



REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, 15/A

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

July 01, 1940
WALKER; "MOLLY"
Driver-Station 2

July 02, 1929
GRANT, EDGAR H.
Fire Fighter-Station 18

July 03, 1929
OXFORD, HARRY L. "RED"
Fire Fighter-Station 18

July 11, 1929
LITTLE, JOHN, S.
Captain-Station 18

July 14, 1913
WEISE, CLIFFORD A.
Fire Fighter-Station 3

July 26, 1923
DODD, HARRY
Fire Fighter-Central Station

July 29, 1953
SOLITO, JOSEPH JAMES
Chauffeur-Station 8

July 29, 1953
CHABOLLA, FIDEL
Fire Fighter-Station 8

RETIREEES WHO HAVE RECENTLY DIED:

DOUGLAS "DOUG" LEE HOLMES
Served HFD 1965 to 1988 - Died June 8, 2003

ROCCO R. RAO
Served HFD 1971 to 2001 - Died on May 16, 2003

MICHAEL T. SMITH
Served HFD 1971 to 1987 - Died on April 23, 2003

B. J. MCDANIEL
Served HFD 1949 to 1976 - Died on April 2, 2003

In the May issue I did a profile on a Fire Fighter named Dutch Wagner. This month I decided to profile Molly Walker. July 2003 marks the 63rd anniversary of his death. Molly is the 26th Houston Firefighter to die in the line of duty.

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 Station 3 where he was the driver of the horse drawn Steamer No. 3.

He was a small man in stature reaching the height of 5' 7" but had a big heart and was a loving husband and father of 5 children. The oldest of his five children is 83 years old and currently resides in Galveston County. She has told me several stories about her father and I would like to share them with you.

While working at Station 3, located at 1919 Houston Avenue he somehow started raising rabbits in cages behind the station. The fun loving Fire Fighters that he worked with named him "Molly Cottontail" after a character in the Peter Rabbit books. The nickname later shortened to "Molly", stayed with him throughout his career. The nickname became so much a part of him that he after his death his wife chose to have the name "Molly" engraved on his headstone.

In 1916 the city bought a motorized chain driven fire truck, manufactured by the American LaFrance Company which was delivered to Fire Station 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.

Some years later, he worked at Fire Station 8 located at 1307 Crawford Street and had acquired two male brown bear cubs, which he raised in cages behind the fire station. His daughter does not know how he had acquired the bears, but I have been told that the wooded area north of town, which is now Spring, Texas, was heavily populated with brown bears in the early 1900's. The Walkers lived at 1611 Polk Avenue, which was within walking distance to his station. Most Fire Fighters during the early days of department either lived at the fire station where they worked or very close to it. They received one hour off for each meal period. One day in 1919, Molly left the station to go home for lunch. He was sitting at the kitchen table with his wife eating lunch when there was a knock at the back door of the house. Mrs. Walker got up to see "who" it was, opened the door and was face to face with one of the now fully-grown bears. The bear somehow got out of his cage and followed Molly home to also have lunch. As the story was told, Molly calmly got up from the table and went outside and walked the bear to the station and put him back in his cage.

During the early 1930's Molly transferred to Fire Station 2, located on the corner of Bagby and Capitol. His assignment there was driving the reserve pumper that the Fire Fighters 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 station in the city was having their fire truck sent to the repair shop. When he arrived at the station needing the reserve fire truck, the crew and the captain would ride that shift with Molly driving the "Bull Dog".

On December 6, 1940, Molly died after trying to overcome injuries he sustained from an accident on July 1, 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 Station 17 located at 319 Sampson. Several of the Fire Fighters from Station 17 were injured in the accident but Molly received a serious head injury, which took his life 29 months later.

Molly's legacy has continued through the years with several of his relatives becoming Houston Fire fighters. 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 Fire Fighters 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.

I have been friends with Molly's daughter for the past few years and have gained a lot of knowledge about him through her. I have had the pleasure of attending family gatherings and have met many of his relatives. I have been able to see how proud this family is of this man, their father, grandfather, great grandfather and a stellar member and brother Fire Fighter of the Houston Fire Department.

For more information on HFD's line of duty deaths or deceased Fire Fighters, refer to my web site www.houstonfirememorial.org



Picture of Molly Walker, taken in the early 1930's, courtesy of the family and HFM.