

# ***Word for Word/A Fire Captain's Eulogy; First In, Last Out: The Unbreakable Links in the Chain of Command***

DEC. 23, 2001 – New York Times

THE building housing Engine Company 40 and Ladder Company 35 is on the corner of Amsterdam Avenue and 66th Street, and because it is on the West Side, its men managed to get to the World Trade Center disaster sooner than many other units. Of the 13 firefighters who jumped aboard the two rigs that morning, only one survived, Kevin Shea, who was apparently knocked unconscious during the collapse of one of the towers and literally blown out of the building.

In the weeks and months that followed, the men of the firehouse attended a series of services for their fallen comrades from this and other units. At the last of these services for the men of 40/35, on Dec. 10, Capt. James Gormley, the house commander, paid tribute to his colleague, Capt. Francis J. Callahan, a 30-year veteran of the department who was killed on Sept. 11. Captain Gormley eloquently described the complexity of command facing an officer in the New York Fire Department. His eulogy was delivered, fittingly, at Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, which the firefighters of 40/35 had been responsible for.

Captains and lieutenants of the New York City Fire Department share a special relationship with other officers of similar rank. When we meet for the first time we introduce ourselves to each other, we shake hands, we measure each other's resolve and fortitude. At Operations our aggressiveness is based on the trust we share in each other.

Firefighters and their officers share a different, but also special relationship. Officers very literally lead firefighters into harm's way. We go first. If things go badly we are required by our oath and tradition to be the last of our command to leave. Accountability for our men is carved into our heart. Responsibility for our men, their wives and children are in the depth of our soul.

This is why we are here today. Capt. Frank Callahan is the ranking officer killed at the World Trade Center from our firehouse. He leaves last. I cannot say he will be the last to ever leave. We live in a dangerous world, and we put our boots and helmets on every day.

Captains, especially commanding officers of companies in the same quarters, have a unique relationship. We know each other as no else ever will. We are commanding officers of complementary companies. We cannot work successfully without each other. There are not many of us, you could fit us in one fair-sized room. We are not always friends. There is too much at stake, but our respect, and trust in each other, is unquestioned.

Frank Callahan was more than my friend, to simply call him brother would not do our relationship justice. Frank was my comrade. It's harder to be a comrade than a friend. It's different than being a brother.

Friends and brothers forgive your mistakes. They are happy to be with you. You can relax and joke with them. You can take your ease with them -- tell them tall tales.

Comrades are different. Comrades forgive nothing. They can't. They need you to be better. They keep you sharp. They take your words literally.

When a friend dies we miss them, we regret words unspoken, we remember the love. When a brother dies we grieve for the future without him. His endless possibilities. If your brother doesn't die of old age you might never accept the parting. When a comrade dies we miss them, we regret words unspoken, we remember the love, we grieve the future without them. We are also proud. Proud to have known a good man, a better man than ourselves. We respect the need for him to leave, to rest.

Some people equate camaraderie with being jovial. It is anything but. Camaraderie is sharing hardship. It is shouts and commands, bruises and cuts. It's a sore back and lungs that burn from exertion. It's heat on your neck and a pit in your stomach. It's a grimy handshake and a hug on wet shoulders when we're safe. It's not being asleep when it's your turn on watch. It is trust, it is respect, it is acting honorably.

You hold your comrade up when he can't stand on his own. You breathe for him when his body's forgotten how. It's lifting a man up who loves his wife and children as much as you love your own. Looking them in the eye for the rest of your life and trying to explain, and not being able to. You kiss them for him. It's laying him down gently when his name appears on God's roll call. It's remembering his name. I'll never forget his name. He was just what he was called: Frank. You never had to chase your answer. He said it to your face.

It's at the same time being both amazed and proud that you've known men like him. Looking for your reflection in their image. Seeing it. Knowing you're one of them.

There's a song out of Ireland. A line of it says, "Comrade tread lightly, you're near to a hero's grave." If you ever said that to Frank he would have given you the "look" and pushed past you in the hallway.

Frank was light on his feet but he never tread anywhere lightly. When Frank did something it was like a sharp axe biting into soft fresh pine, with a strong sure stroke. It was done. It was right. It meant something. It was refreshing. It smelled good.

Quite often we discussed history. The successes and failures of political, military and social leadership. The depth and broadness of Frank's historical knowledge was astounding.

I've been told Frank enjoyed a practical joke. We never joked together. Rarely laughed. We never sought out each other's company on days off. We never went golfing or fishing. We never went for a hike in the Shawangunk Mountains together. We were often happier apart than we ever were together because we shared the nightmares of command.

We shared problems. We shared stress. We shared dark thoughts that are now front-page news. Incredulous at the failures of leadership that have borne fruit. We shared the proposition of a time and place where few would dare to go. He went there because it was his turn. He called his wife, Angie, before he received his orders to respond. He told her what was going on. He told her things didn't look good; he told her he loved her.

Historically it is said, "They rode to the sound of the guns":

Capt. Frank Callahan

Lt. John Ginley

Firefighter 1 Gr. Bruce Gary

Firefighter 1 Gr. James Giberson

Firefighter 1 Gr. Michael Otten

Firefighter 1 Gr. Kevin Bracken

Firefighter 1 Gr. Steve Mercado

Firefighter 1 Gr. Michael Roberts

Firefighter 1 Gr. John Marshall

Firefighter 3 Gr. Vincent Morello

Firefighter 3 Gr. Michael Lynch

Firefighter 6 Gr. Michael D'Auria

and Firefighter 2 Gr. Kevin Shea

Kevin, we are joyful that we got you back. Have no guilt. The same goes for the rest of us. I know what you all did, you got your gear on, found a tool, wrote your name or Social Security number in felt tip pen on your arm or a leg, a crisis tattoo in case you got found.

We went down there knowing things could go badly. We stayed until we were exhausted, got three hours sleep and went back again, and again. That's what comrades do. Only luck and circumstance separate us from them.

It is significant that we are in Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. The first performance here was "West Side Story," the story of this neighborhood. This Act is part of that story. It is more than we can absorb in one lifetime, so the story must be told until it makes sense.

It is poignant because the arts have helped mankind deal with reality since stories were told round the fire and we drew on cave walls. The arts help us exercise our emotions. We are surrounded by art and overwhelmed by our emotions. From the pictures children have drawn for us, the poetry, songs, and banners, to the concerts, plays and operas that we have been invited to attend -- use the arts to heal your heart. Exercise your emotions. Feel anger, feel hate, feel love and pride. Run the gamut of your emotions until you settle where you belong, as good honorable men, every inch the equal of our comrades, friends and brothers. That's what they want. That's what your families need. That's what you deserve.

Frank was a trusted leader, a captain. The best commander I've encountered here, or in the military. It was important to him. We both believed captain to be the most important rank in the department. He was forged by his family, his comrades, every officer and firefighter that he ever worked with. He was tempered by his experience.

History, the record of successes and failures of leadership, has caused us to be here. Capt. Frank Callahan did not fail in his leadership. He led his command where they were needed, and he's the last of them to leave. If more of the world's leaders were forged as he was, our world would not be in its current state.

Frank Callahan is a star, a reference point. A defined spot on the map of humanity. Guide on him to navigate the darkness. You will not wander, you will not become lost.