



REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, Retired

As most of you know, I have been doing this column since March of 2002. I like to talk as much about the line-of-duty incidents as possible. I have been involved with the research concerning HFD's Line-of-Duty Death since 1986. I still, to this day, go back to the newspaper articles and try to find more information on our Fire Fighters that died in the line-of-duty.

When I started this article, I looked at the list for the month of December anniversary dates and that is how I came up with the subject of this month's article.

Several times throughout our history, Houston has lost two or more Fire Fighters at the same incident. Most know about Kim and Lewis, who died at the McDonald's Fire February 14, 2000 and some of you may not be aware of the others. This month I will be talking about two who died together in December 1929.

However, I am starting at the beginning of the year 1929. This was the worst year for line-of-duty deaths in Houston's history of the paid department, 1895 to present. That year there were 7 Fire Fighters who lost their lives in the line-of-duty. The first death occurred in February and the last one in December. Now, out of the 7 deaths, two of the incidents killed 5 of our Fire Fighters and both of the incidents were fire truck versus train collisions.

First I am going to list all the Houston Fire Fighters that died in the year 1929.

JAMES SMITH
Station 10 - Died February 9, 1929
Hit in head with a hose couple.

RUDOLPH HENDRICKS
Station 25 - Died June 22, 1929
Electrocuted at a house fire.

EDGAR GRANT
Station 18 - Died July 2, 1929
Fire truck hit by train.

HARRY "RED" OXFORD
Station 18 - Died July 3, 1929
Fire truck hit by train.

JOHN LITTLE, SR.
Station 18 - Died July 11, 1929
Fire truck hit by train.

AARON O'BRIEN
Station 19 - Died December 2, 1929
Fire truck hit by train.

MICHAEL WARD
Station 14 - Died December 3, 1929
Fire truck hit by train.

With that said, I will discuss the two Fire Fighters who's anniversary we honor every year in the month of December. The names of these two are Aaron O'Brien and Michael Ward. Aaron O'Brien worked at Station 19 located on Griggs Street in Houston's Fifth Ward, his friend, Michael Ward worked at Station 14 in the Heights. Ward was at Station 19 visiting his friend. When a call came in for a reported house fire located on Quitman and Clark, Ward jumped on the back of Engine 19 to go on the run with his friend.

A Southern Pacific train crossing was located a short distance from the fire station. The accident where a train had killed three Fire Fighters from Station 18 just 6 months before was still very fresh in their minds. Travel to the location they were dispatched would require their driver to negotiate the train crossing.

The accident occurred after dark on Friday, December 1st. The light on the crossing warning signal was not operating. When the fire truck crossed the tracks, it was hit by the train on the fire truck's right side. O'Brien was on the left side turning the crank on the siren. He was thrown off and killed instantly. Ward was fatally injured and died the next day at the Baptist Hospital. The other members of the crew, who were all injured were, Pipemen (Fire Fighters) Hugh Cox and David Terry, Tom Raney was the Driver, and the Captain was Lester Ogilvie.

Aaron O'Brien and Michael Ward had become Houston's 21st and 22nd Fire Fighters to die in the line-of-duty. They had also become the City of Houston's 96th and 97th traffic fatality. This tragedy would end a very bad year for the Houston Fire Department and the City of Houston.



HFD O'Brien



HFD Ward

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

December 01, 1913
ROBERT RUTHERFORD GLASS
Fire Fighter - Central Station

December 01, 1984
ROBERT MUNGUIA REYES
Fire Fighter - Station 62
Riding Engine 15

December 02, 1998
STEVEN CLYDE MAYFIELD
Fire Fighter - Station 92

December 04, 1996
RUBEN LOPEZ
District Chief - Houston Volunteer
Riding Engine 25

December 18, 1954
WILLIAM HENRY KERSTEN
Chauffeur - Station 19

December 20, 1929
AARON LOYOLA O'BRIEN
Fire Fighter - Station 19

December 21, 1929
MICHAEL J. WARD
Fire Fighter - Station 14

December 24, 1908
THOMAS A. O'LEARY
Fire Chief - Central Station