

Port Washington Fire Department Honored

The Nassau county Fire Commission presented their annual Meritorious Awards for bravery at a ceremony on April 12 at the VanNess Fire Station Hall in Uniondale. County Executive Thomas S. Gullotta, Town Supervisor John Kiernan, along with 21 volunteer officers and members of the fire departments who were selected by the fire commission, attended the ceremony. Nine men (one posthumously) out of the 21 honorees are

members of the Port Wasington Fire Department.

Editor's Note: The following is an account of the tragic fire on Main Street in November 1988. The nine men honored for bravery all demonstrated heroic efforts in combatting the blaze. Tragically, one of the Firemen, Lieutenant Robert H. Dayton, lost his life that early Saturday morning.

At approximately 7:30 a.m. on Saturday,

November 26, 1989 the Port Washington Fire Department responded to a Signal 8 for a recorded alarm at 165 Main Street. The premises is a antique store at street level with apartments above. Upon arrival at the scene,

1st Asst. Chief Peter Zwerlein observed smoke rising from the rear of the building and immediately ordered a General Alarm to be sounded.

For the next seven and a half hours, 142 firefighters fought a fire that claimed the life of one of its brothers and sent sixteen others to the hospital.

Lieutenant Robert H. Dayton, Jr., a member of the Flower Hill Hose Company responded on the second due engine from the Haven Avenue firehouse. Equipped in full turnout gear and self-contained breathing apparatus, he, along with Firefighter **Scott Wood**, entered the building to conduct a

primary search of the second floor apartments.

Dayton and Wood Led Rescue Search

While firefighting operations were being initiated to control the fire, Lieut. Dayton and Firefighter Scott Wood performed the primary search eventually entering the apartment above the fire.

At this point the alarm on Lieut. Dayton's air pack sounded followed shortly by the alarm on Firefighter Wood's SCBA as well. The intensity of the smoke, fire and heat were such that both members became extremely disoriented and were unable to retrace their steps. Lieut. Dayton sounded a "MAY-DAY" call over his portable radio but his air ran out before he could find an escape route and he was unable to get out of the building. He succumbed to the injuries he sustained

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(l to r) At awards ceremonies for the Bronze Medal of Valor were Philip Poullada, Ex-Chief William G. Zwerlein, Andy Bellini, County Executive Thomas Gulotta, John Olszewski, Ex-Chief Charles Lang, Mike Meade, Chairman of the 8th Battalion, Town Supervisor Kiernan, Fire Chief Peter Zwerlein.



SUPREME SACRIFICE: Mrs. Pamela Dayton accepts the Gold Medal of Valor from 8th Battalion Chairman Michael Meade. Standing to his left is Ex -Chief Charles Lang, to the right of Mrs. Dayton is Chief Peter Zwerlein.

Photo by A. Anthony Miller

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in the fire.

Firefighter Wood had become separated from **Lieut. Dayton** and finally found a window through which he jumped onto a fire escape, cutting his wrists in the process, before his air supply was completely depleted. Firefighter Wood was taken to St. Francis Hospital where he was admitted for smoke inhalation and burns.

Firefighters Come To Aid Of Comrade

Firefighter Wood's directions to other firefighters as to the location of **Lieut. Dayton** was the first indication of where in the building the two had been trapped. **Lieut. Hal Carver** and **Firefighter Vincent Costa** were the first members to reach the fire escape. Wearing full turnout gear and air

packs, they entered the room above the fire where **Lieut. Dayton** was lying unconscious on the floor. Although he was close to the window, his weight combined with the weight of the turnout gear made it extremely difficult to move him. The heat and smoke quickly became unbearable and the two had to flee to the safety of the fire escape. Repeated attempts were made from the fire escape by **Firefighters Andy Bellini** and **John Olszewski** to pull **Lieut. Dayton** through the window, but the intensity of the fire, coupled with reports that the floor may have collapsed, made these attempts unsuccessful.

Finally the fire below was knocked down enough so that **Ex-Chief Thomas Murray**, wearing full turnout gear and breathing apparatus was able to enter the room from the fire escape. The atmosphere in the building was still extremely hot and smokey and the extent of floor collapse was unknown. Tom was able to pass **Lieut. Dayton** through the window to the fire escape where **Ex-Chief William Zwerlein** and Firefighter John Olszewski received him. CPR was initiated immediately. Ex-Chiefs Murray and Zwerlein assisted **Firemedic/AEMT Philip Poullada** in administering CPR to **Lieut. Dayton**. The three continuously administered CPR while smoke and fire continued to threaten their position. At times they were completely enveloped in smoke, but never abandoned the resuscitation effort. During this time, Firefighter Olszewski operated a one and three-quarter inch hose line from the fire escape to control the fire that had once again flared up in the building and was threatening his fellow firefighters.

Fire Medic Company Praised

Fire Medic Company No. 1 is one of four companies in the Port Washington Fire Department and is solely responsible for providing emergency medical service for the department. Within a four hour period, this company attended to seventeen injured firefighters who were transported to local area hospitals. Conditions treated included cardiac arrest, burns, lacerations, twisted knees, chest pains, back pain and smoke inhalation. The performance of Fire Medic Company No. 1 at this alarm was by no means routine. Caring for seventeen aided firefighters in such a short time period required extraordinary teamwork and professionalism.



THE MEDAL OF Valor was awarded to **Scott Wood** (second from left). Standing, left to right: Nassau

County Executive **Thomas Gulotta**, **Michael Meade** (third from left), ex-chief **Charles Lang**, new chief **Peter Zwerlein** and Town Supervisor **John Kiernan**.



AT CEREMONIES AWARDING the Silver Medal of Valor were (l to r) Ex-Chief **Thomas Murray Jr.**, Captain **Hal Carver**, **Michael Meade** (8th Battalion Chairman), Ex-Chief **Charles Lang** and **Vincent Costa**.

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