

FIREHOUSE TRIVIA

THE FIREMANS PRAYER :

When I am called to duty God, wherever flames may rage,
Give me the strength to save life whatever be its age.
Help me embrace a little child before it is too late
Or save an older person from the horror of that fate.
Enable me to be alert and hear the weakest shout
And quickly and efficiently to put the fire out.
I want to fill my calling and to give the best in me,
To guard my every neighbor and protect his property.
And if according to my fate, I am to lose my life,
Please bless with your protecting hand my children and my wife.

FIREMEN TRUMPETS : SPEAK, FIGHT, DRINK. Trumpets came to light about 1752 in New York when a man named Jacobus Truck who looked after the engines was given permission to purchase six speaking trumpets. Trumpets were of all sizes and were carried, for the most part, by the foremen and assistant foremen. They were silver, gold etc. They were good weapons in a fight or anytime the boys gathered at a local tavern and made a special drinking mug for ale, rum, etc. Trumpets were and still are used as tokens of esteem and honor throughout the fire departments of today and the old volunteer departments of yester year.

THE DALMATION DOG : An extremely picturesque dog with a slick white coat decorated with flashing spots of jet black or deep brown, the Dalmatian stands in or about 23 - 24 inches high and weighs from 35 to 50 pounds. He is known as an "English Coach Dog," "Carriage Dog", and of course a "Firehouse Dog". He was used as a war dog sentinel on the borders of Dalmatia, an Austrian province, and received the name "Dalmatian" in the middle of the Eighteenth Century.

He is a very intelligent and has also been used as a bird dog and retriever for hunting. He takes to other animals and to horses like a duck to water, and horses love him. Years ago he loved to run along with horses pacing a coach or racing along with fire apparatus and was always seen in stables and firehouses everywhere. After the advent of motorized fire equipment, he was still kept as a mascot, even to this day.

Most people know him as "Sparky, the Dalmatian Dog," which is widely associated with Fire Prevention Days in October.

COLORS : Colors were as symbolic during the crusades as they are today to the fire service. Blue represented sincerity and truth as in the “blue of the uniform.” White or silver stood for peace; red for nobleness; gold or yellow for generosity and elevation; and black for grief.

The colors of the badge, crest and frontispiece of the fire helmet indicate the rank of the fire service: gold and white for chief officers; white and black for officers below the rank of chief.

Traditionally, black helmets have been worn by engine companies, while red helmets are worn by “truckies,” or truck company members. In recent years, blue helmets have been utilized by paramedics within the fire service and/ or by paramedic/rescue companies.

The PHOENIX and the EAGLE : Often confused with each other, the Phoenix and the Eagle have also become identified with the fire service throughout the centuries.

The Phoenix, a bird nearly equal in size to the Eagle, was symbolic to the early Christians of the resurrection of Christ and eternal life. Legend says that the Phoenix would set a fire and renew its strength and youth, emerging from the ashes as beautiful and powerful as ever. The Phoenix can still be found on fire hats, flags, banners, badges, insignia and fire department seals such as that of the San Francisco Fire Department.

The Eagle, veritably a symbol of courage and majesty, is displayed with extended wings on the crests and shields of high-ranking officers, signifying that the wearer is a person of authority. The wings stand for charity and protection; the beak and talons represent enforcement of discipline.

The BADGE : The badge of the fire service is in the shape of a shield often containing the Maltese Cross on either the crest or the shield. During the Crusades, shields were used by the knights as protective gear to guard against enemy attack. In a similar sense, the fire service acts as a shield, a form of protection against the common enemy of fire.

A rope or cord forming an unbroken circle and symbolic of unbroken service and loyalty, can often be found decorating the badge, forming a border. Inside this circle are found various emblems, each representative of a trait, an event, etc. Crossed ladders traditionally were awarded to one who was “ extremely brave” in battle, scaling walls against a superior enemy; today’s fire service incorporates the ladders for those members of truck or ladder companies. Although rank insignia varies somewhat from department to department, the following symbols are used generally to denote ranks in the fire service in America: fire chiefs have five crossed trumpets, the trumpet being the traditional symbol of office for chiefs in the United States; three or four gold trumpets denote variously assistant, deputy or division chiefs; two gold trumpets crossed, battalion chief; two silver trumpets captain; one silver trumpet lieutenant.

History of the Maltese Cross

The insignia of the fire service is the Cross Pattee-Nowy, otherwise known as the Maltese Cross. The cross represents the fire service ideals of saving lives and extinguishing fires.

The fire service borrows the emblem of the cross from the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, a charitable, non-military organization that existed during the 11th and 12th centuries. A white or silver cross on a dark background was adopted by the Knights or Hospitallers, as they were also known, because of their charity towards the sick and poor in setting up hospices and hospitals. Later, they assisted the Knights of the Crusades through their good will and also through military assistance in an effort to win back the Holy Land. The Knights of St. John eventually moved to the Island of Malta, the island for which the Maltese Cross was named. In later times, they were often referred to as the Knights of Malta.

The need for an identifiable emblem for the knights had become a crucial problem. Because of the extensive armor which covered their bodies and faces, the knights were unable to distinguish friend from foe in battle. They chose the cross of Calvary as their symbol since they fought their battles for a Holy cause. The cross was later called the Maltese Cross representing the principles of charity, loyalty, chivalry, gallantry, generosity to friend and foe, protection of the weak and dexterity in service.

During the Crusades, many knights became fire fighters out of necessity as their enemies resorted to throwing glass bombs containing naphtha, rosin, sulphur and flaming oil into the vessels of the knights. Many knights were called to perform heroic deeds by rescuing fellow knights and extinguishing fires. In acknowledgment of these feats, the highest acclaim possible at the time was accorded the knights when their cross was decorated and inscribed by the royal court.

FYI

George Washington belonged to the Friendship Company of Alexandria, Virginia, formed in 1775. He purchased a hand pumper from Gibbs of Philadelphia, for his company.

The most prominent members of a community made a point of volunteering for fire duty, to set a good example for less public-spirited compatriots. Ben Franklin had set up Philadelphia's first volunteer brigade, the "Union", in 1736, and promoted what is now America's oldest fire insurance company. The "Fire Mark" told firemen the house was insured. Marked houses got priority.

An alarm of "FIRE" would be given, followed by the bellow, "Throw out your buckets!" Householders tossed their leather buckets into the street, and those persons rushing to the blaze would gather as many as they could carry.

Volunteers, manning the company's hand pumper heard commands boomed through their foreman's gleaming fire horn. The organization of a bucket brigade would begin from the nearest well or pump, while the "Smoke-Eaters" would rush their pumpers to the burning structure.

Fire "engines" are believed to have been invented in Germany, but the early American apparatus was imported from England, the Richard Newsham Pumpers being preferred. Apparently the first engine built in the colonies was a machine that Abraham Bickely sold to Philadelphia in 1718. In 1679, Boston imported a fire engine from England. This was 20 years before Paris, France acquired its first engine.

In 1961, Howe acquired the Oren Fire Apparatus Co. By its centennial in 1972, Howe boasted that more than 13,000 communities were equipped with Howe apparatus. In 1976-1977, Howe was sold to Grumman, which continued manufacturing Howe apparatus through 1980, eventually phasing out the Howe name.

The first fire department owned ambulance service was that of the Philadelphia Fire Department, which was organized during the Civil War to haul wounded soldiers from train stations to hospitals and aid stations, many of which were located in firehouses.

During World War II, some extraordinary measures were taken by the fire service. In Boston, a machine gun was mounted on a hose wagon in the event of an air attack by Axis power.

In Los Angeles, Fireboat 2 was painted battleship gray to camouflage it from the air, and night watch was maintained in the case the Japanese fleet sailed into Los Angeles harbor.

The first practical fire engine in America was put into service on January 27, 1678 in Boston. It was hand-carried to the fire and water had to be dumped into the pump box through bucket brigades. It could produce only one small stream.

The first fully motorized fire department in the United States was that of Savannah, Georgia which ordered seven American LaFrance pumpers, one chemical engine and four combination chemical/hose wagons on the installment plan.

The first motorized fire apparatus purchased on the West Coast was a 1909 Seagrave chemical, purchased for the Pasadena Fire Department for \$ 4,950. The engine saw service for more than 21 years, and is still owned by the department.

As an unnamed firefighter very aptly summed up in Kenneth Perkins study on "Volunteer Firefighter in the United States: "A firefighter has something special in him or her that caused him or her to become part of the fire service. The ones that truly have the fire service at heart will serve it forever. The ones that do not will find an excuse to quit."

FIREMEN'S HATS AND HELMETS : Sometime before 1740, Mr. Jacobus Truck, a caretaker of New York's first fire engines, was credited with inventing the leather fire cap. It was round with a high crown and narrow brim, stovepipe style.

Mr. Matthew Dubois, about 1824, deserves mention because he introduced the sewing or iron wire in the rims so the caps could be shaped and wouldn't warp from heat or moisture. Other makers: John Wilson & Son, John W. Towt, William Baudoine, George Henry Ramppen, Robert Roberts.

Henry T. Gratacap started as an apprentice for William Hinton in 1828, had his own shop in 1836. For thirty years, he made caps for New York and most other cities, it is said that he put the first extension brim to the back of the cap, raised the stitched hat fronts and the brass eagle head front or badge holder. Nobody knows how the design originated. One source claims the idea came from a fire cap on a firemen's monument chiseled by some unglorified sculptor. Some say he was inspired by the patriotic fever after the War of 1812. There is much to say about firemen's hats, how they saved lives of men, how they got their strength. Hats of eight, twelve, sixteen combs were common in the old days.

Gratacap once made a cap with 144 combs which was on display in the Crystal Palace, New York, in 1853. Many a hat, made special by Gratacap, sold for \$500 for presentation gifts. The most elaborate hat of all was made for foreman hunt of Sacramento, California, of gold, silver, and precious stones - the cost, \$1,350.

There is many a use for a fire hat. The main purpose of the hat is to protect the fireman from head injury. It is also to shed water and other debris from the back of the neck, and turned around, shields the face from heat. It can be used in many ways to save their lives and others; in the old days, a wreath of oak leaves was placed around the crown of the cap, and was meant to show that the wearer had saved a human life. Leather caps, then fire hats or fire helmets, are still being made and in use in the fire service today. San Francisco is still using that same style that came about and was made by an unglorified sculptor and a man named Gratacap.

In the early 1850's helmets were worn socially .

The STORY OF THE FIREMEN'S RED SHIRTS

The following story tells how the red shirt became identified with fire fighters since 1729.

It was in Amsterdam in 1727 that Van Schublik, the greatest inventor of his age, produced the finest hand engine that the world has ever seen, the Avalanche, now the Star of Jamaica.

The engine disappeared some years ago when the French invaded Holland, and much to the chagrin of Napoleon, it could not be found. It was in vain that the burghers sought for it after that, for it had disappeared in a cloud of mystery,

never, apparently, to be found again. For a long time, a reward of \$1000 was offered for its return. In spite of that, it was never discovered.

If Van Schublik had lived a few years longer, unquestionably its counter-part would have been constructed in every city of note; but unfortunately he met an awful fate in the great fire of Ghent in 1729 and the secret of the rotary swivel arrangement died with him.

At that fire was present the Emperor Charles of Austria and the Holy Roman Empire and father of the famous Maria Theresa.

The fire had been burning for over a day and the city seemed to be doomed when the Avalanche arrived and the city was saved. But at what a sacrifice! The gallant Van Schublik, its captain, after the most heroic endeavors, was crushed by a falling wall, and when removed from the debris, he was a lifeless corpse. His white linen was stained a crimson hue, his own life's blood; and then it was that the monarch, in commemoration of the sad event and of the dead hero, called upon the assembled firemen always after to wear a red shirt, as a fitting garment emblematic of their greatest captain and of their vocation, and to this day, his wishes have been carried out.

The Enemy : "I am more powerful than the combined armies of the world. I have destroyed more men, women and children than all the wars of all nations. I massacre thousands of people every year. I am more deadly than bullets, and I have wrecked more homes than the mightiest guns.

"In the United States alone, I steal over 21 billion dollars each year, I spare no one and I find my victims among the rich and poor alike, young and old, and the strong and weak. Widows know me to their everlasting sorrows. I loom up in such proportions that I cast my shadow over every field of labor.

"I lurk in unseen places and do most of my work silently. You are warned against me, yet you need me not. I am relentless, merciless and cruel, I am everywhere-in the home, in the schools, in the factory, throughout the wildlands, in the air and on the sea.

" I bring sickness, degradation and death, yet few seek me out to destroy me. I crush, I maim, I devastate, I will give you nothing and rob you of all you have.

" I am your worst enemy! I am uncontrolled fire!"