

On March 4, 1905, Battalion 44 which in those days was Battalion 34, moved into the new Fire Station at 107 Watkins Street. The station would cost NYC just over \$40,000 to build. One month later, on April 8, Ladder 70 was organized and was quartered in the new house as well. Within the following eight years, as the FDNY grew, all three companies were renumbered. Engine 131 became E231, Ladder 70 became L120, and Battalion 34 became Bn44, their designations to this day.

The charter member of Bn44 is Battalion Chief David J. Thomas who was assigned to Bn 34 in 1898. Following the renumbering of all Battalions, only one other chief would have the distinction of serving in the 34 Battalion (Bn Chief John J. Farrell - 1905). One of the 44's earliest "good jobs" occurred on April 21, 1905, when 19 buildings were consumed by a 4<sup>th</sup> alarm blaze at Belmont and Thatford Avenues. The Battalion Commander, Chief Thomas was in control of this operation.

The 44 chief who would graduate to the highest uniformed position in the FDNY was Bn Chief Elmer Mustard who was assigned to the 44 in 1919 and became Chief of Department. Many others would rise to Staff Chief positions in the coming years as well. James Love, Carmine D'Angelis, Allen D. Hay, Albert Sileo, Benjamin Aaronson, Michael Kearney, Brian Clinton, and Thomas Galvin (current Chief of Training) were all former members of Bn 44 who would become Assistant Chiefs.

Like many others of this generation, when America needed them most, members of the 44 Battalion answered her call to duty. Ironically, two future chiefs of the 44 were shot down over Germany and Czechoslovakia during WW2 and would become POW's in separate incidents. James Love (Purple Heart) (Bn Chief 1957) was shot down while flying his B-17 over Germany. Allen D. Hay (Purple Heart) (Bn Chief 1960) who incidently is the father of current Staff Chief Allen S. Hay (Chief of Safety) was also shot down while flying a mission in March 1944 over Czechoslovakia as they were heading to Austria to bomb a railroad marshaling yard on his B24. Both men would return from their military duty to start their storied careers within the FDNY. They, along with countless others brought back the term "maximum effort" and would then apply it within the FDNY.

The aide to the chief has always played an integral role in the day to day operations of the 44. It is a known fact that a good aide is worth his weight in gold. In some instances the eyes and ears of the chief are called into action on the fire floor. February 6, 1949 was such a day as FF 1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Thomas Yasvin, Jr. (44<sup>th</sup> Bn Aide) to Bn Chief Herbert J. Downward rescued a woman trapped in the front bedroom of a top floor fire of an old 4 story tenement at 1849 Broadway. These actions were taken before any other units were on scene and without the protection of a hose line. For his heroic actions, FF Yasvin was awarded the John H. Prentice Medal along with a Departmental Medal.

The 44<sup>th</sup> Battalion has suffered its share of loss within the line of duty. The first such tragedy occurred on July 23, 1934 when FF Frederick Erb (E231) was killed in a crash with a taxi while responding to a false alarm after being detailed for the tour to drive the Bn44 and Chief Herbert Downward.

On January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1955, Watkins Street would mourn the loss of Bn Chief Eugene G. Dowd who would succumb to injuries sustained while operating at box 1643. Chief Dowd was assigned to the 44 in 1948.

Battalion Chief Frank Tuttlemondo (assigned to Bn 44 1974) was a 26 year veteran of the FDNY who was adored by the men of Watkins Street. He was a physical fitness addict who was the prototypical "dream officer." On August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1980, Chief Tuttlemondo made the supreme sacrifice while heading a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm fire in a three story abandoned tenement at 124 Osbourne Street at 4:30 AM. The chief, realizing correctly that there could be squatters inside was in command of an intense operation when suddenly conditions deteriorated on the top floor and the building began to collapse. The chief, without regard for his own safety reacted in titanic fashion and saved the life of Lt. Michael Ramos by using his own body to shield his comrade during the collapse. Today, Chief Tuttlemondo's memory is alive and well as a Department Medal is presented in his name and even more importantly a scholarship is awarded each year to family member of a firefighter or officer from the 15 Division. This serves as a reminder that firefighters either from yesterday or tomorrow will never wander from their commitment to honor the fallen who have served before them.

There is an era referred to in FDNY lore as "The War Years" where a turbulent period of arson and civil unrest

dominated the city. There was a second section of the 44<sup>th</sup> Battalion from November 1965 until December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1969, because of the tremendous increase in work. The second section eventually became the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion now residing with L170 and E257 on Rockaway Parkway. On April 10, 1968, Watkins St. had probably the busiest night in the history of the FDNY. There were a total of 25 fires in Brownsville alone, 5 of which were multiple alarms, and 20 "smaller" ones where firemen reported being pelted by stones thrown by crowds of onlookers. The Deputy Police Commissioner at the time stated this was "only slightly above the normal number recorded on an average weekly night."

The men at Watkins St. responded to more alarms than anybody in 1971, and in an article written by Jimmy Breslin in the NY Times, he correctly dubbed it "The Busiest Firehouse in the World". In 1971, the NY Times reported that Bn 44 responded to over 10,000 runs, which were 5x, the average number for FDNY units.

On May 5, 1971, the NY Times also reported the FDNY fighting more than 100 structural fires in Brownsville-East New York between 5PM and midnight, twenty of which were considered major. Then Deputy Chief Frank Coughlin confirmed in the same interview, "We responded to 33 fires of some significance since 4:30PM, you could consider us heavily engaged."

Also that year, Bn44 aide Seymour Schenker reported over the Department Radio, "The 44 Battalion has just completed its 10,000<sup>th</sup> run," (to which the dispatcher replied) - "Congratulations Bn44, now take in number 10,001!"

Commanding fires is the bread and butter of the 44 and one such instance occurred in November 9th, 1967 where the 44 Bn was the first unit on scene for a fire at 80 Belmont Ave. As the Chief began to update units via the Department radio, the aide, Seymour Schenker began to gain entry to the building where, to his surprise he caught an arsonist in the act. The woman, Priscilla Hayes would admit to starting 1,200 different fires! A hero to the community, needless to say this cunning "detective work" by FF Schenker was not met with glaring enthusiasm by the men back at Watkins Street who were surely not thrilled to see the capture of one of their best clients.

Up until today, there have been 86 chief officers assigned to Bn44 in its' entire history. The 44 maintains as one of the most desired spots within the job.