



REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, Retired

Several events have already happened this year that has made a huge impact on the HFD. There has been, what I consider three major events, the accident between Engine 7 and Ladder 16, the two Fire Fighters who perished at a house fire and the Fire Cadet who died while in training at the Val Jahnke Training Academy.

I am actually going to start with the latest event. On April 29th Cadet Cohnway Johnson, just one month into his training, collapsed after completing his morning run. He was rushed to Memorial Herman and admitted to the ICU where he died 5 days later.

Cohnway had been a valuable member of the Oak Hill Fire Department for three years. He left his friends and family in Central Texas to pursue his dream to become a Houston Fire Fighter. Cadet Cohnway Johnson is not considered a line-of-duty death because he had not taken the oath of office which would not have happened until he graduated.

The very first of what I call an HFD tragic event of the year was the accident between Engine 7 and Ladder 16 on March 30. This accident sent every Fire Fighter (9) riding on the two apparatus and two civilians to the hospital. I had been out of town all weekend and had arrived at the airport that morning around the time of the accident. When I got home I returned a call from a friend wanting some historical information and found out that he was waiting (because he is a Member of the Honor Guard) to see if all the Fire Fighters had survived the accident. When I finally saw the news and saw Ladder 16 on its side looking like a beached whale and Engine 7 minus the front of the cab, I was horrified and that is saying a lot for me, at the carnage of the accident where all involved were still breathing. Days began to pass, two of the Fire Fighters who were hospitalized were recovering, however, Leigh Boone, one of the civilians injured as result of the accident, was still listed in critical condition. Each day that went by her condition never seemed to improve.

The Saturday before Easter Sunday I emailed a question to my friend Billy Goldfedder, who is the author of the "Secret List" (the email list that addresses Fire Fighter deaths and Fire Fighter safety). He emailed me back and said he was out right now and would get back to my question when he got back home and in case you have not heard yet the "Lady on the Bike" died about an hour ago. That news to me was comparable to a brick falling on my head.

Then came Easter Sunday morning, which by the way for me started out very early. The news of Miss Boone's death was still bouncing around my brain. Early that morning I was preparing to travel to NYC for my spring trip getaway. I was leaving on Sunday and was coming home on Friday. Prior to leaving the house for a

7:30 am flight, I kept feeling something was wrong and kept thinking the anxiety was way beyond the old "what am I forgetting" feeling. About an hour into the flight I noticed a voice mail from my wife time stamped 7:30 am. When I played it back, with the plane noise and not being used to my new iPhone, all I was able to hear were the words "Fire Fighters." I was once again horrified because at 7:30 am Sunday morning the words could only produce a bad connotation, and because the words were plural meant a disaster happened to more than one Fire Fighter. When I arrived at my destination, it was almost an hour before I was able to learn that the two that died were Captain James Harlow and Fire Fighter Damion Hobbs.

When I got to where I stay in New York City, I looked at return flights and decided that I would stay at least through Monday. I was not able to return until Wednesday. I started Wednesday at 3:00 am, and after a major delay in one of my flights I did not arrive in Houston until 4:00 pm. This was a good thing because by the time I got home I was totally emotionally and physically gone and was able to crash and burn and not deal with the situation until the next morning, which was the day of the double Memorial Service.

Now that some time has passed and I have somewhat recovered from the numbness I experienced the second I was told of James and Damion's death, I am now able to describe to you my perspective of the Memorial Service held in their honor.

The day started at 7:00 am with Fire Fighters mustering at Ellington Field so they could be bussed to Station 93 where the march to the church was to begin. I found a spot in the Chauffeurs section of the column and soon the march to the church began and the "Long Blue Line" was formed. When the march ended and we were all in our seats at the church, the Honor Guard began to escort the two families to their seats. The last four memorial services watching the family being seated has always been the hardest part for me and this was no exception, especially since there were two families in attendance. The service began and we listened to several dignitaries and as numb as I was I really only remember small parts of each individual on the stage. Then the crew of the deceased Fire Fighters got on stage and began reading a several page paper that they had all helped write. Each sentence was literally etched into my brain as they began to tell all of us how much they loved these guys and what an impact the two had made on each of them. What I got out of this was the fact that the veteran captain was a well respected officer and left the crew with many great memories for them to cherish and take to their graves. The Fire Cadet turned "Probie" who had only just began his on the job training had already, within six weeks, shown the crew that he was on his way to being a well respected Fire Fighter with the potential of becoming a well respected officer later in his career.

However, the most important item I took a way from that day is the fact that the family of our fallen brothers will always remember and cherish the send off given their loved ones by the Citizens of Houston, and the Houston Fire Department, something I promise you they will never forget.



(From the left) Leigh Boone, James Harlow, Damion Hobbs, and Cohnway Johnson

Remembering To Never Forget

BRIAN ELLIS RHONE
Served HFD 1998 to 2009
Died May 25, 2009

LASKAR ANDREW "PAT" MULLENS
Served HFD 1953 to 1974
Died May 7, 2009

COHNWAY MATTHEW JOHNSON
Served HFD 2009 to 2009
Died May 2, 2009

ANTHONY WAYNE FOSTER, SR.
Served HFD 1982 to 2005
Died April 26, 2009

LEORY EDWARD WARD, JR.
Served HFD 1959 to 1984
Died April 23, 2009

KYLE QUINCEY RANEY
Served HFD 1973 to 2008
Died April 16, 2009

DAMION JON HOBBS
Served HFD March 7, 2009 to April 12, 2009
Died April 12, 2009 - *Line-of-Duty Death*

JAMES ARTHUR HARLOW
Served HFD 1979 to 2009
Died April 12, 2009- *Line-of-Duty Death*

ALTON LAMAR KLUTTS
Served HFD 1950 to 1986
Died April 12, 2009

JERRY JOE HUBENAK
Served HFD 1958 to 1983
Died April 11, 2009

JAMES DONALD "J.D." ROBINSON
Served HFD 1941 to 1970
Died April 8, 2009

ARNOLD IVY BAKER
Served HFD 1952 to 1977
Died April 6, 2009

WILLIAM JAMES CLEMONS
Served HFD 1963 to 1987
Died March 26, 2009

RONALD WAYNE GUNNELS
Served HFD 1964 to 2001
Died March 11, 2009

PHILLIP STEVEN "STEVIE" SCHULTZ
Served HFD 1967 to 2002
Died March 5, 2009

BOBBY DEE CARRAWAY
Served HFD 1968 to 2004
Died February 18, 2009

PHILLIP LEE HUDGENS
Served HFD 1977 to 2005
Died February 1, 2009

RODNEY DALE WATERS
Served HFD 1985 to 2009
Died January 31, 2009

THEODORE GREGORY HILL
Served HFD 1970 to 1990
Died January 21, 2009

GEORGE HARLAN CONWAY
Served HFD 1952 to 1977
Died January 13, 2009

TRACY BIRKELBACH
Served HFD 1961 to 1991
Died January 1, 2009

Total from January 1, 2009 to present - 21 Deaths
Total for the Year 2008 - 39 Deaths

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

June 8, 1932
CHARLES ROLAND RUSK
Fire Fighter, Station 14

June 22, 1929
RANDOLPH "RUDY" HENDRICKS
Fire Fighter, Station 25

June 13, 1902
CLIFFORD W. JOHNSON
Driver, Station 8

June 30, 1962
CLAUDE JACKSON HOPKINS
Chauffeur, Station 2

For current information on deceased Fire Fighters, please go to my website: www.houstonfirememorial.org
and click on "Recent Deaths" or email Scott at scottmel@juno.com

My website contains information on current Houston Fire Fighter deaths, obits, line-of-duty deaths and many other items. There is also information on my memorial t-shirts. If you have any input on this site, I would be glad to hear from you, email me at scottmel@juno.com

Also visit www.firefighterclosecalls.com. Website where my friend and Fire Fighter safety advocate Billy Goldfedder has his information. Also while you are there sign up for his email newsletter The Secret List, where you will get current information on Fire Fighter injuries and deaths around the United States.

The Faces of Local 341

1932 to 2008

Houston Professional Fire Fighter's Association

Photos on this page submitted by Scott Mellott (Retired)



Pictured above: Station 1 - Preston and Caroline, February 1931

Pictured below: Station 25 - 3104 Blodgett and Ennis, February 1931



The Faces of Local 341

1932 to 2008

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Leon "Pappy" Self (probably playing "Faded Love") - 1970's



Fire Station 46/C Shift - 3902 Corder and Scott Street - April 30, 2009

*(Top L-R) Captain John Zepeda; Barrett Hansen - FF; Jason Martinez - FF; Chris Cull - E/O; Paul Robles - FF;
Captain Mo Davis; Gary West - FF; Jeff Johnson - FF; Marc Arnaud - FF; Larry Dickens-E/O. (Bottom L-R) John Westbrook - FF;
Tommy Scott - FF; Al Sanchez - FF; Javier Clemente - FF; Chief Fred Hooker.*