

*Today is October 18, 2012, and this is **David Ehrenhart** from the Illinois Fire Service Institute talking to **Captain Kurtis Brown** from the Bethalto Fire Department. We are discussing Assistant Chief Charles Lehnen, who died in the line of duty in 2004.*

**DE:** Can you tell me about the history of the Bethalto Fire Department?

**KB:** Well, the history since I was on, it was pretty... didn't have many runs we went on. Average around 650 a year; it was mostly medical calls. As far as the personnel, it was pretty much a "good ol' boy" fire department. You had your higher ups that kind of ran the department and it was nothing to go across the street and have a beer or two. It was a real low key department. Throughout the years it has kind of gotten a little more professional. I'm not saying that the "good ol' boy" department's bad, but it's a little bit different of a department nowadays.

**DE:** OK, thank you. I know you have talked a little bit about the history since you have been on. Is there anything else about the department, what it was like at the time that Assistant Chief Lehnen was with the Department?

**KB:** As far as what it was like...it was very low key.

**DE:** OK, thank you. What can you tell me about Assistant Chief Lehnen and his career? For example, did he have any special responsibilities as Assistant Chief?

**KB:** Mainly what I remember is, like after we'd get back from a fire it was his responsibility to make sure we were putting everything back in service, getting the packs and stuff back in order. Just basically putting the department back in its place after we've pretty much tore it up going to a fire. Other than that, he did a lot with training. Basically, I think he might have been the Training Officer at the time. I only served with him for about two years and I believe he did a lot with training. He was a good pack trainer. I attribute just about everything I know about using an air pack to him. Other than that, it was mainly just basic station duties.

**DE:** OK, thank you. Do you remember any interesting or unique anecdotes about Assistant Chief Lehnen?

**KB:** The thing that really stands out is he always had his tea cup and everybody would hide it and play jokes with it but you never seen him without his big ol' mug. Another thing, and I've never seen anybody do it, but he always put ice in his beer. Never since then or never before have I seen anybody do that before. He was always given a hard time about that. As a person, I think, first meeting him, you would think that he was kind of a jerk if you really didn't know him, but once you got to know him, he really knew his stuff. I think he put on a good front on being a hard-ass and really got his point across whenever he was training people. That's the main thing I remember, as far as quirky stuff, the tea cup was the funniest thing.

**DE:** OK, thank you. What was the reaction of other firefighters when they learned that Assistant Chief Lehnert was hospitalized?

**KB:** I mean, naturally everybody was in shock. It was so unexpected. He didn't seem to be in bad health or anything like that. It was really unexpected and it upset a lot of people.

**DE:** How did the line of duty death affect individuals within your organization and the community?

**KB:** I think the community, the fire service and the community lost a really good firefighter, a good leader. I think he would have gone even further. I mean, he was Assistant Chief, but I think the City of Bethalto lost a good man that day.

**DE:** OK, thank you. How did your organization or community memorialize Assistant Chief Lehnert? Can you describe the funeral?

**KB:** The funeral, the big thing, it was raining. It was, really, if you could call a funeral awesome...it is kind of inappropriate to call it that, but it really was a heart wrenching funeral. Like I said, I only known him for two years. I didn't know him personally real well, but it still was a sad day, a sad day, but a beautiful funeral. We put him on our old pumper, on the hose bed of the pumper. Just seeing the flag draped coffin, just kind of gets to you.

**DE:** OK, thank you. Is there anything from this incident that would be helpful to today's firefighters?

**KB:** Just, take care of your body. He died of a stroke, so I mean you just gotta stay healthy. If you were to learn anything from it, I mean just mainly keep your body in shape and limit the possibilities of something like that happening.

**DE:** OK, thank you. Is there anything else that you would like to share about Assistant Chief Lehnert or the Bethalto Fire Department that we did not cover during this interview?

**KB:** Just mainly, Mike was a great guy. Like I said, he...if you didn't know him, you'd think he was the biggest jerk in the world, but once you got to know him, he was a great guy. Good trainer; he's been missed. He just...he was a good guy.

**DE:** OK, thank you.