

*Today is April 26, 2011, and this is **Adam Groves** from the Illinois Fire Service Institute talking to **Hank Shouse** who is retired from the Danville Fire Department. We are discussing Lieutenant Gene Anderson, who died in the line of duty in 1976.*

AG: Can you please tell me about the history of the Danville Fire Department, and your personal history as a member of the department?

HS: As I recall, I had an uncle who was assistant fire chief at the time, this was back in 1946. He suggested that my brother and I take the exam to get on. We both took the exam. We were called. We were both working for my dad at Robert Holmes and Brothers. I was on the layout tables, laying out blueprints. And when the call came my brother said "I'm in. I'm in, boy." So, I told my dad, I said, "well, Dad, I don't know if I can go or not." I said, "my wife's pregnant and I'm making three hundred and some dollars a month, and I'm gonna go down there any make a hundred and some dollars a month?" His answer to me, "son, you go or you're fired. You are not working here." So that was the start of it.

My brother and I both went on the department the same day. He was stationed at the downtown station, which was on Walnut Street, next to the [police] station and across the street from the Illinois Bell Telephone Company. I was stationed at the corner of Bowman and Fairchild, #3 Fire Station. Downtown was the Central Station, and out to #3, that was an outside house. We had one pumper out there and three men at the time. As things advanced, I was out there for approximately nine months, and I was sent downtown to work on a shift opposite my brother because they did not allow family to work on the same day. So I went to work down there. I got involved quite deeply in departmental things. I was a Trustee for the State Association [Associated Fire Fighters of Illinois] for twelve years.

We made a lot of changes in the fire department. We went from working "twenty-four on, twenty-four off" to what they're working now, "one on, two off." And things progressed, things got better, and that's the way they should be. The department here in Danville, I can say I'm very proud of the men that's on it. They're all gentlemen, they take their work serious, and they have all been like young men to me. Everybody's a young man to me.

My brother, he went ahead on the department. He became an assistant chief. I was a little dumber, I was a fireman all my career, which I have no regrets. I enjoyed everything about it. The seventeen large fires that we made, I can remember each one individually. Going around, I remember all of the old timers. It's good to go back and remember the old timers, the new kids that are on the department now. And I think that the fire service is a tremendous place to work.

AG: OK. Can you tell me what the department was like in 1976, at the time of Lieutenant Anderson's line of duty death?

HS: Yeah. Andy was a very, very likable guy. He was a tremendous young man. I knew Andy way before he came on the department. And he played a lot of athletics, which I participated in. But at that time we were working "twenty-four on, twenty-four off." We had three, we had Central Station and three outside stations, which today that's what we have. Andy was out to #3 Station. Out there then there was a lot of factories, that was the factory area, in fact. There was a grade school right across the street from them.

The department itself, I don't know whether we had more men then than they do now. I'm sure we did, but I'm not certain on that. Nowadays they have to have two men on a pumper, plus an officer, so I'm assuming that that's what we had, too. The officers were very capable men. The guys that worked on our department were gentlemen, and very, very good workers. I'm always proud to say that I worked with this man or that man.

AG: What can you tell me about Lieutenant Anderson and his career? Do you remember, did he have any special responsibilities or leadership activities as a lieutenant?

HS: He was responsible, probably at one of the busiest stations in the city, out at #3. Andy was always a very capable man, a very likable man, but a hard worker, too. Very good man. And Andy, you could always bank on Andy being there if he said he would be there. You didn't have to mess around and say "where is he at?" or anything. Andy would be there if he promised you he'd be there. As far as an officer, I didn't have the opportunity of working under Andy, but I had the opportunity to see the way he operated, and he was a very good officer.

AG: Do you remember any interesting or unique anecdotes about Lieutenant Anderson?

HS: Not pertaining to the fire department, but most of the time, a holiday or something, Andy would always have a big cookout in his backyard. Most of the firemen and some of their families and that, we'd all be there. But, Andy, Andy loved his job.

AG: Can you please describe the incident in which Lieutenant Anderson died in the line of duty?

HS: The fire happened on the afternoon of 8/11/76 [August 11, 1976]. It was a big, two-and-a-half story house. At the time, we didn't know everything about it being torn down or anything like that. All we knew is when we got there we had a major fire. And we laid a line of hose. We went in and knocked the fire out. And the assistant chief at that time, which, I'm not sure, but I think it was Harold Watson, and he asked us to put a light plant up so we'd have light. It was starting to get dark on us. So, Andy, the two men that worked with him, Bill Thoma and John Broderick, and Andy and I set the light plant up.

As soon as we got it set up, we headed back into the building. I dropped off on the first floor, that's where I'd been working, and Andy and his two men went to the second floor. They no more got to the second floor then Broderick said, "Andy is down." Well, they immediately performed CPR on him. They called the rescue. They performed CPR. They zapped him two or three times, but it just seemed that he just went "boom." That was it. There was no struggle or anything. It was just that "bang." Andy fell over and that was the end of it.

At that time, my brother was married to Andy's sister, so I went over to the parish house, there was a priest home over there. And I got on the telephone, called my wife, and had her get a hold of Jack and the family, and have them get over to Lakeview Hospital because that's where the ambulance was taking Andy so that they'd all be there.

Andy was a great man, a great firefighter, and he has been missed.

AG: Do you remember anything about the on-scene reaction of the other firefighters when Lieutenant Anderson collapsed?

HS: It became a real, real solemn, silent place. And after we had cleaned up around there, went back to the station, no one said anything. All the fire department guys, all they did was sit around. No one talked to anybody or anything else. That's the big thing that I can remember.

AG: What effect did Lieutenant Anderson's injury, when he collapsed, what effect did that have on the emergency response operations at the incident? You suggested the fire was mostly out already?

HS: That's correct. The fire was mostly out. Everyone, the first thing they did, the crew up above, Lieutenant Anderson's crew, brought him down, down on the first floor, and they worked on him there til the rescue car got there. Then they got an ambulance and took him right to the hospital. Like I said, I notified my wife because my brother was married to his sister and we knew Andy's family and everything. We tried to get everybody over there, but there just wasn't any use. Andy was gone.

AG: Can you tell me how the line of duty death affected individuals within the Danville Fire Department and within just the City of Danville?

HS: I think guys became more rigid on, maybe, their health stuff. I know right after that everybody had to start, they started giving physical examinations. And I think that it came due to the effect of Andy's death. And everybody, I think everybody took better care of themselves because of his death.

AG: How did the Danville Fire Department memorialize Lieutenant Anderson? Do you remember anything about the funeral?

HS: I'm not sure, but I think Andy was the only firefighter to die in the line of service while I was there. But, they took all the hose off and his casket was put on a pumper, and that's the way that Andy was buried. They took him right to the cemetery, and if I'm not, I'm not quite sure, but I think the aerial truck had a big flag that they put up at the cemetery when he went in. It was moving, very moving.

AG: Is there anything from this incident that you think would be helpful to today's firefighters?

HS: I think that mostly nowadays that they've got it all covered. When I was on they didn't give physicals like they do now. You're required to take physicals periodically or they have a certain time that everybody has to go take a physical and do this and do that. At that time, we didn't do anything like that.

AG: Is there anything else that you would like to share about Lieutenant Anderson or the Danville Fire Department that we did not cover during this interview?

HS: Not really. It's like I said, I'm proud of the Danville Fire Department and proud that I spent thirty years on it from 1946 to 1977, and I think every young man ought to give it consideration.