

## What is a "Fallen" Firefighter?

08/19/14 411 W - + 7 - 6

And what isn't one? That's a question that I've been pondering lately. And again today, after a [conversation started by Dave Statter](#) on his Statter911 Facebook page. (It's about a news headline about word choice therein.) I've been hesitant to voice this question, as we're talking about death, after all. We're talking about the brothers and sisters who are no longer with us. And each is its own tragedy.

Each one's passing has impacted so many lives at the personal and professional level, and regardless of circumstance or situation. And yet it's the situation that compels the question. Is "fallen" as a synonym for "died" or for something more specific?

There are three choices. Depending on your perspective, a fallen firefighter is one who:

- Is an active or retired/former member, and died on- or off-duty.
- Is an active member, and died on- or off-duty.
- Is an active member, and died on-duty.\*

Three distinctly different definitions. Which is the "right" one? That's something I won't attempt to answer. But I recognize the definition can vary, depending upon the person or people or groups people. At a minimum, the lay person probably has a far looser definition than a member of the fire service.

Equally challenging is defining the proper response to those three categories above. Should each be memorialized with a degree of ceremony? Should they instead escalate, with a "duty death" as the most ceremonious? Good questions.

Now, did you catch my asterisk? Even the words "died on duty" are tricky, because they don't necessarily equate to "died in the line of duty." Bill Carey wrote an excellent blog post about the difference between "on duty" and "in the line of duty" last year. [See his posting](#).

Differences between the above categories are also crucial in the awarding of survivor benefits. Every firefighter should understand their death benefits, and the circumstances that impact the awarding or reject of them. The same concept applies to memorial inclusions. Fallen firefighter organizations have their own criteria determine inclusion or exclusion on local, state, and national memorials.

How do you define "fallen?" How *should* you define "fallen?" And for our meta-thinkers, how appropriate (or inappropriate) is this discussion? I look forward to your comments.

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Good questions Mike. Not easy to answer. We all want to do the right things for the right reasons.

This is a good resource...the matrix on page 16 specifically @ <http://www.firehero.org/wp-content/uploa..>

As the local pipe band it's tough for us as well – and we try to do all we can, when we can to honor our comrades who've gone before us.

**Joe Brady** ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 08/19/14 - 21:07

We can look locally/regionally for case examples. In Wake County, line of duty deaths are rare. Decades have passed between some instances, such as Norwood Massengill (Fairgrounds) in 1971 and Pat Dougherty (Garner) in 1993. Or nearly twenty years later, with Todd Blanchard (Eastern Wake) in 2005.

Think of what evolves in the fire service and culture, over the course of decades. The introduction of honor guards in this region. The exponential amount of information-sharing brought by the Internet (and other media technologies). The impact of the events of September 11, 2001.

In Raleigh, over forty years passed between the line-of-duty deaths Lt. Paul Mimms (1965) and Lt. Herman Jones (2008). Eighteen years had passed between the off-duty deaths of active members Ted Calvert and John Gardner (1990) and George Crocker, A.J. Johnson, and Flip Kissinger (2008-2009).

Those are long spans between such impactful events, be they a duty-related death, or the passing of an active member. The Raleigh Fire Department had to re-learn and re-experience everything from burial procedures to collective grieving.

Now cascade that across Durham and Orange and Johnston and Alamance counties, etc. Our region hasn't been historically dense with firefighters. We don't have the generations of traditions and experience to draw upon. Thus, with firefighter deaths, folks have been doing their best, looking outward for help, and at times perhaps making things up with the best of intentions.

Postscript, everything above also applies to how retired members are recognized. As departments find themselves conducting ceremonies for an active member's death, they're invariably forced to consider or reconsider the processes for retirees.

Postscript #2, what's rare isn't as rare any more. As departments grow in size, there are more people, which means more people who might pass away before they retiree. There are more fire departments today than in prior decade. And there's far more scrutiny of any active member's death, with regard to criteria for consideration of line-of-duty status.

**Legeros** - 08/20/14 - 18:29

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**What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?**

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