





Chapter Eight

Line of Duty Deaths

I have been involved with the History of the Houston Fire Department since 1986. In the beginning I was asked by the Houston Fire Museum to research Houston's Line of Duty Deaths since the HFD became a paid Department in 1895.

This became an eight-month project and the results of my labor were published in the *Houston Fire Department 1988 Sesquicentennial Yearbook*. After that my line of duty history was published in the HFD's 1995 and 2000 Yearbooks. After all the names were compiled they were placed on my memorial website, www.houstonfirememorial.org.

The Houston Fire Fighter Pension built a new office in 2000 and also built a memorial plaza on the same property. In this Memorial Garden there are two memorial walls. The "Wall of Honor" is made of granite. On this wall are the names of all the deceased Fire Fighters since 1895. The second memorial is call the "Rescue". This is a granite and bronze monument that lists all the Houston Fire Department's Line of Duty Deaths since the beginning of the paid Department.

- Scott Mellott

Left: Shortly after this photo was taken this crew was involved in an accident, killing three of these crew members. Identified in this photo is Henry Levy driving, he entered the HFD in 1895 as one of the original 50 hires for the new paid department. The three of the fire fighters that died are identified as the second from the left on the running board is Harry L."Red" Oxford, next to the driver is Captain John S. Little Sr, the Fire Fighter on the far right is Edgar H. Grant. (Family of John Little)



Emil "Ed" Thompson

Died April 27, 1899 at age 31

Born: 1868 in Europe

Entered Fire Department: January 1, 1897

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 5

Buried: Glenwood Cemetery, Section C, The Houston Firemen's Plot, Plot 98

Ed met his demise through a series of coincidences that were unavoidable. At that particular time, Houston Avenue was in very poor condition which caused the crew from Fire House 5 to detour onto Hickory Street if their route required it. Hickory Street was not a favorite route of the Fire Department because at one place, a railroad track

intersected it with an unusually steep grade crossing and an almost totally blind spot. On the day of the accident, Fire House 5 received a call for a house fire on Crocket Street which made them detour through Hickory Street. Meanwhile, Engine # 56 of the Houston and Texas Central Railway was moving eleven cars, pushing them toward the Hickory Street crossing. Neither the railroad crew nor the Fire Department crew aboard the horse-drawn Hose Wagon 5 knew both would reach the dangerous railroad crossing at the same time. By the time the driver of Hose Wagon 5 was at the top of the grade, he knew he was in danger of being hit, but he was at the point of no return. Thinking quickly, he whipped and shouted at the well-trained horses and caused them to bolt forward suddenly. The Fire Fighters on the back of the wagon did not think the horses and wagon would clear the crossing in time, so they jumped off the back. The last man off was Ed Thompson who fell backward in the path of the railroad cars and was killed instantly.



Clifford W. Johnson

Died June 13, 1902 at age 24

Born: 1878 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: Early 1899

Duty: Driver at Fire House 8

Buried: Hollywood Cemetery, Mossy Dell , Plot 42, Space 6

On the night of the accident, Clifford Johnson was assigned to drive the Assistant Chief's Buggy. His duties included picking up the Chief at his home in case of alarm. He was en route to pick up Chief Arto and respond to a fire at 1611 Franklin. He was driving his buggy on Crawford Street and had built up a high rate of speed. As he passed Fire House 8, he ran into the rear of a slow moving vehicle traveling in the same direction without working tail lights. The Fire Fighters at Fire House 8 shouted a warning to the driver of the slow moving vehicle; however, their attempt proved futile. The driver of the other vehicle narrowly escaped injury, yet Johnson's injuries were fatal. The injured fire fighter was taken to Saint Joseph Hospital where he died early the next day.



Frank W. Medlenka

Died November 23, 1901 at age 42

Born: June 15, 1859 in Louisville, Kentucky

Entered Fire Department: September 21, 1895

Duty: Driver at Fire House 8

Buried: Glenwood Cemetery, Old Strangers Rest, Space 320

Frank Medlenka was the driver of horse drawn Steamer 8. The day of his death, the steamer was responding to a fire at the corner of McKinney and Chartres, received from box # 315. Hose Wagon 8 preceded Medlenka's apparatus in crossing over the streetcar tracks at McKinney and Jackson where new tracks were being laid. As Hose Wagon 8

crossed the loose planks, they separated and cluttered the construction site. Steamer 8 then attempted to cross the same site when it overturned and fatally crushed Medlenka. He was taken to Saint Joseph Hospital where he died later that night. Frank Medlenka's name had been left off the Houston Fire Departments official list of Fire Fighters killed in the line of duty. In the early 1980's, one of his great nephews had noticed that his uncle's name was left off of the fire department official list. In a ceremony at Frank's gravesite, his name was rededicated as a Houston Fire Fighter killed in the line of duty. Frank had served as a Houston Volunteer Fire Fighter with Protection Company 1 in the early 1880's. He joined the ranks of the Houston fire department when it went to a paid in 1895.



Barney C. Moffatt

Died April 26, 1908 at age 50

Born: October 10, 1858 Location not known

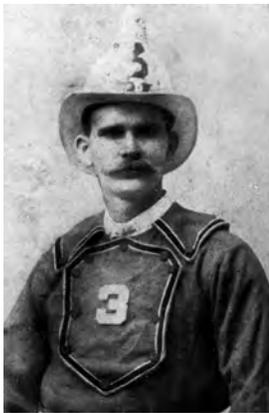
Entered Fire Department: 1895

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 7

Buried: Glenwood Cemetery, Section D, Plot 94

Barney Moffatt died while fighting a large fire at the Mercantile Grain Company located at 1215 Hardy Street. The blaze began at six o'clock Sunday morning in the main warehouse of the plant where sacks of grain and feed were kept. After the fire was extinguished, crews were assigned to work among the sacks to make sure the fire was out.

Moffatt and his Captain, Lawrence Lazzio, were given this assignment. Both were on top of the sacks, looking for small fires when suddenly the ceiling fell, crushing Barney Moffatt. Captain Lazzio, saved himself by grabbing a large ceiling beam. Moffatt served as a Houston Volunteer Fire Fighter from 1886 until Houston disbanded the volunteer service and went to a paid department in 1895. He worked out of Stonewall 3 Volunteer Company.



Thomas Andrew O'Leary

Died December 24, 1908 at age 48

Born: 1860 in New Port, Monmouthshire, England

Entered Fire Department: September 1895

Duty: Fire Chief of the Houston Fire Department

Buried: Glenwood Cemetery, Section West Avenue

Thomas O'Leary lost his life while he and his men were trying to extinguish a blaze in a railroad boxcar loaded with fireworks. The fire took place on the afternoon of November 22, 1908, in the Houston Belt Terminal Railroad switching yard located east of downtown. The fire started when a switch engine kicked another boxcar into a boxcar

loaded with the fireworks. The collision of the two boxcars caused an explosion and the ensuing fire. Chief O'Leary was directing his men with little or no concern about the exploded boxcar because the explosion blew the roof of the car, thus minimizing its danger. The main concern was the possibility of the fire reaching the other rail cars, however, unknown to the Fire Fighters, large shells for aerial fireworks were on board the boxcar. Those who investigated the accident believed that one or more of the shells exploded in the end of the car where Chief O'Leary stood. The Chief took the full brunt of the blast. Five other Fire Fighters were injured and taken to Saint Joseph Hospital, along with Chief O'Leary. The Chief fought courageously for his life until December 24, 1908, when he lost his final battle. Tom O'Leary volunteered with Stonewall 3 Company until the City of Houston hired full time Fire Fighters to take the place of the volunteers. When this happened O'Leary, joined the ranks of the paid department.



Clifford A. Wiese

Died July 14, 1913 at age 22

Born: June 10, 1891 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: July 4, 1913

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 3

Buried: Magnolia Cemetery

Clifford Wiese had worked for the Houston Fire Department for a few months in 1912. He had been reinstated for ten days when he was a victim of an accident on July 14, 1913. Clifford was assigned to Fire House 3 at 1919 Houston Avenue and Spring Street. His duty that day he died was that of driving a mule-drawn supply wagon and delivering

supplies to the various fire houses around the city. Upon completing his day's deliveries, he began the trip back to Fire House 3. There was a railroad track that ran beside fire house which was in need of repair. The maintenance crew of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad was on the job repairing the bad track with a work train that consisted of various types of cars used to hold the needed equipment. Wiese and his wagon were traveling on Johnson Street and were less than 500 feet from the back of the fire house when they began to cross the railroad tracks to turn onto Spring Street. At the same time the engine of the work train was pushing its rail cars across Johnson Street where Wiese was attempting to cross. The lead rail car hit the wagon splintering it into many pieces, injuring the horse and fatally injuring Wiese. Clifford Wiese was taken by ambulance to Saint Joseph Hospital where he died two hours later.



Herman J. "Dutch" Wagner

Died May 25, 1912 at age 41

Born: June 2, 1871 in Chicago, Illinois

Entered Fire Department: 1894

Duty: Captain at Fire House 8

Buried: Washington Cemetery, Section D, Plot 2

Captain Wagner met his demise when a heavy building timber fell on him as he and his crew were fighting a large inferno in downtown Houston. The fire, which started in the Stowers Building, destroyed it and three other buildings on May 19, 1912. In describing the fire, the Houston Chronicle reported that Herman Wagner had thought that the Stowers

Building was dangerous and capable of taking a fire fighter's life one day. He never dreamed that the fire fighter would be himself. Captain Wagner fought valiantly for his life in Saint Joseph Hospital for the six days following the accident. He never regained consciousness after surgery was performed in a final attempt to save his life.



Patrick O'Hare

Died September 21, 1913 at age 35

Born: March 17, 1878 in the State of Washington

Entered Fire Department: 1906

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 6

Buried: Cleveland, Ohio

Patrick died when the fire engine he was riding on was en route to fire alarm Box # 412. The apparatus was traveling south on Sabine crossing Lubbock Street. At this point, the street intersects at an offset position. Because of this, the fire engine had to make a sharp turn in order to continue through on Sabine. When this was done, the rear wheels hit a twelve-inch hole where the street bricks were missing. At this time O'Hare was attempting to put his fire coat on. He was knocked off balance from a sudden lurch of the fire engine and was thrown off against a telephone pole. He was killed instantly.



R. R. GLASS,
Pipeman Hose Co. No. 5.

Robert Rutherford Glass

Died December 1, 1913 at age 31

Born: September 14, 1882 in Houston, Texas

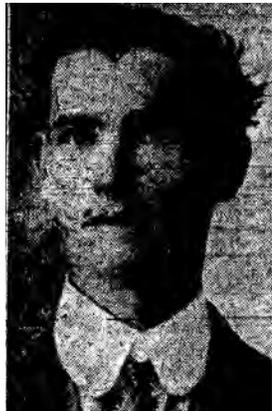
Entered Fire Department: 1902

Duty: Fire Fighter at Central Fire Station

Buried: Evergreen Cemetery, Section B2, Plot 21

Robert Glass worked at the Central Fire Station located in San Jacinto and Texas Avenue where he was assigned to Auto Service Truck 1. Seconds before an alarm for a house fire in the Fifth Ward was received, Car 119 of the Galveston-Houston Electric Railway Company was returning to its roundhouse a short distance from the fire

house. Truck 1 rushed out of its berth turning left and quickly turning left again onto the street directly beside Central Fire Station. There, it slammed into the trolley car injuring Glass and two other Fire Fighters that were riding on the side of the truck. All three Fire Fighters were taken to Saint Joseph Hospital where Glass died the next morning. The two other Fire Fighters were treated and released.



Harry Dodd

Died July 26, 1923 at age 40

Born: November 17, 1883 in Kinney, Texas

Entered Fire Department: January 1, 1921

Duty: Fire Fighter at Central Fire Station

Buried: Hempstead, Texas

Harry Dodd died instantly in an accident which involved Ladder 1, a passenger car, and a streetcar. Ladder 1 was en route to a house fire at 1315 Shaw. Entering the intersection of Dallas and Milam, it hit a passenger car. Meanwhile, the Chapman Street trolley car was at the intersection waiting for the emergency vehicle to pass. Chemical Truck

1 had already crossed through the intersection a few seconds prior to Ladder 1. The ladder truck and car entered the intersection at the same time and collided with such a tremendous force that it caused Ladder 1 to hit the streetcar head on. Several Fire Fighters and four civilians were injured.



H. A. "Ace" Harris

Died February 14, 1921 at age 48

Born: October 24, 1873 in Calvert, Texas

Entered Fire Department: November 1920

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 10

Buried: Sunnyside Cemetery, about 2 1/2 - 3 miles northeast of Calvert, Texas

H. A. was a Fire Fighter in Dallas, Texas for twelve years before he moved to Houston and landed a job with the fire department as a house watchman. A couple of weeks later assigned as a Fire Fighter to Fire House 10.

At 6:15 PM on the day that Harris died, his engine company responded to a building fire just north of downtown

on Baker Street. When they arrived at the Texas Lamp and Oil Company, the large building was fully engulfed with flames. A second alarm was immediately sounded, and soon after that; a third alarm was requested. The lack of water supply in the area prompted the fire crews to drag hose line through a narrow alley way to reach the burning building, Harris, along with the other crew members, entered the alley way with two hose lines in order to gain access to the burning building. Meanwhile, another crew had opened a door on the other side of the building. This caused a back draft and three barrels of denatured alcohol to explode, blowing out the wall bordering the alley trapping Harris and seven other Fire Fighters. The falling wall did not kill; Harris however, the heavy lamp oil smoke suffocated him. The cause of this fire that caused one hundred thousand dollars worth of damage to three businesses was faulty electrical wiring. Harris's death was overlooked by the fire department for seventy-nine years. A scrapbook recently obtained from the estate of a retired fire fighter contained a Houston Press clipping dated February 15, 1921 verifying his service.



John "Bob" A. Boyd

Died August 4, 1923 at age 53

Born: November 3, 1870 in Galveston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: 1895

Duty: First Assistant Chief at Central Fire Station

Buried: Holy Cross Cemetery, Section H, Plot 71

Bob Boyd entered into the paid ranks of the Houston Fire Department after serving as a volunteer with the Stonewall 3 Company from 1887 to 1895. In 1919 he left the fire service to work as trainman on the Southern Pacific Railroad. In May 1923, Chief Roxy Ollre of the Houston Fire Department became angered at the two

Assistant Chiefs and demoted both of them to the rank of Fire Fighter. Chief Ollre then contacted Bob Boyd and persuaded him to return to the service of the fire department as an Assistant Chief, the same rank as when he left in 1919. In the early afternoon of August 4, 1923, Chief Boyd was killed while riding Chemical 1 when it hit a telephone pole while trying to avoid a collision with an auto at the intersection of Congress and Hamilton. Chemical 1 was answering an alarm at Schrimpt Alley Street where a serious fire was in progress. It is interesting to note that Chief Boyd, who served the Houston Fire Department for over thirty-five years, was scheduled to go on vacation leave just two days after the accident occurred.



Harold A. Denny

Died May 1, 1924 at age 19

Born: September 6, 1905 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: 1924

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 9

Died: May 1, 1924 at age 19

Buried: Washington Cemetery, Section D Lot 44

Harold Denny was a very young, eager just learning the job that he had chosen for his life's profession. He was the brother-in-law of John S. Little Sr., who was the Captain at Fire House 9. Denny was living with the Little family and was sent by Mrs. Little to the Fire House with Captain Little's bed sheets. A short time after Harold arrived,

Engine 9 was dispatched to a fire at the Bluefront Boarding House located at Preston and Milam. Denny decided to ride Engine 9 to the fire. En route to the fire, the driver used the North Main viaduct. Engine 9 was exiting the north end of the viaduct when a streetcar hit them. Harold Denny was riding on the rear when he was killed instantly another Fire Fighter was also seriously injured.



George L. Bishop

Died March 1, 1926 at age 42

Born: 1884 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: 1916

Duty: Captain at Fire House 4

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Section J, Plot 128, Space 2

On February 28, 1926, a call came in for a house fire at 2707 Grant Street. When Captain Bishop's crew arrived on the scene, the structure was totally involved. Captain Bishop took his crew around to the rear of the house to attack the fire. He gallantly led his crew onto the back porch of the house. Without warning, the chimney came loose

from the house, crashing onto the porch, tearing it away from the house, and sending the Fire Fighters scurrying for their lives. Captain Bishop took most of the brunt of the flying brick and debris and suffered critical injuries. He was taken to Saint Joseph Hospital where he died the next morning.



Claude W. Edmonds

Died August 19, 1926 at age 32

Born: September 25, 1894 in Mississippi

Entered Fire Department: December 16, 1916

Duty: Captain at Central Fire Station

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Section I, Plot 181, Space 2

Captain Edmonds was conducting a ladder drill with Ladder 1 on the parking lot beside the Central Fire Station. The eighty-five foot aerial ladder was raised and the Fire Fighters had been taking turns climbing down the backside of the ladder. This was not a routine Fire Department drill. Several Fire Fighters had climbed the ladder before Captain

Edmonds took his turn. As Captain Edmonds reached the top of the ladder, it began to sway in the wind. Suddenly it cracked five feet from the base, fell across Preston Street, and hit an overhead trolley car wire where it broke again. When this happened, Captain Edmonds fell to the street where he was critically injured. He was taken to the hospital and pronounced dead upon arrival.



James "Mag" Magerson Smith

Died February 9, 1929 at age 38

Born: August 23, 1891 in Taylor, Texas

Entered Fire Department: May 4, 1920

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 10

Buried: Evergreen Cemetery

Mag Smith was assigned to Engine 10 on the night of February 9, 1929, when a fire broke out at a residence on 2704 Congress. The house was heavily involved with fire. Engine 10 arrived at the scene, and stopped at the fire hydrant down the block. Mag got off the back of the fire truck to hook a hose line to a fire hydrant, when Engine 10

proceeded to the fire. A hose coupling caught in the bed of the pumper pulled the end of the hose like a slingshot from the grasp of Mag. When this happened, the hose couple hit him in the head, killing him instantly.



Rudolph “Rudy” L. Hendicks

Died June 22, 1929 at age 23

Born: September 29, 1906 in Colorado County, Texas

Entered Fire Department: January 4, 1928

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 25

Buried: Rosewood Cemetery, Section I, Lot 112

Rudy had only been a member of the Houston Fire Department for about 5 months. He died from a hazard that all Fire Fighters fear: electrocution. His crew had received a call for a house fire at 3552 Reeves Street, which was close to the firehouse. Rudy was operating a hose line in the rear of this totally involved structure when an electrical

line burned loose from the house and wrapped around his body. His fellow fire fighter administered artificial respiration until an ambulance arrived and transported him to Methodist Hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival.



Edgar H. Grant

Died July 2, 1929 at age 27

Born: March 20, 1902 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: February 18, 1928

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 18

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Section C, Plot 109

Story Below.



Harry L. “Red” Oxford

Died July 3, 1929 at age 34

Born: July 3, 1895 in Dallas, Texas

Entered Fire Department: November 16, 1928

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 18

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Section I, Plot 143

Story Below.



John Sellis Little Sr.

Died July 11, 1929 at age 46

Born: November 19, 1883 in Knoxville, Tennessee

Entered Fire Department: June 4, 1913

Duty: Captain at Fire House 18

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Section 27, Plot 59, Space 12

Story Below.

Shortly after midnight on July 2nd 1929, Engine 18 was dispatched to a house fire at 2426 Wilshire. The fire had progressed to the point where the fire was producing a large glow in the sky. Engine 18 took a route that would include Telephone Road and a Gulf Coast Line Railroad grade crossing. Engine 18 and the railroad engine pulling 53 cars arrived at the crossing at the same time. Engine 18 was broad-sided by the train.

Edgar Grant, age 27, was a Houston firefighter for less than 6 months and was dead at the scene. Harry Oxford, was a Houston Fire Fighter for less than a year and died the next day at Memorial Baptist on his 34th birthday. Their Captain, John S. Little Sr., a 16 year veteran, was seriously injured and was taken to Memorial Baptist Hospital, where he underwent several operations and lost his final battle eleven days later.

There were two other men on board Engine 18 who narrowly escaped death. Captain George “Pop” Wilson,

who was one of two station captains and off duty, got on Engine 18 to ride to the fire with the crew. He was riding on the side and was able to jump away from the collision and sustained cuts and bruises. The chauffeur Raymond Prewit was injured and hospitalized.

After the accident, Engine 20 and Engine 22 were dispatched to take the place of Engine 18 at the house fire. Both Engine 20 and 22 took a different route but also had to cross the same track but at the Lawndale intersection taking a chance that the train was going in the opposite direction. However, the train had crossed the Lawndale intersection, and after colliding with Engine 18 blocked the path of the replacement engines. The firefighters did not know this, and did not see the train’s tank cars on the crossing until the last minute. The driver of Engine 22 slid sideways into a ditch to avoid a second deadly crash. After Engine 22 slid into the ditch, a quick thinking Fire Fighter ran onto the street toward

a fast moving Engine 20 in order to prevent a third accident.

July of 1929, the HFD had to deal with the first multiple line of duty deaths. You would think that another train and fire truck accident would not happen any time soon. Unfortunately, five months later in December another train and fire truck accident occurred. Safety of the railroad grade crossing was to say the least “lacking” and would most likely be the culprit. Many crossings at that time were not marked.



Aaron Layola O'Brien

Died December 20, 1929 at age 23

Born: September 15, 1906 in Texas

Entered Fire Department: July 12, 1929

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 19

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Section I, Plot 248, Space 4627

Story Below.



Michael J. Ward

Died December 21, 1929 at age 34

Born: 1895 in Evansville, Indiana

Entered Fire Department: unknown

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 14

Buried: St Joseph Catholic Cemetery, Evansville, Indiana, Section 9 Lot 69

The accident between Engine 19 and a Southern Pacific Railroad train that killed Fire Fighters O'Brien and Ward happened only five months after the same type of accident killed three men from Fire House 18. The previous accident caused the Fire Fighters at Fire House 19 to be very aware of railroad crossings, especially the one a few hundred yards

from Fire House 19 on Gregg Street. Each time the fire apparatus pulled out of the Fire House to the right, the first thing the driver did was to look down Gregg Street at the warning signals. The night of the accident, Fire House 19 received a call for a house fire at Quitman and Clark. As the driver wheeled his pumper out of the Fire House toward the railroad crossing, he noticed that the warning signals were not flashing. Engine 19 began to negotiate the railroad crossing when it was hit by a train.

Aaron O'Brien was riding on the side of the apparatus working the siren and was thrown off and died instantly. Four members of the crew sustained relatively minor injuries

William Ward was visiting the Fire House off duty at the time the alarm came in and chose to ride Engine 19 to the fire when he was seriously injured and was taken to Saint Joseph Hospital where he died early the next morning.



Charles Roland Rusk

Died June 8, 1932 at age 52

Born: June 3, 1880 in Akron, Ohio

Entered Fire Department: April 24, 1918

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 14

Buried: Hollywood Cemetery, Section K, Space 105

Charles Rusk, prior to his fatal accident, had been slowly losing his eyesight. This medical condition caused him to leave the Houston Fire Department in November of 1931 after fourteen years of service. In time, he regained his eyesight which enabled him to return to duty on May 8, 1932.

Rusk was fatally injured exactly one month after his return to duty when the ladder truck he was riding on slammed into an eastbound streetcar at 17th Street and Yale Street. Ladder 14, which was en route to a house fire, struck the streetcar broadside, causing injury to the operator of the streetcar, two passengers, Rusk, and two fellow Fire Fighters. Rusk was transported to the Heights Clinic where he died later the same day.



Esker Jackson Rogers

Died August 22, 1934 at age 28

Born: May 18, 1906 Buckshot, Texas

Entered Fire Department: September, 1929

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 17

Buried: Rosewood Cemetery, Section 20, Plot 90, Space 2

Esker Rogers' death was a classic example of someone being in the wrong place at the wrong time. His was regularly assigned to Fire House 17, but because of a shortage of Fire Fighters at Fire House 24, someone was needed from Fire House 17. However, it was not Rogers' turn. It was the turn of another Fire Fighter, who lived to

tell about it. When Rogers reported to Fire House 24, they received a call from a fire alarm box, which turned out to be false. While en route to the location, a streetcar pulled into Engine 24's path at Leeland and Jackson. The driver of Engine 24 tried to avoid hitting the streetcar by turning sharply. This caused the fire apparatus to slam sideways into the streetcar, crushing Rogers between the two vehicles. Rogers was taken to St. Josephs Infirmary where he died later that evening.

None of the occupants of the streetcar were injured; however, three other Fire Fighters were seriously hurt. Captain Merl F. London, Driver Julis F. "Bubba" Arto and firefighter Willie Cross.



Alford Henry Schutze

Died August 21, 1938 at age 51

Born: September 22, 1887 Location not known

Entered Fire Department: November 5, 1917

Duty: District Chief at Fire House 7

Buried: Hollywood Cemetery, Section J, Plot 4, Space 1

Chief Schutze was a twenty-one year veteran of the Houston Fire Department. He died when the Chief's Chemical Truck, housed at Fire House 7 overturned as it hit an esplanade in the 5100 block of Main Street. This accident occurred while the Fire Fighters were en route to a house fire, which destroyed a garage apartment at 2012

Bolsover. The cause given for the night time accident was that the amber warning light used to warn drivers of the esplanade was burnt out. Chief Shultze was killed instantly. The fire fighter also on the apparatus received serious injuries and the driver of the fire truck sustained only minor injuries.



James Edward Lowth

Died March 31, 1947 at age 24

Born: June 26, 1923 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: January, 1946

Duty: Fire Fighter Fire House 26

Buried: Hollywood Cemetery, Section F, Plot 19

James Lowth was killed instantly when Engine 26 was hit by a train on the way to a fire at the Eastern States Refinery. Engine 26 was traveling on Broadway Street and was attempting to cross the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks at Bowie Street. The swinging arm-warning signal at the crossing had a burned out light causing the driver of the

pumper to miss the warning in advance of the oncoming train. Another factor that may have caused the accident was that the engineer of the train was seated on the opposite side of the engine from where the accident occurred and did not see the fire truck attempting to cross in front of the train.

Lowth had returned to the Houston Fire Department a year before the accident, having served forty-one months in the United States Navy. He had been married for two weeks, returning from his honeymoon six days before his death.



“Molly” Walker

Died July 1, 1940 at age 59

Born: October 23, 1881 in Millican, Texas

Entered Fire Department: March 1, 1914

Duty: Driver at Fire House 2

Buried: Hollywood Cemetery, Peaceful Valley, Plot 98, Space 5

His real name was Walter William Walker, born in 1881 in Millican, Texas. He entered the Houston Fire Department in 1914 at the age of 33. He had previously worked on the railroad as an engineer and fireman and was most likely hired because of his experience working with steam engines. He began his career in the Houston Fire

Department assigned to Fire Fire House 3 where he was the driver of the horse drawn Steamer 3.

In the early 1916 the city bought a motorized chain driven fire truck, manufactured by the American LaFrance Company which was delivered to Fire House 3. Molly was chosen to be the first drivers of this new type of fire apparatus. Molly adjusted to the fact that the horses were being retired and the City of Houston was quickly leaving the horse drawn era and moving in to the more modern motorize age of the fire service.

During the early 1930's Molly transferred to Fire House 2, located on the corner of Bagby and Capitol. His assignment there was driving the reserve pumper that the firefighters referred to as the “Bull Dog”. The brand name of the fire truck was Mack and the Mack Truck Company used a small hood ornament shaped like a bulldog as their company symbol. His job entailed going to whichever fire Fire House in the city was having their fire truck sent to the repair shop. When he arrived at the Fire House needing the reserve fire truck, the crew and the captain would ride that shift with Molly driving the “Bull Dog”.

On July 1, 1940, Molly died after trying to overcome injuries he sustained from an accident on December 6, 1938 involving the “Bull Dog” and a city bus. The day of the accident was Molly's day off, but he took the place of a fellow Fire Fighter who wanted off that day. Molly assignment that day was Fire House 17 located at 319 Sampson. Several of the firefighters were injured in the accident but Molly received a serious head injury, which took his life 41 months later.

Molly's legacy has continued through the years with several of his relatives becoming Houston Firefighters. His son, Senior Captain James E. “Buddy” Walker served the HFD from 1942 to 1977. His grandson, Captain Robert W. McCarty served from 1956-1995. Both of these firefighters are now deceased but are remembered by those of us who knew them as highly respected officers of the Houston Fire Department. Molly also has a great grandson who entered the department several years ago.



Horrace Oscar Gassoway

Died August 6, 1941 at age 37

Born: July 18, 1904 in Winsboro, Texas

Entered Fire Department: September, 1928

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 10

Buried: Hollywood Cemetery, Section J, Plot 31, Space

Horrace Gassoway was killed while responding to a large fire involving a supermarket located at Preston and Washington Avenue. Gassoway, normally assigned to Fire Fire House 10, was called to work that day at the Central Fire Station because of a shortage of manpower. He was riding on Service Truck 1 en route to the fire. Engine 2 was en route to the same location and was behind the apparatus

on which Gassoway was riding. When Service Truck 1 entered the intersection of Preston and Smith, Engine 2 was following to close and rear ended Truck 1. Gassoway was killed instantly when he and too other Fire Fighters were thrown off the back of the truck.



John "Red" Benjamin Adams

Died March 7, 1948 at age 49

Born: February 25, 1899 in Wheelock, Texas

Entered Fire Department: January 22, 1941

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 18

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Section 24, Plot 345, Space 7

"Red" Adams was a Fire Fighter assigned to Fire House 18; the night he died he was driving Engine 18. Fire House 18 was dispatched to a house fire at 2840 Lidstone. The incident turned out to be a small fire in a closet. "Red" was last seen standing beside Engine 18 operating the pumps when, moments later, one of the Fire Fighters in the house looked out and noticed "Red" lying on the ground. Red had a massive heart attack. The Harris County Emergency Corps arrived, and attempts to revive him failed. He was pronounced dead by a physician who lived in the neighborhood.



Vernon John Dorsett

Died January 21, 1949 at age 47

Born: November 15, 1902 in Nacogdoches, Texas

Entered Fire Department: December 5, 1919

Duty: Assistant Chief at Central Fire Station

Buried: Rosewood Cemetery, Section 20, Plot 81, Space 6

Vernon Dorsett has been given the ultimate compliment by being referred to as a "Fireman's Fireman." Chief Dorsett worked the day shift out of the Central Fire Station, and he, like the other Assistant Chiefs, was required to go to all multiple alarm fires. He responded to such an alarm at the Hub Lumber Company at 5519 Lawndale shortly after

reporting for duty. He received his fatal injuries when his Chief's car collided with a passenger car containing a woman who was taking her daughter to school. The accident occurred at the intersection of Harrisburg and Linwood on wet pavement. The Chief's car slid into the passenger vehicle as it was attempting to get out of the way. Chief Dorsett was killed instantly; however, the mother and daughter received slight injuries.

A sad footnote: Chief Dorsett was to attend his daughter's wedding that evening to give her hand in marriage. The Chief's daughter Barbara was married two weeks after the tragedy.



Robert "Bobby" Weir Milburn

Died April 14, 1949 at age 38

Born: March 31, 1911 in Palestine, Texas

Entered Fire Department: September 4, 1933

Duty: Driver at Fire House 7

Buried: South Park Cemetery, Section J, Plot 227

Box 3423, located at McGowen and Sauer Streets, was a fire alarm pull box that had sent in many false alarms. The men from Fire House 7 had been trying through channels to have this box removed. On the night of April 14, a prankster activated the alarm box which summoned Bobby Milburn to his death. Milburn was driving the Chief's car while en route to Box # 3423. The car reached the intersection of Fannin and McGowen the same time as a pickup truck. The pickup and Chief's car collided, seriously injuring the Chief and the driver of the pickup. Bobby was thrown out of the vehicle and suffered fatal injuries. The impact of the two vehicles was so great that both vehicles ended up on the side street far enough down the street that the passing Engine and Ladder 7 never knew that the accident had occurred.



Joseph "Bull" Earl Connor

Died January 31, 1951 at age 51

Born: April, 1900 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: January 1, 1922

Duty: Chauffeur Central Fire Station

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Gethsemani 55, Plot 257, Space 1

Joseph Conner was a soft-spoken man truly dedicated to his job. "Bull," the nickname that he had for over twenty years, died while on duty at a fire at the Alaskan Fur Factory on Main and Texas. His job was that of driving and operating the water tower truck. Witnesses said that "Bull" had just finished getting the kinks out of the fire hoses that were

attached to his truck when he fell against the fire apparatus apparently suffering a heart attack. A fire fighter close by summoned for help, but by the time the ambulance crew arrived, "Bull" had already lost consciousness and attempts to revive him were futile.



Charley Albert Middlekauf

Died March 10, 1953 at age 65

Born: in Canton, Illinois February 7, 1888

Entered Fire Department: January 1, 1910

Duty: Assistant Chief at Central Fire Station

Died: March 10, 1953 at age 65

Buried: Forest Park Lawndale, Section 24, Plot 124, Space 12.

Chief Middlekauf, a veteran of some of the largest fires Houston had ever experienced, suffered a fatal heart attack while at a fire near downtown Houston. As Assistant Chief, one of his many duties was that of directing the fire-fighting efforts at multiple alarm fires. This was the case at a fire

at the Fredrick Poultry and Egg Company at 1817 Center. He had taken a command position in front of the fire and had been there for some time when suddenly he fell to his knees and asked another fire fighter to take him aside.

The stricken chief was carried off the fire ground to the front porch of a house across the street. He sat there a few minutes before he passed out. The efforts of the ambulance personnel were unsuccessful and a physician on the scene pronounced him dead, ending his forty-three year career.



Rufus "Bullock" John Templet

Died March 12, 1951 at age 57

Born: October 5, 1894 in New Iberia, Louisiana

Entered Fire Department: January 1, 1922

Duty: Captain at Fire House 5

Buried: Forest Park Lawndale Catacombs Section 54, Plot 497

Captain Templet, called "Bullock" by those who knew him, was a very dedicated fire fighter. This dedication sometimes led him to fires during his time off. He would hear the fire trucks coming from town during the night and would get out of bed and get dressed knowing it would be a big blaze. His wife would also climb out of bed heading for

the kitchen to fix her husband some hot coffee to take with him. His wife Lottie began to realize that there was a need for someone to have hot coffee and nourishment at the fire scene to help keep the overworked Fire Fighters going. Lottie, along with her best friend, laid the groundwork for what began as the Third Alarmer Club. The group later became the Ladies Auxiliary Club and was an inspiration for other such groups around the country. Captain Templet was on duty on January 31, 1951 when a blaze occurred at the Alaskan Fur Factory at Main and Texas. This multiple-alarm fire was especially brutal because of the freezing weather and icy conditions and the large amount of smoke lying close to the ground. These conditions proved fatal to Captain Templet as he suffered a heart attack. He was taken to the Veterans Hospital where he died two months later.



Joseph "Joe" James Solito

Died July 29, 1953 at age 39

Born: August 24, 1914 in Lake Charles, Louisiana

Entered Fire Department: 1938

Duty: Chauffeur at Fire House 8

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Gethsemani 50, Plot 6

On July 29, 1953, the Houston Fire Department lost two Fire Fighters, Joe Solito and Fidel Chabolla when Engine 8 and Ladder 1 collided at the intersection of Preston and Crawford while responding to the fire alarm box at Gable Street and the MKT Railroad tracks. There were several factors that put the two fire apparatus together in the

intersection at the same time. Engine 10 was the Fire Company due to respond, but it was on another assignment. Engine 8 was then ordered to respond to the fire alarm box. Ladder 1 had trouble starting, thus delaying its departure. Neither of the two fire crews were expecting the other to be anywhere near the intersection. Both apparatus reached the intersection of Preston and Crawford at the same time with a terrible crash. Fire Fighters, fire equipment, and pieces of fire trucks were scattered over the intersection. Seven Fire Fighters were injured and transported to area hospitals. Solito and Chabolla were also transported to the hospital. They arrived at the hospital in critical condition and were pronounced dead a short time later.



Fidel Chabolla

Died July 29, 1953 at age 35

Born: April 24, 1918 in Moore, Texas

Entered Fire Department: October 4, 1951

Duty: Fire Fighter at Central Fire Station

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Gethsemani 54, Plot 847, Space 5

On July 29, 1953, the Houston Fire Department lost two Fire Fighters, Joe Solito and Fidel Chabolla when Engine 8 and Ladder 1 collided at the intersection of Preston and Crawford while responding to the fire alarm box at Gable Street and the MKT Railroad tracks. There were several factors that put the two fire apparatus together in the

intersection at the same time. Engine 10 was the Fire Company due to respond, but it was on another assignment. Engine 8 was then ordered to respond to the fire alarm box. Ladder 1 had trouble starting, thus delaying its departure. Neither of the two fire crews were expecting the other to be anywhere near the intersection. Both apparatus reached the intersection of Preston and Crawford at the same time with a terrible crash. Fire Fighters, fire equipment, and pieces of fire trucks were scattered over the intersection. Seven Fire Fighters were injured and transported to area hospitals. Solito and Chabolla were also transported to the hospital. They arrived at the hospital in critical condition and were pronounced dead a short time later.



Woodrow Wilson Erwin

Died February 24, 1954 at age 40

Born: March 2, 1914 in Palestine, Texas

Entered Fire Department: July 8, 1940

Duty: Chauffeur at Fire House 24

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Section 31, Plot 518, Space 1

Woodrow Erwin's regular duty was that of driver assigned to Engine 24. The day of his death he was acting Captain of Engine 24 because the regular captain was off duty. Engine 24 was dispatched to a fire at 2705 Clay Street which involved a small shack located in a junkyard. Immediately after the fire was extinguished, Erwin complained of a sharp

pain in his chest and asked to be taken to the hospital. While en route to Jefferson Davis Hospital, he asked the attendants to call his wife and have her meet him at the hospital. Woodrow Wilson Erwin died from a heart attack just minutes before his wife arrived.



Frank Catino

Died January 7, 1954 at age 62

Born: February 10, 1892 on the boat from Sicily, Italy

Entered Fire Department: May 15, 1911

Duty: Fire Fighter at Central Fire Station

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Gethsemani 55, Plot 1232, Space 11

Frank Catino was referred to by his fellow Fire Fighters as a tough, hard working fire fighter. He started at the end of the colorful horse-drawn era and ended his career at a time when the Fire Department was concentrating on updating its equipment and techniques. In Frank's forty-four year career, he was involved in four serious accidents, two of which took fellow fire fighter's lives. The fourth accident took his own life.

The accident occurred at Preston and Crawford. This Corner in the city had been dubbed the "Death Intersection" by the local newspapers. This intersection in the downtown area received this title because it was the same intersection that was the scene of the accident that killed Joseph Solito and Fidel Chabolla just five months earlier. The truck on which Frank Catino was riding, responded to the fire alarm box at Gable Street and the MKT Railroad track. Two young men, wanted by the police, sped through the intersection at the same time. The heavy truck struck the passenger car, instantly killing the civilians and fire fighter Frank Catino.

An interesting note, Frank Catino was born Angelo Cortimeglia. At age nineteen when he entered the fire department, the Fire Chief, Chief Ollre decided that his name was too hard for anyone to pronounce and renamed him Frank Catino. No one knows where or how the chief came up with this name, but it was the only name that he had for the rest of his life.



Delbert Harvey Sherfy

Died October 31, 1954 at age 41

Born: April 19, 1913 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: June 25, 1941

Duty: Chauffeur at Fire House 17

Buried: Cleveland, Texas

Delbert Sherfy was an Acting Captain of Engine 17, when he responded to a call to wash down fuel that had spilled as a result of a car accident. The Fire Fighters never made it to the scene because Engine 17 hit a passenger car at Sampson and Canal. Delbert Sherfy died instantly as a result of this crash. Four of the Fire Fighters and both occupants of the passenger car were injured. Sadly, the next day, Robert L. Francis, one of the occupants of the car, died of multiple injuries.



William Henry Kersten

Died December 18, 1954 at age 40

Born: November 6, 1914 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: December 11, 1941

Duty: Chauffeur at Fire House 19

Buried: Woodland Gardens of Memories Cemetery, Section 56, Plot 116, Space 3D

William Kersten received fatal injuries when the District Chief's car he was driving collided with a Houston Transit Company bus. Kersten was due to be relieved of duty when the alarm for a fire at 7306 Bonham was dispatched. Another five minutes and the driver on the night shift would have been driving and Bill Kersten would have escaped

death. Upon receiving the alarm, Kersten wheeled the Chief's car out of Fire House 19 toward the location of the house fire. While traveling east on Lyons, he entered the intersection at Lockwood Drive and was hit by the Nance Street bus that was traveling southbound. The Chief's car was hit with such tremendous force that it knocked over a traffic light and skidded 75 feet from the point of impact. The Chief and three passengers of the bus were sent to the hospital. Bill Kersten, who received more serious trauma, died a short time after being transported to Jefferson Davis Hospital.



D. H. "Spud" Chandler

Died November 9, 1959 at age 27

Born: December 13, 1932 in Rusk, Texas

Entered Fire Department: July 1, 1958

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 19

Buried: Lyons Sanders Cemetery, Cushing, Texas

D. H. "Spud" Chandler had returned home after he served 6 years in the U. S. Navy where he worked as a diver. He joined the ranks of the HFD and followed in the foot steps of his older brother James. On Sunday morning, November 8, 1959, the Amoco Virginia, a 150,000-gallon tanker, caught on fire while loading a cargo of gasoline. D. H. was on duty at Fire House 19, and his crew responded to the fire.

In order to put out the fire the Fire Fighters had to use foam to smother the blaze and get it under control. During the clean up phase of the operation D. H. was walking on the ship's deck and accidentally fell through the open hatch of one of the ships cargo holds. Gasoline is a non-buoyant liquid, and even an experienced diver like "Spud" could not survive.



Willis Neal McWhorter

Died November 6, 1959 at age 32

Born: April 17, 1927 in Madisonville, Texas

Entered Fire Department: June 1, 1953

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 30

Buried: Resthaven Memorial Gardens Cemetery, 72, Plot 72, Space 1

McWhorter and Jedlicka were both Fire Fighters assigned to Fire House 30. The day of the accident they were both riding Engine 30. These two men were killed when a transport truck carrying steel struck Engine 30 broadside at the intersection of Berry and Fulton. Engine 30 was responding to a house fire at 7320 Airline Drive when it

reached a red light at the intersection. When the driver checked the intersection, the traffic on the left had stopped, but to the right was a blind spot. An oncoming truck loaded with heavy steel was approaching from the right. The driver of the truck saw the fire apparatus but was unable to stop because of the weight of the steel. Both vehicles entered the intersection at the same time with the transport truck striking the side of the fire apparatus and breaking it into several pieces. Willis McWhorter was killed instantly. Charles Jedlicka, the Captain, and the Chauffeur were all seriously hurt, but of the three. Because of his serious injuries, Charles was flown to Brook Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas in a plane owned by a local oil company. On November 17, 1959, Charles Jedlicka lost the long, hard battle for his life.



Charles Alponse Jedlicka

Died November 17, 1959 at age 37

Born: September 27, 1922 in Cameron, Texas

Entered Fire Department : June 1, 1953

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 30

Buried: Brookside Cemetery, Section 2, Plot 159, Space 1

McWhorter and Jedlicka were both Fire Fighters assigned to Fire House 30. The day of the accident they were both riding Engine 30. These two men were killed when a transport truck carrying steel struck Engine 30 broadside at the intersection of Berry and Fulton. Engine 30 was responding to a house fire at 7320 Airline Drive when it

reached a red light at the intersection. When the driver checked the intersection, the traffic on the left had stopped, but to the right was a blind spot. An oncoming truck loaded with heavy steel was approaching from the right. The driver of the truck saw the fire apparatus but was unable to stop because of the weight of the steel. Both vehicles entered the intersection at the same time with the transport truck striking the side of the fire apparatus and breaking it into several pieces. Willis McWhorter was killed instantly. Charles Jedlicka, the Captain, and the Chauffeur were all seriously hurt, but of the three. Because of his serious injuries, Charles was flown to Brook Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas in a plane owned by a local oil company. On November 17, 1959, Charles Jedlicka lost the long, hard battle for his life.



Donnic "Don" J. Contorno

Died May 21, 1962 at age 51

Born: March 12, 1911 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: December 16, 1941

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 37

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Gethsemani 55, Plot 1099, Space 4

Don Contorno suffered a severe heart attack while helping to fight a two-alarm fire at the Wanda Petroleum Company on Almeda Genoa Road. The combination of the heat of the day and the physical strain proved to be too much for Don's heart to withstand. He was transported to Saint Joseph's Hospital where the doctors knew he was in serious

condition. They could not understand how the heart attack did not kill him instantly. Don Contorno had a strong will to live that kept him hanging on for 19 days.



Claude Jackson Hopkins

Died June 30, 1962 at age 30

Born: January 20, 1932 in Bryan, Texas

Entered Fire Department: November 1, 1956

Duty: Chauffeur at Fire House 2

Buried: Woods Hole Cemetery, Madisonville, Texas

Claude Hopkins lost his life while driving Ladder 2 en route to an automatic sprinkler alarm at the Bayou Products Company at 1209 Commerce. The fire apparatus hit a transport truck carrying grain at the intersection of Preston and Louisiana. The grain truck entered the intersection at the same time as Ladder 2 and the two vehicles collided, injuring four Fire Fighters who were taken to Saint Joseph Hospital. Claude Hopkins died of his injuries the next day. Incidentally, the alarm the Fire Fighters were trying to reach was false.



Steve Charlie Baranowski

Died February 3, 1969 at age 62

Born: July 9, 1907 in Chappell Hill, Texas

Entered Fire Department: December 11, 1941

Duty: Captain at Fire House 37

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Westheimer, Section 502, Plot 168, Space 2

Steve Baranowski was a veteran fire fighter of 28 years. He had seen many blazes through the years. The last fire he fought was a house fire at 3631 Underwood. The fire at this location had been extinguished and overhaul was taking place to clean up and make sure the fire was out.

Captain Baranowski and his crew were up on the roof of the structure pulling shingles off when suddenly the fire captain fell unconscious. The district chief, who was on the scene, went up a ladder and brought the stricken captain down over his shoulder. The Fire Fighters on the ground worked feverishly to save Captain Baranowski with a new lifesaving technique called CPR. He was transported to Methodist Hospital where he was later pronounced dead.



James Louis Walls

Died May 3, 1971 at age 26

Born: March 8, 1945 in Langleyfield, Virginia

Entered Fire Department: May 5, 1969

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 51

Buried: Memorial Oaks Cemetery, Section 7, Plot 61, Space 2

The name Walls has long since gained notoriety for being the first Houston Fire Fighter killed while working on an ambulance. The Houston Fire Department Emergency Medical Service was in its infant stage and the ambulances that were in service were small four-wheel delivery vans. The vans proved to be very vulnerable. Walls was driving Ambulance 51 through the intersection of Chimney Rock and Westheimer when he was hit broadside by a passenger vehicle. The van flipped upside down, causing James Walls' fatal injuries. The accident investigation revealed that the size of the van proved to be a contributing factor in the death of James Walls.



Truxton Joseph Hathaway Jr.

Died October 19, 1971 at age 31

Born: January 9, 1940 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: February 15, 1961

Duty: Fire Inspector assigned to the Train Academy

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Gethsemani 55, Plot 491, Space 8

Houston’s infamous Mykawa Road catastrophe was where Truxton Hathaway lost his life. The Mykawa Road train derailment and ensuing explosions injured more than 35 people. This disaster, like another well-known Texas disaster, the Texas City explosion of 1947, involved two explosions only a short interval apart. In the Mykawa Road

disaster, the violent blasts came forty minutes apart with the second one doing the most damage.

On October 19, an 82 car Missouri Pacific Railroad train had been making its way into Houston when it passed over a track that was being repaired. The track did not hold up under the weight of the loaded rail cars and caused derailment and a major explosion. The first explosion was from a tank car containing vinyl chloride, while the second tank car explosion contained butadiene. The main reason so many Fire Fighters were hurt was that fire officials did not have information on the chemicals in the rail cars, making it hard for them to handle the situation properly.

Truxton Hathaway was assigned to the Fire Department Training Academy. When the explosion occurred, Hathaway took a camera to the scene to record the incident for future training purposes. He arrived on the scene and began recording the incident when the second tank car exploded, sending a wall of fire over Truxton and killing him instantly.



Lewis “Moe” Washington Richardson

Died February 3, 1973 at age 57

Born: January 18, 1916 in Groveton, Texas

Entered Fire Department: August 1, 1941

Duty: Captain at Fire House 7

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Section J, Plot 144, Space 5

Captain Richardson’s death was a surprise to his fellow workers because most believed him to be in excellent health. “Moe” Richardson suffered a fatal heart attack at an apartment fire at 1400 Richmond. The blaze was deep-seated when the Fire Fighters arrived, producing an extremely large amount of smoke and heat. Captain

Richardson and his crew were attacking the fire from within one of the apartments when suddenly the fire captain emerged from the building totally exhausted. Shortly afterward, he complained of a chest pain, dropped to his knees, and passed out. The men at the scene and the ambulance crew tried unsuccessfully to revive Captain Richardson.



Jackie Dunham Ludwick

Died February 4, 1977 at age 44

Born: August 17, 1933 in Austin, Texas

Entered Fire Department: July 16, 1956

Duty: Senior Captain at Fire House 7

Buried: Woodlawn Cemetery, Section 8, Plot 154, Space 3A

Captain Jackie Ludwick was respected by his fellow Fire Fighters as a competent fire officer. His knowledge and ability as a fire fighter were probably contributing factors that saved Fire Fighters under his command from serious harm or even death just months prior to his own death.

This incident took place at a local hospital in which a fire was reported in the ventilation system. The fire was in the duct used for venting the hospital’s dryers in the laundry. Just minutes before a serious flashover occurred in the duct system where the Fire Fighters had been working for some time to find the deep-seated smoldering fire, Captain Ludwick sensed something major was wrong and began ordering the Fire Fighters out of the venting system. However, several fighters were injured. Had there been more Fire Fighters in the area, the results would have been more tragic. Months later, Captain Ludwick was directing the efforts to extinguish a fire at 3700 Wheeler when he suffered a fatal heart attack and was transported to Hermann Hospital. Efforts to save the Captain failed.



Thomas Norwood Cooper

Died September 23, 1982 at age 23

Born: February 17, 1959 in Pine Bluff Arkansas

Entered Fire Department: February 8, 1982

Duty: Probationary Fire Fighter at Fire House 1

Buried: Memorial Oaks Cemetery, Section 2, Plot 69, Space 6

Tom Cooper had been in the department for only seven months, barely enough time to experience the excitement that a rookie fire fighter has during his first few years. On the day he was critically injured, he was riding on Engine 1 at Fire House 1. The crew had been at the corner of Chartres and Ruiz practicing hose lays and had just rolled up the last hose when they were dispatched to a trash fire shortly after noon. The rolled hose, used for the drill, was put on the tailboard of the engine where Cooper was riding and the crew took off down Ruiz Street en route to the location of the trash fire. As Engine 1 turned the corner at Hamilton and Congress, Cooper, possibly trying to prevent one of the rolled hoses from falling off, fell off himself. Ambulance 1 transported Cooper to Saint Joseph Hospital where he died of head injuries two days later.



Lonnie Louzette Franklin

Died January 4, 1983 at age 54

Born: November 23, 1929 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: August 5, 1950

Duty: District Chief at Fire House 7

Buried: Resthaven Memorial Gardens Cemetery, Section 7, Plot 78, Space 4

Lonnie Franklin worked at Fire House 7 with a close knit group of Fire Fighters. At about four o'clock in the morning of January 4, 1983, Fire House 7 was dispatched to a building fire in the 2800 block of Dowling Street, which turned out to be a "working" fire. While en route to the location, the District Chief's car in which Chief Franklin

was riding, was struck broadside by a passenger car that ran a stop sign at Elgin and Hutchins just a few blocks from Fire House 7. Engine and Ladder 7 were just seconds behind the accident. The engine crew stayed behind to help at the scene and the ladder truck proceeded to the fire, but all the men knew their chief was severely injured. Chief Franklin was transported by ambulance to Hermann Hospital where attempts to save his life failed.

Chief Lonnie Franklin was a highly respected officer of the Houston Fire Department. Chief Franklin's accident and death were similar to the accident that killed Bobby Milburn in 1949.



Robert Munguia Reyes

Died December 1, 1984 at age 32

Born: August 30, 1952 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: January 26, 1981

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 62

Buried: Memorial Oaks Cemetery, Section 11, Plot 42, Space 3B

After high school Robert Reyes, began to work for the Federal Bureau of Investigation with the intention of making that career his life's work. However, after ten years of service, he realized that the promotional system did not include him. This caused him to seek another career field. A few short years after he joined the ranks of the Houston Fire

Department, he fell to his death off Engine 15 while traveling on the North Freeway enroute to a car fire. Robert's son Robert Reyes Jr. followed in his dad's foot steps and is now a Houston Fire Fighter.



Ruben Lopez

Died December 4, 1996

Born: October 12, 1957 in Victoria, Texas

Entered Fire Department: 1987

Duty: District Chief, worked mostly out of Fire House 25

Buried: Forest Park Cemetery, Lawndale, Section 12, Lot 385, Space 11

Ruben worked his volunteer shifts as often as time permitted. His usual place to work was Fire House 25. He arrived at Fire House 25 on the evening of December 3 and placed his gear on Engine 25 as he had done many times before, not knowing that it would be his last time. Early the next morning, Engine 25 was dispatched to a house fire at

4006 Roseneath, just a short distance from the Fire House. Upon arrival, the crew was informed that there were victims trapped inside the two-story home. The crew of Engine 25 then went to work trying to find those still inside the burning home. Once inside, Ruben started assisting in the search and rescue operation. However the heavy smoke created a flashover, catching Ruben and putting him in a position where he was unable to escape. He died along with the 41-year-old female occupant of the home.

Ruben energetically worked his way up in the ranks of the Houston volunteer department. In six short years he was promoted up to the rank of district chief. He received the organization's award for fire fighter of the year, two years in a row.

Ruben is the only known Houston Volunteer death in the history of the Houston fire department.



Steven Clyde Mayfield

Died December 2, 1998 at age 47

Born: October 5, 1951 in Pasadena, Texas

Entered Fire Department: March 31, 1975

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 92 A Shift

Buried: Resthaven Cemetery, Section 7, Lot 587, Space 12

Steve grew up in Denver Harbor on the eastside of Houston. He attended Austin High School. When he graduated, he moved out of the old neighborhood and, a few years later, he was able to qualify to be hired by the Houston Fire Department. He was following in the footsteps of his Father and his Uncle who were both Houston Fire Fighters.

After a few years Steve decided to become a paramedic.

He worked on an ambulance for twelve years. He soon felt like he had been on the ambulance too long and gave up his paramedic status to become an EMT.

He left the EMS Division and went to Fire House 27 where he did not have to be on an ambulance everyday. In 1990, he was able to become an Airport Certified Fire Fighter and moved north of town to ARFF Station 54, which is located at the Intercontinental Airport Stations. In 1997, he transferred to ARFF Station 92, which is also an airport station. At ARFF Station 92 Steve was the only EMT and he had to work on MS 92, which was a pick-up that was equipped to respond to medical emergencies in all of the terminal; at Intercontinental Airport. He realized then that he was able to serve the public as he had done as a paramedic, but in a less stressful atmosphere.

Steve Mayfield is described by his co-workers as being dedicated to his profession and had been known to go above and beyond to help a citizen of Houston.

As an airport fire fighter, part of the job is to recertify annually in order to maintain his certification as required by the FAA. Part of the yearly process he and all airport Fire Fighters go through is a live burn that is done in Dallas at DFW Airport. The exercise proved to be too much for Steve. He was transported to a Dallas hospital. He died as the result of a heart attack.

When Steven Mayfield died, the Houston fire department had not had a paid fire fighter die in the last fifteen years.



Lewis Evans Mayo III

Died February 14, 2000 on Valentines Day at age 45

Born: December 13, 1955 in the state of Florida

Entered Fire Department: June 29, 1981

Duty: Fire Fighter at Fire House 76 A Shift

Buried: Memorial Oaks, Section 219, Lot 8 Space 2

After graduating from the fire academy, Lewis was assigned to Fire House 16. Fire House 10 was re-built and opened in the southwest side of town. The crew that Lewis had been assigned moved to this brand new Fire House. Lewis then became a southwest fire fighter. After a few years in 1989, while still at Fire House 10, he transferred to

Fire House 76 because of balancing of manpower. He soon began to feel at home in his new assignment.

Lewis Mayo worked hard on and off the job. He co-owned a lawn business that kept him very busy on his off days. His dedication to his family led to many hours of time spent with them. He was also the coach his daughters soccer team.

Lewis was a soft spoken man who enjoyed working in the fire service. He did the best job that he could on assignments at the Fire House and on the fire ground. He was well thought of by the officers he worked for and the men he worked with.



Kimberly Ann Smith

Died February 14, 2000 on Valentines Day at age 30

Born: November 20, 1969 in El Paso, Texas

Entered Fire Department: April 11, 1994

Duty: Fire Fighter 76, C Shift

Buried: Mt. Calvery Catholic Cemetery-Refugio Texas, in the far left corner. Between her grandparents Beatrice and Lewis Zarsky.

Kim was raring to go after graduation from the HFD Training Academy. She was fit and trim and ready for anything anybody threw her way. On her application, she answered the question of how she would handle the stress the job of a Houston fire fighter would bring, by confidently writing, "I personally deal with stress through physical exercise. I presently run and lift weights on a regular basis, both of which helps me to alleviate those daily stresses which life brings." Kim made an impact on everyone she came in contact with.

She was assigned from the Training Academy to Fire House 68, "A" shift where it was not long before she became a seasoned veteran. Kim later transferred to Fire House 13, "A" shift, where she stayed for three years. Kim enjoyed working with the crew of 13A, but she felt a need to get back to her southwest side of town roots where she had a better chance of doing what she liked best about the job, fighting fires. Of course she also left Fire House 13 to go to a Fire House where there was not an ambulance. She transferred to Fire House 76 on January 14, 2000.

Kim Smith not only has the sad distinction of being the 56th Fire Fighter who has died in the line of duty, and the first female.



Jay Paul Jahnke

Died October 13, 2001 at Age 40

Born: September 16, 1961 in Houston, Texas
Entered Fire Department: December 2, 1981, Class 81C
Duty: Captain at Fire House 2 “B” Shift
Buried: Memorial Oaks Cemetery 13001 Katy Freeway Next to his beloved father, Claude. Section: 212 Lot: 138 Space 4D

Captain Jay Jahnke died while trying to save the resident of Unit 52 located in the Four Leaf Tower Condominiums, 5110 San Felipe. Captain Jahnke of Engine 2 arrived at the high rise at 4:54 a.m. and proceeded to the fifth floor with his crew and the crew of Ladder 28. Once they arrived on

the fifth floor they were concerned about locating the resident that had been reported trapped. They were unable to find the resident and by that time the fire conditions were very severe. At the same time, the windows of the unit were broken out by the fire. Gusty north winds had push the heavy fire and smoke on top of the fire fighters causing them to return to the hallway. Low on air they proceed to head for the stairway. Captain Jahnke was unable to make it to safety and was found Rescue 11 and transported to the hospital. Shortly after he was pronounced. Jay is survived his wife and two children. Both son and daughter are attending college. Every year on the anniversary of his death, his family holds a small memorial service at Fire House 2. There has been a monument erected in his honor in front of the Fire House. The American and Texas flag are flying above the Fire House in his honor.



Grady Don Burke

Died February 19, 2005

Born: January 31 of 1966 Houston, Texas
Entered Fire Department: March 3, 1993
Duty: Captain Engine 46 B Shift
Buried: Forest Park Cemetery East Sec. 216B Estates, lot 4, space 2

Captain Grady Don Burke served as a Texas City Fire Fighter for four years before becoming a member of the Houston Fire Department. Grady had been promoted to captain two years before his death and was assigned to Fire House 46. On the early morning of Saturday, Feb 19, 2005, Engine 46 along with Ladder 46 and District 46 had been

dispatched to a house fire near by at 8510 Brandon. The house they were dispatched to was abandoned and was been used by the homeless in the area. While Captain Burke and his crew was inside the house trying to extinguish the fire the roof collapsed and top of them, all of the crew inside the burning house escaped except Grady. A homeless man had set the fire he was charged and convicted of manslaughter and is now serving a sentence of 12 years in prison. A memorial built at his Fire House in his honor was dedicated on February 19, 2006.



Kevin Wayne Kulow

Died April 4, 2004 at age 32

Born: November 2, 1971 in Bellville, Texas
Entered Fire Department: September 15, 2003
Duty: Probationary Firefighter at Fire House 50 A shift
Buried: Sealy Public Cemetery-Section 17 Lot 423B Space B

Kevin Kulow was a member of Class 23 which graduated on November 17, 2003. Probationary Firefighter Kevin Kulow began the morning of his death, April 4th 2004 just like all rookies, a little early. He arrived at Fire House 50 and took off the gear of the Fire Fighter he was to relieve that day and began his day by checking his equipment just

like every day for four and a half month since being assigned to his first fire house of his career. A short time after he arrived at work, at 5:55 pm, Engine 50 was dispatched to a truck fire with hazardous materials involved on Kempwood Street. When the fire apparatus arrived at the location they were in front of the El Festival Ballroom, 7610 Kempwood which was charged with smoke. The civilians outside informed the Captain of occupants still inside the building. The crew then entered the building with a charged hose line. Kevin did his job just like any other day and entered the burning building with the crew of Engine 50. Shortly after his crew entered the building, the fire intensified and injured two members of his crew and a crew member of Ladder 77. Kevin, was unable to reach the door and died before he was found by the fire crews on the scene. The fire was determined to a arson and very soon arrests were made. Four suspects were arrested. The main suspect who was a career criminal and ring leader of a identify theft ring. He was convicted of felony murder and is serving a life sentence with the possibly of parole. His cohort in the Identity theft ring was in a custody disputed with his ex-wife. She was a waitress of the club and her boy friend was the owner. To hurt them finically they set the fire to destroy the club. He also received a life sentence. The main suspect’s wife and one of his friends were the lookouts. They are both serving 30 and 40 year sentences.





James Arthur Harlow

Died April 12, Easter Sunday, 2009 age 50

Born: May 18, 1958

Entered Fire Department Academy: December 29th 1979

Duty: Captain on Engine 26, Fire House 26 “B” Shift

Buried: Grandview Cemetery Garden of Prayer Lot 584 Space 2

Captain Harlow a 30 year veteran had been in the rank of Captain for four years. He was a highly respected HFD Officer and as most who had the pleasure to work with him would say “he is fun to be around”. Captain Harlow was in charge of Fire Fighter Hobbs and been training this eager Fire Figthter to learn for the past 6 months. In the

Fire Service the Captain’s “job” is to take care of the “Rookie” and that is what he was trying to do when tragedy struck and they both lost their lives. On the early morning of Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009 the equipment of Fire House 26 responded to a report of a house fire at 7811 Oak Vista, just a couple of miles from their quarters. Upon arrival Captain Harlow and his “Rookie” entered the 4000 plus square foot home to began the process of controlling the fire. That morning the weather conditions were not good there were reports of 15 to 20 mph winds with gusts over 25 mph. The winds blowing through the house worsened the conditions very quickly. The flames quickly spread causing the two Fire Fighters to head for the exit, which they were not able to reach in time to survive.



Damion Jon Hobbs

Died April 12, Easter Sunday, 2009 age 30

Born: December 24h 1978 in Galveston, Texas

Entered Fire Department Academy: 2008

Duty: “Rookie” at Fire House 26 “B” Shift

Died: April 12th Easter Sunday, 2009 at 30 years young

Buried: South Park Cemetery Lawn Garden of Eternal Love Lot 53 Space 5

Fire Fighter Hobbs had been discharged from the Military where he had served 2 tours in Iraq. After retuning home he was ready to pursue his dream job, being a Houston Fire Fighter. Damion graduated from the Val Jahnke Training Facility and was assigned to Fire House 26. His first 6 months he was scheduled to ride with Captain Harlow on Engine 26, then after that he was to work his shifts for the last 6 months of his probation on Ladder 26. The morning that he died would have been his last day to work on Engine 26. On the early morning of Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009 the equipment of Fire House 26 responded to a report of a house fire at 7811 Oak Vista, just a couple of miles from their quarters. Upon arrival Captain Harlow and his “Rookie” entered the 4000 plus square foot home to began the process of controlling the fire. That morning the weather conditions were not good there were reports of 15 to 20 mph winds with gusts over 25 mph. The winds blowing through the house worsened the conditions very quickly. The flames quickly spread causing the two Fire Fighters to head for the exit, which they were not able to reach in time to survive.

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Cohnway Mathew Johnson

Died May 4, 2009 at age 26

Born: Austin, Texas October 4, 1982

Entered Fire Department: April 2009

Duty: Cadet-Val Jahnke Training Academy

Buried : Cook Walden Capital Park Pflugerville, Texas 14501 North I-H 35 Section H Lot 1608 Space 3

Cohnway Mathew Johnson at a young age knew he want to be a Fire Fighter. He wanted to follow in his Great Uncle’s foot steps, a Chief with the Austin Fire Department. After high school he took off to Stephen F. Austin University to study Forestry and Kinesiology after the first year he realized he was to return to persue his calling as a Fire

Fighter. He then enrolled in the Taylor Fire Academy to get the required courses to get closer to his dream. He was hired by the Yokum Fire Department and worked there for almost 2 years. He then landed a position with the Oak Hill Fire Department, which put him closer to his Austin area roots. However Cohnway wanted in the worst way to become a Houston Fire Fighter. In April of 2009 he left his family and friends in Central Texas to pursue his dream to become a Houston Fire Fighter. He proudly became a member of the Val Jahnke Training Academy Class of 2009C.

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.



Thomas William “Bill” Dillon

Died March 4, 2012

Born: March 25, 1962 in Houston, Texas

Entered Fire Department: June 5, 1989

Duty: Captain 69 “B” Shift

Buried: Memorial Oaks Cemetery, Morningtide, Section 303, Lot 16, Space 5

On March 14, 2012 Captain Dillon was working a “fill in shift” (what Fire Fighters call a Debit Day). His shift was at Fire House 76 located at Cook Road. His assignment is normally at Fire House 69. The morning of his shift his ladder company was dispatched to an apartment fire at 7520 Cook Road. The small kitchen fire was quickly

extinguished, but focus soon turned to the Captain after he collapsed. He was rushed to the hospital where a short time later he was pronounced.



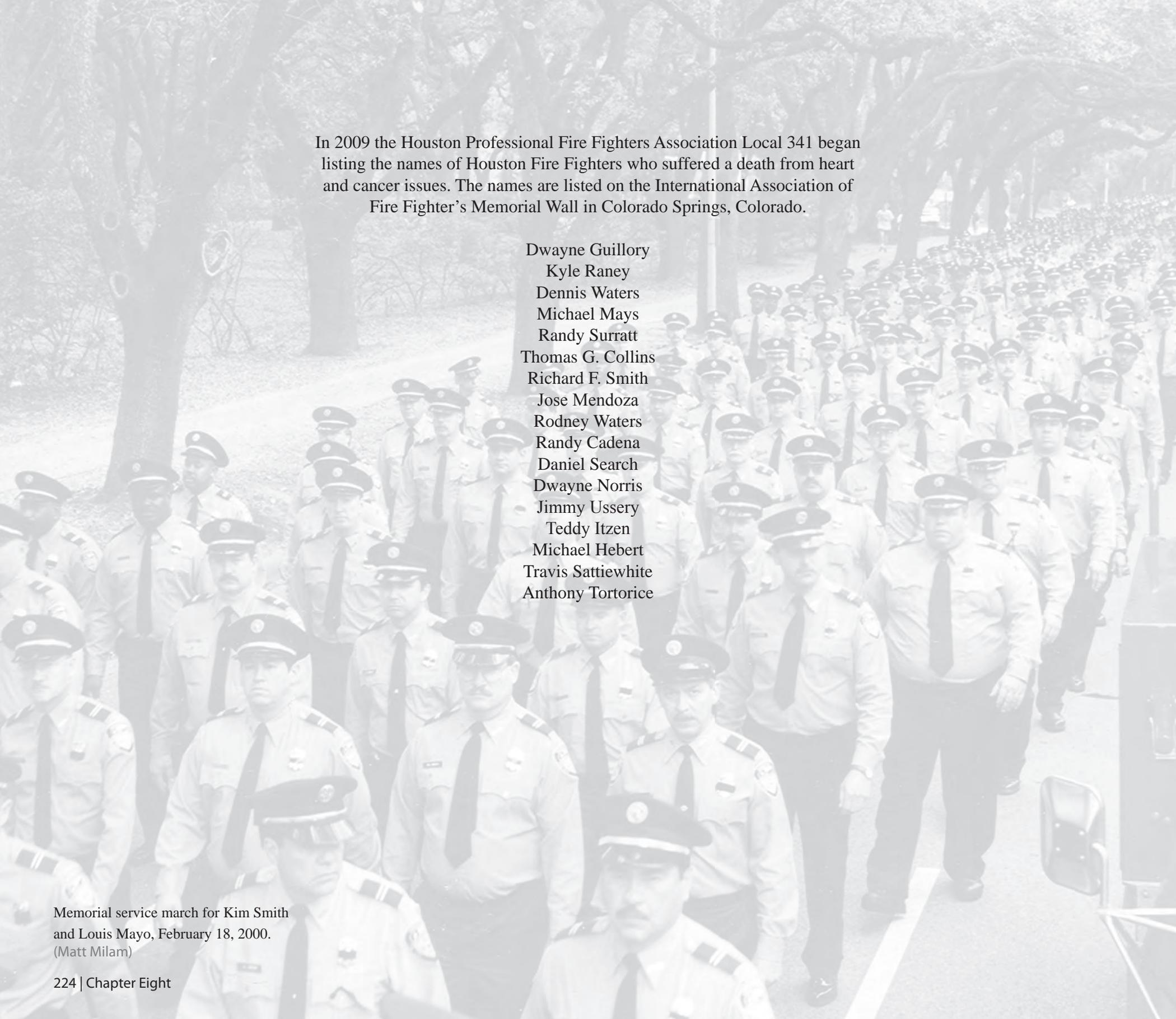
Members of the Houston Fire Department Pipe and Drums participating in the memorial service for Kevin Kulow who died in the Line of Duty, Palm Sunday, April 4, 2004. Left to right, George Mcateer, and Terry Crawford.
(Matt Milam)



Members of the Houston Fire Department Honor Guard participating in the memorial service for Captain Grady Burke who died in the Line of Duty, February 19, 2005. Left is Richard Mann and Laura Saavedra. (Matt Milam)



The Houston Fire Department Volunteer bought this Glenwood Cemetery plot in 1888. They then ordered a life size statue of Robert Brewster, the oldest living Fire Fighter at the time. The statue and the monument was ordered for Carrara Italy paying 3500.00 dollars. The monument was delivered in December of 1889, and a dedication took place in 1890. Glenwood Cemetery is located 2525 Washington Avenue. (Scott Mellott)

A large group of firefighters in uniform marching in a memorial service. They are wearing light-colored shirts, dark ties, and dark caps. The background shows a path lined with trees.

In 2009 the Houston Professional Fire Fighters Association Local 341 began listing the names of Houston Fire Fighters who suffered a death from heart and cancer issues. The names are listed on the International Association of Fire Fighter's Memorial Wall in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Dwayne Guillory
Kyle Raney
Dennis Waters
Michael Mays
Randy Surratt
Thomas G. Collins
Richard F. Smith
Jose Mendoza
Rodney Waters
Randy Cadena
Daniel Search
Dwayne Norris
Jimmy Ussery
Teddy Itzen
Michael Hebert
Travis Sattiewhite
Anthony Tortorice

Memorial service march for Kim Smith
and Louis Mayo, February 18, 2000.
(Matt Milam)