October 13, 2008

RAYMOND JAMES KOENIG

Served HFD 1950 to 1987

Died November 29, 2008

JAMES R. JOHNSON, JR.

Served HFD 1959 to 1994

Died October 21, 2008

RICHARD DUKE IRWIN

Served HFD 1960 to 1983

Died October 6, 2008

THOMAS HAROLD VAUGHN

Served HFD 1960 to 1990

Died November 18, 2008

JOHN DIXIE FISHER

Served HFD 1960 to 1990

Died September 20, 2008

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



February 03, 1969
**STEVE CHARLIE
BARANOWSKI**
Captain - Station 37



February 04, 1977
**JACKIE DUNHAM
LUDWICK**
Sr. Captain - Station 7



February 19, 2005
**GRADY DON
BURKE**
Captain - Station 46



February 03, 1973
**LEWIS W. "MOE"
RICHARDSON**
Captain - Station 7



February 14, 1921
H. A. "ACE" HARRIS
Fire Fighter - Station 10

Below - a picture was not available at the time of printing - if you can locate one, please let us know.

February 09, 1929
JAMES MAGERSON "MAG" SMITH
Fire Fighter - Station 10

February 29, 1954
WOODROW WILSON ERWIN
Chauffeur - Station 24

The Faces of Local 341

1932 to 2008

Houston Professional Fire Fighter's Association

Photos on this page submitted by Scott Mellott (Retired)



Houston Fire Department Station 40 - 5830 Old Spanish Trail - 1977

(Top Row) Michael Shrum, Chauffeur; Curtis Barker, Sr. Captain; Rick Dujay, FF; Bill Love Chauffeur; Jim Burnett FF; (Bottom Row) Herbert Cummings, FF; Richard Smith, FF

Photo Provided by Bill Love



***Chief Benny Albers (District 69) -
Star Wholesale 4-11 Fire, October 1998***

Photo from the HFD Archives



***District Chief 103 (Station 7) Donald Crowder
house fire at Albany St - 1975***

Photo Provided by J.J. Reneau

The Faces of Local 341

1932 to 2008

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Fire Station 45 "D" Shift - November 30th, 2008

*(l-r) Victor Yanez, FF; Andy Tucker, FF; John Taylor, E/O; Anthony Milligan, Captain;
James Wisnoski, District Chief; Osborne William, FF; Robert Strong, Sr. Captain;
Mark Snider, E/O; Jeffery Harvey, FF.*

Photo Provided by Scott Mellott



Station 15 - 402 Tabor St. - 1992

(l-r) Captain Jim Wheeler, E/O Donnie Havemann

Photo Provided by Joe Delgadillo



Engine 17 - house fire at Saultus St. - 1993

Captain J.J. Reneau

Photo Provided by J.J. Reneau