

Durham Public Safety Officer Duty Death, February 1978

Speaking of public safety officers, the March-April 1978 issue of *Hose & Nozzle* published this account of the death of Durham Public Safety Officer Gary Fletcher. He died on February 14, 1978, from injuries sustained at a fire on February 5. ([My fallen firefighter database](#) cites the date as February 6. Memo to self, correct same. His [death certificate](#) [PDF] confirms the February 5 date in the story.)

FREAK ACCIDENT PROVES FATAL TO DURHAM PSO

Hose Couple Comes Loose From Hydrant

DURHAM, N.C. - Public Safety Officer Gary Fletcher, who died [on Feb. 14] of injuries received while fighting a fire on Feb. 5, was described as a dedicated officer who was the victim of a freak accident. The terms were used by Fire Chief J. A. Letzing, who gave a report on what he believed to be the cause of the accident to the City Council public safety review committee.

Struck by Hose

Letzing's conclusion was the same as that drawn by other fire and public safety officials after their preliminary investigations: Fletcher was struck by a fire hose after a malfunction caused the hose to pull away from a fire hydrant at tremendous force. Fletcher suffered broken legs and head injuries when the fire hose struck him as he stood by a fire hydrant at East End and Angier avenues.

Fletcher had attached the hose to the hydrant and was standing by to turn on the water when the hose was run to the fire, which was in a house at 300 East End Ave. Letzing said his investigation showed that the hose wedged in a small gap between the wooden slats on which the hose rested and the side of the hose bed.

Unrolling Hosing

Letzing said Fletcher signaled the driver of the fire truck to proceed and that the truck then started toward the fire, unrolling the hose as it went. When the hose was [played] out to the point at which it was binding, Letzing said, it pulled away from the hydrant "with terrific force."

Fletcher was thrown into the air when the hose struck him, Letzing said. It was not clear whether his injuries were caused by the impact of the hose, the impact of his body striking the ground or both.

Once the probable cause of the accident had been determined, Letzing said, all fire trucks were examined to determine if they had similar gaps in the hose bed. None did, he said, adding that the defect had been remedied in the truck involved in the fatal accident.

<http://www.legeros.com/ralwake/photos/weblog/pivot/entry.php?id=6299>

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