



REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, Retired

I suppose I could be considered a self appointed "Keeper" of the memory of Houston's deceased Fire Fighters. Those that know me know that I take the job very seriously. With this "job" that I have been doing since 1987, I attempt to document the history of as many of the past Fire Fighters as possible.

As for my yearly January article, I hope that you can go through the list of names and reflect on those that passed on during the year 2007. As I write this article, there are only a few days left in December. So far, during the year, we have lost 43 of our Brother Fire Fighters.

I get notification through e-mail from the pension office every time a retired or active Fire Fighter dies. This is hard for me because each time I open my inbox for e-mail and see where it is from I am sure it is not good news. However, I have just realized that once a Fire Fighter dies my job begins. First, I gather the Fire Fighter infor-

mation and post it on my web page under "Recent Fire Fighter Deaths." Then I format the information to go on the "Remembering To Never Forget" page which is below after this column. On this page you will only find the listings of the Fire Fighters who died during the current year.

Then I go to a website called Legacy.com where I look up the Fire Fighter's obituary and post it on my web site as well. With information from the obit or the family, I document the cemetery where the Fire Fighter is buried.

With that said, I have had a really good year. Had a few set backs in the past and have fully recovered, and have really been working hard to research our past Fire Fighters through documents and pictures. If you have any comments, pictures or information to share with me please get in touch with me either through the union hall or my email address scottmel@juno.com.

Now in closing, back in March 2004 we ran an article written by Bob Parry as a past editor of this paper and who is now retired from HFD and living in Pittsburgh, PA. The article was written about his District Chief, Lonnie L. Franklin who died in the Line-of-Duty on January 4, 1983. It is very appropriate that we re-run this article on Chief Franklin's 25th anniversary of his Line-of-Duty Death. Please take time to read this article, even if you read it back in 2004, you will find this article on page 14.

Remembering To Never Forget

JAMES SIDNEY JACKSON

*Served HFD 1968 to 1993
Died December 23, 2007*

JAMES BARRY RIGGS, JR.

*Served HFD 1980 to 2002
Died December 13, 2007*

JEFF MAXWELL WHITLEY

*Served HFD 1955 to 1976
Died December 12, 2007*

MANUEL MEDEL

*Served HFD 1979 to 2007
Died December 12, 2007*

RAYMOND EDWARD RUSK

*Served HFD 1940 to 1976
Died December 7, 2007*

LUKE CANALITO

*Served HFD 1952 to 1974
Died November 16, 2007*

GEORGE ANTHONY JAMAIL

*Served HFD 1970 to 2004
Died November 8, 2007*

JOSE "JOE" SALVADOR MENDOZA

*Served HFD 1981 to 2007
Died October 16, 2007*

HILLARY DARNELL EVANS

*Served HFD 1981 to 2007
Died September 16, 2007*

STEVEN SCOTT JAHNKE

*Served HFD 1972 to 2007
Died August 15, 2007*

WILBUR LEO SANFORD

*Served HFD 1963 to 1993
Died August 13, 2007*

ALBERT LEE ZUBRIK

*Served HFD 1972 to 2002
Died July 26, 2007*

DANIEL "DANNY" WAYNE CASANOVER

*Served HFD 1970 to 2002
Died July 25, 2007*

MARSHALL ROBERTS, JR.

*Served HFD 1948 to 1980
Died July 20, 2007*

LLOYD EARL THAYER

*Served HFD 1942 to 1965
Died July 16, 2007*

JOHN RILEY VOLLENTINE

*Served HFD 1973 to 1989
Died July 12, 2007*

WILLIAM "BILL" LEE WHITE

*Served HFD 1974 to 1976
Died July 10, 2007*

MAX HENRY McRAE

*Served HFD 1955 to 1994
Died July 6, 2007*

JASON TEAGUE

*Served HFD 2001 to 2007
Died June 21, 2007*

HORRACE FONTENOT

*Served HFD 1953 to 1966
Died June 4, 2007*

KENNETH JEFF ROBINSON, JR.

*Served HFD 1948 to 1986
Died May 28, 2007*

DOYLE DWAYNE JOHNSON

*Served HFD 1981 to 2006
Died May 20, 2007*

HENRY HALLIO

*Served HFD 1952 to 1978
Died May 4, 2007*

ROY ALEXANDER FOSTER, JR.

*Served HFD 1969 to 2004
Died May 3, 2007*

OSCAR FREEMAN WALLACE, JR.
Served HFD 1970 to 2000
Died May 1, 2007

RICHARD FRANK SMITH
Served HFD 1978 to 2007
Died April 28, 2007

GEORGE W. WARD
Served HFD 1945 to 1965
Died April 14, 2007

LARRY JULIAN BLACKMON
Served HFD 1971 to 1978
Died April 4, 2007

FRANK JACOBS, JR.
Served HFD 1947 to 1973
Died March 29, 2007

BOBBIE JAMES "BJ" EVANS
Served HFD 1966 to 2001
Died March 21, 2007

HOMER EUGENE FRANKS
Served HFD 1961 to 1977
Died March 17, 2007

JOHN TURNER COMSTOCK
Served HFD 1978 to 1988
Died March 11, 2007

DOYLE SHELTON HOLDER
Served HFD 1974 to 2005
Died February 25, 2007

CURTIS EDWARD MORRIS
Served HFD 1962 to 1986
Died February 20, 2007

AUSTIN PEAVY KENNADA
Served HFD 1956 to 1983
Died February 18, 2007

MAXIE GENE JONES
Served HFD 1959 to 1979
Died February 9, 2007

WILLIAM RAY YOUNG
Served HFD 1955 to 1976
Died February 5, 2007

WILBER MARTIN JONES
Served HFD 1945 to 1966
Died January 21, 2007

JIMMY EARL LILLEY
Served HFD 1969 to 1991
Died January 20, 2007

LARRY ANTHONY WESLEY
Served HFD 1979 to 2000
Died January 19, 2007

GEORGE EARL LOWDERMILK
Served HFD 1950 to 2005
Died January 12, 2007

KENNETH RAY JUDD
Served HFD 1963 to 1994
Died January 7, 2007

LEE DITTA
Served HFD 1948 to 1978
Died January 1, 2007



LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH ANNIVERSARIES FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER 2007

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

December 01, 1984
ROBERT MUNGUA 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

LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH ANNIVERSARIES FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY 2008

January 04, 1983
RONNIE LUZETTE FRANKLIN
District Chief, Station 7

January 07, 1954
FRANK CATINO
Fire Fighter, Station 1

January 21, 1949
VERNON JOHN DORSETT
Assistant Fire Chief, Station 1

January 31, 1951
JOSEPH "BULL" CONNOR
Chauffeur, Station 1

The Faces of Local 341

1932 to 2008

Houston Professional Fire Fighter's Association



Fire Station 2 - 1935

Photo provided from the private collection of Scott Mellott

Last year, we began printing these two pages of pictures monthly. We did this in honor of Local 341 existing for 75 years and to show the faces of our membership. Pages 12 and 13 have become quite a popular item and for that reason we will be continuing these pages monthly. If you have pictures to submit for possible publication, please contact me - Scott Mellott.



Red Evans and Captain Leggio, Station 10 - 1949

Photo provided by Doyle Ebel

Celebrating 76 Years

1932 to 2008

Houston Professional Fire Fighter's Association



Jon Hutchens, Station 51 - 3 alarm fire - 1980's

Photo by Jo Kenner



*George LaRue and Captain Robert Kercho,
Engine 6 - 1980's*

Photo provided by Local 341



*Capital and Jackson Street - May 1991
Larry Miles, Jay Reneau and Johnny Villarreal*

Photo provided by Jay Reneau



*(Right to Left) Captain Robert McCarty - Engine 42;
Captain Ronnie Brown - Engine 41; Chief Doyle Ebel
- District 41. 1970's*

Photo provided by Doyle Ebel

Remembering District Chief Lonnie L. Franklin Killed In The Line-of-Duty January 4, 1983

When I close my eyes and think about it, it is hard to imagine that 25 years have passed since the tragic morning of January 4, 1983 when District Chief Lonnie Franklin was killed while enroute to an arson fire on Dowling near Drew in the Third Ward. Chief Franklin was a brother-in-law to the Jahnke HFD family (Roe, Claude, Val, and Duke) and Uncle to our late fallen brothers Steve and Jay. He was not only a great Fireground Commander, but also a second father to many of us.

It was a typical busy day at Station 7/B (even without the first responder calls) and we were preparing for a busy night since the weatherman predicted the low to be in the teens. We caught our first working fire during the news and returned to quarters a little after midnight. After the hose change and quick synopses, we were wakened again by the "booper" around 1 a.m. We returned cold and wet and met in the kitchen after another change of clothes. The discussion at the table soon turned from the fire to what kind of boat Chief Franklin was going to buy since his retirement was a couple of months away. 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 04:30. At 04:45, the lights kicked on again and the sound of other tones followed. The dispatcher was announcing a box alarm assignment for Station 7, Engines 8 and 25 for a reported house fire at Dowling and Drew. I was the first lineman on the engine that night. I slid the pole and pulled the rope to open the bay door for Ladder 7. I walked out onto the slab while gearing up and could see smoke through the leafless trees. Others began to come down and I told Captain Royce Beck that I could see smoke. When I climbed on the battery box on the pumper, I yelled over to Chief Franklin and his driver, Don Sims, that we had another fire. In those days, as well as today I imagine, it was customary to have the Chief pull out first, then the engine followed by the ladder. However, the strangest event occurred a few seconds later. Whether it was fate or the cold weather, when Don Sims pulled the rope to open up his bay door as it always did in the past, the door went up only a few feet and not high enough to clear the light bar on the Ford sedan. Both Chief Franklin and Don Sims got out of the car and pushed the door open while Engine and Ladder 7 turned right on to Elgin toward the column of smoke. It was a cloudless night as we anticipated our first in arrival in less than a minute. Though we were allowed to stand up on apparatus during emergency runs, the cold made me look through glow of the fire through the windshield of the engine.

District 7 sped past while we were on the 59 bridge and they had only a couple of blocks to go before their left on Dowling. Suddenly, there was a flash of light, sparks, and dust and we watched the chief's car roll over a couple of times. Captain Beck looked at Fire Fighter John Burleson, his driver that night, then back to me and then to Fire Fighter Mike Wedgeworth. We stopped and jumped off the pumper. Ladder 7 slowed down and Fire Fighter Thomas Morant jumped off as well. The car was facing west on Elgin with the driver's side door visible to us. Since it did not look that bad, Ladder 7 continued to the fire. I asked Don if he was ok and he mumbled a few words. I took off my bunker coat and put it over him since he was shaking. I leaned over to give Chief Franklin a few pats on the face to wake him up. He did not respond. Just then, Mike Wedgeworth spoke an "expletive" while standing on the other side of the car. The car door was completely caved in. We stood there for

a moment or so in shock when someone said lets pull him out and work on him. We led Don over to sit on a curb and we pulled the Chief out and began mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and CPR. We could hear the sirens of the other companies but wondered "what about us?" We knew help was on the way to Elgin and Hutchins but seconds seemed like minutes. Two ambulances arrived and I remember seeing Fire Fighter / Paramedic John Crotchett of A-25 intubate the Chief. While we were loading Chief Franklin into the ambulance, the look on Deputy Chief Crowder's face said it all. They rushed the Chief off, then Don, and then we checked on the other driver. He was transported to the hospital. We went to the fire that was knocked down by this time then went back to the station and prayed for a miracle. Senior Captain Ed Hauck left the fire to go to the hospital once he found out how serious the accident was. The remaining crew of Ladder 7 that night, E/O Delbert Burleson and Fire Fighter Gary Pick, made their way back to the station. It was right around relief time that we found out Chief Franklin had been killed.

Though our main focus was on preparing for a funeral for Chief Franklin, we were also interested in pursuing justice for the family as well as his fire department family. Just a few months earlier, the Texas Legislature passed a bill that made it a capital crime when a Police Officer or Fire Fighter was killed in the line-of-duty during a criminal act. However, the Harris County District Attorney did not want to proceed with the case as a capital offense because Chief Franklin was killed enroute to the arson fire and not at the scene! In the end, the driver of the pickup truck was found guilty of negligent homicide. He was late for work and sped through the stop sign.

I will always remember how blessed I was to have Chief Franklin as my first Chief right off the tower. I transferred from "Sweet 16's" in 1981 mainly to learn fire-ground tactics from him. You could not ask for a better Chief to guide you through thick and thin. When he complemented you, it was in front of all. If he had to correct you, it was around the corner and not in front of everybody. Many of the highly respected officers in today's department used Chief Franklin as a mentor. I drove Chief Franklin on Christmas Day where we "snuck off to the Heights" so he could visit his wife. His three sons, Lonnie, Michael, and Thomas, also joined the Houston Fire Department during his tenure. For the Members of District 7/B (Stations 7, 8, 16, 25) that fateful night, it took a lot out of us. However, the thought on why the bay door only went up a few feet and stopped, causing that critical delay in response will haunt me until it is my time.....May He Rest in Peace.

Bob Parry (Retired)

