Remembering Our Fallen Fire Fighters

by Scott Mellott, Retired

I am happy to announce to you that I have now written my 75th "Remembering our Fallen Fire Fighters" article since I started this column over 6 years ago. I would like to thank all the readers of this column for the many compliments I receive. I usually tell those people thanks and the remarks are what keeps me going once a month.

Now on to this month's subject, The Arlington National Cemetery. I came across the idea of researching and giving you information on a very special 612 acres of the United States of America after I read an article in a past issue of the National Geographic Magazine. After I finished the article, my interest really peaked and that is when I decided to do my article. I started reading anything that I could find about the Cemetery. I was truly amazed that each article I read or website I explored I came across new information each time. After a recent visit to The Arlington National Cemetery, I am now ready to give you a lot of information on one of our nations most sacred places.

While in the process of research, I found that there were quite a few people and groups of people buried in Arlington that may or may not have been famous, but who they were or what they represented, made a profound place-mark in our nation's history.

The first on my "Notable" list is Robert Todd Lincoln. He was the oldest of President Lincoln's four sons. However with the tragic deaths of his brothers, Robert was the only one left to carry on the Lincoln legacy. Robert graduated from Harvard at age 22 in January of 1865 very close to the Civil War's end. Robert requested permission to join the union army as a private so he could join the war effort before it's end several months later ... His father, who already lost two sons to disease, used his influence as President of the United States to have his son's request denied. General Grant made Robert a Captain and assigned him to his staff. Because of this, Robert was able to witness General Lee's surrender ending the four-year long Civil War.

After President Lincoln's death, Robert entered into politics. He was appointed Secretary of War by President Garfield. Later he became the United States Minister to Great Britain under President Harrison's administration. During this time, his son Abraham "Jack" Lincoln died at age 16 due to complications after surgery. Jack was buried next to his grandfather in Springfield in the Lincoln Mausoleum.

Robert Todd Lincoln died in 1926 and was buried in The Arlington National Cemetery. His burial plot has a view of the then newly constructed Lincoln Memorial. In 1930, his son Jack was moved to the Arlington Cemetery and six years later his wife of 58 years was buried next to her husband and son.

During the Civil War, Union Soldiers were buried on land owned by Robert E. Lee who left the area to command the Confederate Forces and was considered a traitor by the Union Government. On May 13, 1864, Private William Christman of the 67th Pennsylvania Infantry was buried on the north east corner of the Lee Plantation. Private Christman has the distinction of being the first to be interned at The Arlington National Cemetery. Private William Christman, 21 years old, was only in the Union Army for two months, most of that time confined to the Lincoln Hospital. He died of peritonitis. For several weeks after his burial, a steady stream of Union Soldiers were buried near Private Christman.

June 15, 1864, the Lee Plantation was declared, by the Union Government, a Military Cemetery. On the same day, 65 Union Soldiers were buried there. By the end of 1864, 7000 Union Soldiers were buried in the Cemetery. By the war's end, a total of 15,585 of the 315,555 Citizen Soldiers who died in the Civil War were buried there.

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1961 was the beginning of the "race for space" which began with President Kennedy's Administration shortly after he entered office. However during the history of the space program there have been three major disasters.

The first was the Apollo I Mission, which was to launch late February 1967. Four weeks before the launch the crew was conducting a mock countdown - five hours into the process they reported a fire in the space capsule. Before the launch-pad crew could remove the sealed hatch all three crew members were dead.

Two of the crew members were buried in the Arlington Cemetery. Gus Grissom, the commander of Apollo I and the first American to serve on two space missions, was buried next to his crew member Edward White, who was the first American to conduct a space walk.

The third member of the crew, Roger "Bruce" Chaffee, a navy test pilot and the rookie of the mission, was buried on the grounds of his alma mater, West Point.

The next tragedy was the Space Shuttle Challenger. The Challenger was scheduled for its tenth mission on January 22, 1986, but due to unseasonably cold weather the launch was postponed until January 28th. Seventy-two seconds and 10 miles in altitude with a crew of seven, the Challenger exploded killing everyone on board.

The Navy and Coast Guard searched the Atlantic Ocean for several weeks to recover the debris of the Challenger and the remains of the Astronauts. Three months after the accident the remains of all the astronauts were returned to the families for burial.

Two of the crew members of the Challenger were buried at the Arlington Cemetery with the Pilot of the mission, Michael J. Smith. Michael was buried in the section just below the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and very close to the grave of the heavyweight boxing champion, Joe Louis. Two weeks later, Francis "Dick" Scobe, the mission's Commander was buried in Section 46 adjacent to the graves of three air men who died during the Iranian hostage rescue mission.

The third space program tragedy was the Columbia, which was on its 28th mission. It was launched on January 16, 2003 with a flight crew of seven astronauts. During the launch, foam insulation from the external fuel tanks struck the orbiter wing leaving a nine inch hole. The damage had made a safe re-entry virtually impossible. Upon its initial decent on February 1st, the space craft had a catastrophic break up which resulted in the deaths of all seven crew members.

The recovery efforts lasted several weeks and the bodies of all seven astronauts were recovered.

Three of Columbia Astronauts were buried in the Arlington Cemetery with full military honors. They were Payload Commander Michael Anderson, Mission Specialists Dave Brown and Laurel Clark.

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There are many more "Notables" to write about, but no more space in this column. In a future article, I will give you more of the history of The Arlington National Cemetery.

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Remembering To Never Forget

JOSEPH FLETCHER HOLMAN, JR.
Served HFD 1953 to 1991
Died July 2, 2008

SCOTT STEWART WINTERHALTER
Served HFD 1959 to 1990
Died June 29, 2008

MICHAEL ALLEN MAYS
Served HFD 2002 to 2008
Died June 24, 2008

JOHN CHARLES EAGLIN
Served HFD 1972 to 1999
Died June 18, 2008

ROBERT LOUIS DANBERG
Served HFD 1967 to 1980
Died June 10, 2008

DELBERT LEE WARWICK, SR.
Served HFD 1956 to 2005
Died June 1, 2008

CHRISTOPHER JASON BOISVERT
Served HFD 2008 to 2008
Died May 30, 2008

DWAYNE FRANCES GUILLORY
Served HFD 1996 to 2008
Died May 18, 2008

BILLY ROYCE HESTER
Served HFD 1955 to 1986
Died May 6, 2008

LEON LARA EGUIA
Served HFD 1957 to 1977
Died May 4, 2008

CLARENCE DANIEL BYERS
Served HFD 1951 to 1972
Died May 2, 2008

MICKEY GENE PATE
Served HFD 1979 to 2008
Died April 16, 2008

JOEY SHELDON REED, SR.
Served HFD 1989 to 1993
Died April 21, 2008

OTTO W. MUELLER
Served HFD 1956 to 1982
Died March 26, 2008

ARLON FLOYD DRAKE
Served HFD 1953 to 1973
Died March 9, 2008

RICHARD HENRY DECKER
Served HFD 1961 to 1984
Died March 6, 2008

"WHITEY'" LESTER O'NEAL MARTIN
Served HFD 1949 to 1988
Died March 2, 2008

ERIC DEWAYNE BRADY
Served HFD 1980 to 2004
Died February 15, 2008

BRICEY EUGENE CHILDRESS
Served HFD 1959 to 1986
Died February 9, 2008

DAVID LEE NORRIS
Served HFD 1975 to 2003
Died February 1, 2008

TED W. SANFORD
Served HFD 1946 to 1974
Died January 26, 2008

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

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

July 02, 1929
EDGAR GRANT
Fire Fighter, Station 18

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

July 11, 1929
JOHN LITTLE, SR.
Captain, Station 18

July 14, 1913
CLIFFORD WIESE
Fire Fighter, Station 3

July 26, 1923
HARRY DODD
Fire Fighter, Central Station

July 29, 1953
JOSEPH "JOE" SOLITO
Chauffeur, Station 8

July 29, 1953
FIDEL CHABOLLA
Fire Fighter, Central Station

Total from January 1, 2008 to present - 21 Deaths
Total for the Year 2007 - 43 Deaths

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

The Faces of Local 341

1932 to 2008

Houston Professional Fire Fighter's Association

Top Left: Foley Building at 214 Travis Street Snorkel 8 - Spring of 1976

Photo provided by HFD Photo Lab

Top Right: Station 18 - October 1976. (l/r) Bill Love, Susie, and Terry Shell

Photo provided by Bill Love

Bottom Right: Jack Cato, Channel 2 News and Chief Dole, District 41

Photo provided by Chief Dole Ebel

The Faces of Local 341

1932 to 2008

Houston Professional Fire Fighter's Association

David Klutts - (2nd from the left) shown here in NYC after the Mayor of Houston and David's fire house lost a bet with the Mayor of NYC and FDNY's Engine 40 and Ladder 35. The Mets won the National League Championship over the Astros in October of 1987.

Photo provided by WNYF

Left:
Crew of Ladder 20/A, April 22, 2008
(l/r) Arnold Ruiz, FF; Captain Jimmy Campbell; Johnny Villarrel, E/O; Michael White, FF;

Right:
Crew of Engine 80/B, April 23, 2008
(l/r) Miguel Cantu, FF; Captain Arnold Jimenez; James Thompson, E/O; James Johnson, FF

Photos provided by S. Mellott