



REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, Retired

One of the first collections of Fire Fighter personnel pictures that I scanned belonged to the family of Walter Carl Dudensing, Sr. Walter entered the Houston Fire Department in 1928 and retired in 1964. He and his family managed to save and care for pictures that dated back to the first year of his career. One of the pictures in Walter's collection is what this article is based on. That picture is at the bottom of this page.

I assumed that Walter stayed at Station 16 most of his career, however even in my kind of research, assuming sometimes works, this time it did not. Walter was promoted to Captain sometime in the early 1940's and left Station 16 where he had worked since 1928 and never made it back, but more on Captain Dudensing later.

Next I will introduce you to another Fire Fighter related to this article. His name is Mike Raymond Lathrop. Mike entered the Houston Fire Department in 1920 and started his career at the very end of the horse drawn era at Fire Station 4. I would like to note here for future reference that he was a U.S. Marine Corp Veteran of World War I and World War II. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Mike left the HFD to rejoin the Marine Corps. He stayed in the military until 1943 and returned to civilian life and back to the job that he really loved. He returned to Fire Station 26, where he was one of the two Station Captains.

The second Fire Fighter, Wilson Snow, entered the HFD in 1937 at age 25. When World War II started and he was drafted into the U.S. Army, Wilson had the mis-fortune to be captured by the Japanese in 1942 and was a Prisoner of War in Japan working in the coal mines. In 1945 he was released by the Japanese and from the Military. Upon his return to Texas he re-entered the Houston Fire Department, and was assigned to Station 26.

The next Fire Fighter in this story is Earl McWilliams, who began his career with HFD in 1943 where he was assigned to Station 26. After a short stay in the HFD, he was drafted in 1944 into the United States Army. Earl was released from military duty in late 1945 and returned to his fire fighting job and his position at Station 26 in February 1946.

The fourth member of this crew is Joseph "J. B." Martin. "J. B." was the Uncle of our late Chief "Whitey" Martin. "J. B." entered the HFD in 1931. His age had put him past the draft age and therefore he continued to serve HFD during the war years. In 1945, he transferred from Central Station to Station 26.

The fifth and final member of this crew was James Lowth. James, the nephew of HFD District Chief Pat Lowth, was also a veteran of World War II. James served 42 months in the U.S. Navy assigned to the Submarine Service. In January of 1946, James became a Houston Fire Fighter and was assigned to Station 26.

Now back to Captain Dudensing and the year 1948. Walter was a newly promoted Captain and his assignment was driving Assistant Chief Vernon Dorsett. His tenure as Chief Dorsett's driver came to an abrupt halt when, on the morning of January 21, 1949 while the pair were en route to a large fire at Hub Lumber on Lawndale. The Chief's car, driven by Captain Dudensing, collided with a passenger car occupied by a young woman who was taking her daughter to school. Chief Dorsett died at the scene and became the 30th Houston Fire Fighter to die in the line-of-duty. Captain Dudensing

received a very severe shoulder injury. The doctors told him that he would never be able to return to fire fighting and would mostly likely be "tied" to a desk the rest of his career. However this head strong 21 year veteran refused to accept his fate. He built his own "therapy machine" in his garage. He devised this "machine" using pulleys and ropes and a platform that held bricks and exercised his injured shoulder everyday while adding more bricks until he rehabilitated his shoulder. He endured the mental and physical pain of the accident for many months and was finally released by the doctors and returned to his fire fighting duties. Upon his release, he transferred to Station 26 replacing Capt. Mike Latrop.

The early morning of March 31, 1947 an alarm sounded at 0321 hours. The crew of Engine 26 left their quarters headed to a fire at the Eastern States Refinery located in the Manchester area of Southeast Houston. However, the crew of Engine 26 never made it to the dispatched location. Four short minutes after receiving the call, Engine 26 crossed over the railroad track at Broadway and Bowie and was struck by a locomotive owned by the Port Terminal Rail Road. The 100 ton locomotive hit the fire truck and dragged it over 400 feet before the engineer could come to a stop.

One year and three months after James Lowth entered the HFD, March 31, 1947, is when this tight knit crew's life's changed forever. Lowth, who had been a newlywed for only two weeks, had returned to work Sunday evening March 30th. Fire Fighter James Edward Lowth, age 23, was killed instantly and became the City of Houston's 13 traffic fatality of 1947 and HFD's 28th Fire Fighter to die in the line-of-duty since the beginning of the paid department in 1895.

As devastating as this crash was, it was a miracle that all of the crew of Engine 26 were not killed. When I first researched this incident, I did not give much thought to the other members of James' crew because I was concentrating on the details of his death. Years later, while talking to one of the survivors of the accident, I was told about the injuries of the other crew members. It was then I realized that each of the survivors endured much physical and mental pain for years following the fatal accident.

Now, back to the photo that I consider the beginning of this article. I ran the picture on our "Faces of Local 341" page in the October 2007 issue, and in the caption I mistakenly stated that it was taken at Fire Station 16, only because Walter Dudensing was in the picture. After the issue came out I was corrected by Chief Earl McWilliams. He stated that the picture was taken at Fire Station 26 around 1950. He also told me that Captain Dudensing had just trans-



(Left to right) "J. B." Martin, Walter Dudensing, Sr., Earl McWilliams, Robert Jacob, Sr.

Photo provided by the family of Walter Dudensing.

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Remembering To Never Forget

DWAYNE FRANCES GUILLORY

Served HFD 1996 to 2008

Died May 18, 2008

BILLY ROYCE HESTER

Served HFD 1955 to 1986

Died May 6, 2008

LEON LARA EGUIA

Served HFD 1957 to 1977

Died May 4, 2008

CLARENCE DANIEL BYERS

Served HFD 1951 to 1972

Died May 2, 2008

MICKEY GENE PATE

Served HFD 1979 to 2008

Died April 16, 2008

JOEY SHELDON REED, SR.

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 1980 to 2004

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 JUNE

June 8, 1932

CHARLES ROLAND RUSK

Fire Fighter, Station 14

June 13, 1902

CLIFFORD W. JOHNSON

Driver, Station 8

June 22, 1929

RANDOLPH “RUDY” HENDRICKS

Fire Fighter, Station 25

June 30, 1962

CLAUDE JACKSON HOPKINS

Chauffeur, Station 2

Total from January 1, 2008 to present - 14 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

The Faces of Local 341

1932 to 2008

Houston Professional Fire Fighter's Association



HFD Station 5 - 1931

Photo provided by Rufus Templet



HFD Station 5 - 1955

Photo provided by Ben Brymer

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ferred there replacing Captain Latrop and had just returned to full duty after his shoulder injury that he suffered in the crash that killed Chief Dorsett. Earl had also just returned back to full duty after being off from the injuries he sustained on the night that James Lowth was killed.

I will close this article with details of the four surviving Fire Fighters.

CAPTAIN MIKE LATROP - suffered a broken back. Even with his broken back he managed to check on the condition of his men. Mike returned to duty and back to Station 26 in late 1948, and later transferred to the newly opened Station 29. Station 29 had a brand new engine and was possibly easier on his back. Captain Latrop managed to remain on duty for several years retiring in 1955 after 35 years service.

CHAUFFEUR J. B. MARTIN - went through the windshield suffering glass cuts and bruising. He was off for five months following the accident.

WILSON SNOW - sustained major head injuries and a broken leg. For the first 30 days of his hospital stay, he was in and out of consciousness and would wake up many times thinking he was still a POW. Wilson's hospital stay lasted 6 months. He returned to

Station 26 after being off from work for 2 years. He stayed with his old crew for a while and later transferred to the newly opened Station 12. Wilson never fully recovered from his injuries, emotionally and physically and took a disability retirement in 1963.

EARL MCWILLIAMS - his injuries consisted of a compound fracture to his right leg and he also sustained a broken wrist. His leg injury required him to be in a partial body cast. Earl stayed in St. Josephs Hospital for four and a half months. After that he was scheduled to be transferred, along with Wilson, to Jeff Davis Hospital. Assistant Chief George Richardson talked the hospital into letting him go home and had acquired a hospital bed for Earl's house. During the time he was still in the body cast, the crew of Station 29 would come over and help Earl's wife when he had to be moved. And from time-to-time one of the ambulance companies would go and pick him up and take him to Station 26 for a visit with his crew.

Earl returned to service after two years of recuperation. He returned for a short time on light duty and after a few months was allowed to go back to Station 26. He stayed there for a short time and was promoted to Chauffeur and retired in 1978 as District Chief 102 (Station 10) after serving citizens of Houston for 35 years. I would like to thank Chief McWilliams, who in the last five years has become a very good friend, for helping with this article and many of my other projects.

The Faces of Local 341

1932 to 2008

Houston Professional Fire Fighter's Association



Fighters working the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo - March 2008

(left to right) Leo Jordon, Fire Fighter - 63/B, Ingrid Bozarth, E/O - 69/C, Cary Hunter, Fire Fighter - 94/B, Slate Hill, E/O - 40/B.

Photo provided by Scott Mellott



ARFF, Station 99/C-Shift, IAH - May 21, 2008

(left to right) Mathew Novac, Bill Ivy, Alan Johnstone, Gary Sowell, Alec Beard.

Photo provided by Scott Mellott



Captain Gilbert Bennett, Engine 3, August 28, 2007.

Photo provided by Scott Mellott



Station 103/C-Shift - April 25, 2008

(top left) Engineer/Operator Chris Weaver, Captain J. J. Reneau. (bottom) Fire Fighter Roy Gonzales, Fire Fighter Mike Thompson.

Photo provided by Scott Mellott