

Court Honors Slain Detective Hero
Fire Department Also Expresses Sorrow

Among those who paid honor to Detective James L. Daggett, killed in an arson blast, while he and other Detectives were arresting the men responsible for the crime, were a city magistrate and the New York Fire Department.

In opening court on September 11 (1951), the morning after the explosion, Magistrate Louis A. Pagnucco who had worked with the dead officer and with Detective Howard J. Phelan, seriously injured in the blast, made the following statement:

“Before we start today’s proceedings, the Court wants to take this opportunity to express his feelings concerning the tragedy which took place late last night, in which Detective James L. Daggett died in the heroic performance of his duty, and Detective Howard J. Phelan was seriously wounded.

“These two detectives, members of the Safe, Loft and Truck Squad, are personally known to the Court. When I was an Assistant District Attorney of New York County, I had occasion to work with both of them, and I found them to be splendid types of men, who sacrificed their time when off duty, and were devoted to the work of protecting the citizens of the City of New York, and their lives and property, above and beyond the call of duty. I worked with them for months, tracking down underworld characters and solving murder cases. . . .

“There are no words in which I can adequately express my deep sorrow in stating that, in Detective Daggett, the city has lost one of its finest men. The Court wants to express its regrets and condolences to his father and to the Police Department. The Court also wishes to express its best wishes for the speedy recovery of Detective Howard J. Phelan.

“I believe it is fitting for the Court to bring to the attention of the general public the noble and great work which is being done by the policemen of our city, who, in the performance of their duty, in the defense of life and property, are exposing themselves daily to great dangers, which sometimes entail the loss of their own lives. . . .”

Magistrate Pagnucco then declared a five-minute recess as a token of the court’s respect to the memory of Detective Daggett.

The Fire Department took official cognizance of Detective Daggett’s death in Special Order No. 152, dated September 12, 1951, which read in part as follows: “The New York Fire Department, deeply regretting the untimely death of Detective James Daggett, which occurred on September 10, 1951, while engaged in the act of apprehending evident arsonists, joins with the New York Police Department, in expressing its sorrow.”

At the Inspector’s funeral, which was tendered the heroic officer on September 14th, the Fire Department was represented by a battalion of two companies headed by Fire Commissioner Jacob Grumet and Chief of Department Peter Loftus.

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Injured in Blast

Detective Howard Phelan of the Safe, Loft and Truck Squad, injured in an arson blast which took the lives of Detective James L. Daggett and two arsonists, was selected as the winner of the *New York Journal-American* Public Protector Award for September.

Phelan and other Detectives had closed in on a business man and a group of criminals he had hired to set an “insurance” fire to his place of business last September 10 (1951). The gasoline being used in the crime suddenly exploded and rocked the West 18th Street area in Manhattan, where the loft building was located. Phelan was blown through a wall and severely injured in the terrific detonation.

Police Commissioner Monaghan made the presentation at a bedside ceremony in St. Vincent’s Hospital, where Detective Phelan is recuperating.

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Honor Committee Cites 869 Officers

Deceased Det. Daggett’s Name to be Placed on Memorial Tablet

Sergeant, 5 Detectives and 6 Patrolmen Receive Honorable Mention

Two General Orders and a teletype message, containing the names of members of the force cited for meritorious acts, were published during the month of March (1952). The Honor Committee held several special meetings during the month so that the examination credits, recognized by the Municipal Civil Service Commission for departmental awards, would be available to the men participating in the promotion examination for sergeant on March 29. General Orders No. 10 contained 395 awards, General Orders No. 11 contained 236, and the teletype message of March 28 contained 238 others.

Detective James L. Daggett, who was killed in an arson blast last September 10 (1951), received the posthumous award of Honorable Mention. His name is to be placed on the tablet at Police Headquarters. Sergeant Earl J. Campazzi, five detectives and six patrolmen also were awarded Honorable Mention which automatically makes them eligible to be the recipient of one of the medals to be awarded either late this month or early in June.

Awards for other acts of meritorious conduct included: Exceptional Merit—23; Commendation—173; Meritorious Police Duty—399; and Excellent Police Duty—260.

HONORABLE MENTION

(Name to be placed on Tablet at Police Headquarters)

Detective James L. Daggett, Shield No. 727, Safe, Loft and Truck Squad, Detective Division. At about 9:30 P.M., September 10, 1951, while on duty, accompanied by four other detectives, observed four men, two of whom were known safe burglars, drive an automobile up to premises 9 West 18th Street, Manhattan, and then carry a number of paper cartons into said building. After a few minutes, the four men emerged from the building carrying the empty cartons. Two men drove away in the automobile and the other two men re-entered the building. The two men in the automobile were apprehended and admitted to the detectives that a fire was going to be set in the premises. Detective Daggett with another detective entered the premises and apprehended the two men therein and while leaving with their prisoners a loud explosion occurred followed by a fire. Detective Daggett and one of the prisoners were instantly killed. The other detective and his prisoner were seriously injured and removed to a hospital where the prisoner died two days later. The two other prisoners were indicted for first degree murder. Four other detectives who participated in this case have been awarded in these orders.

HONORABLE MENTION

Detective Howard J. Phelan, Shield No. 1786, Safe, Loft and Truck Squad, Detective Division. At about 9:30 P.M., September 10, 1951, while on duty, accompanied by four other detectives, observed four men, two of whom were known safe burglars, drive an automobile up to premises 9 West 18th Street, Manhattan, and then carry a number of paper cartons into said building. After a few minutes, the four men emerged from the building carrying the empty cartons. Two men drove away in the automobile and the other two men re-entered the building. The two men in the automobile were apprehended and admitted to Detective Phelan that a fire was going to be set in the premises. Detective Phelan and his partner entered the premises and apprehended the two men therein and while leaving with their prisoners a loud explosion occurred followed by a fire. Detective Phelan was blown through a wall and in a semi-conscious condition crawled the balance of the way to the street with his clothes afire. His partner and one of the prisoners were killed in the explosion. Detective Phelan and the other prisoner were taken to St. Vincent's Hospital in serious condition. The prisoner died two days later as a result of the explosion. The two other prisoners were indicted for first degree murder. Four other officers who participated in this case have been awarded in these orders.

Sadly, this announcement was included in a article called "All in a Day's Work" in the September 1951 issue of Spring 3100 just a few days before Det. Daggett was killed in the line of duty:

Detectives Howard Phelan, Thomas Sullivan, Richard Weber and James Daggett of the Safe, Loft, and Truck Squad, under the supervision of Acting Captain Raymond Maguire, quickly solved the theft of eight tons of paper valued at \$20,000 from a West Side paper manufacturer. They arrested four men, two of them employees of the victim on July 27.

Entering into collusion with a pair of salesmen who disposed of it, the printing foreman and the stockman of the company systematically stole the paper. The theft was discovered when executives of the paper company learned that their products were being sold to dealers for less than the company's price.

After an inventory which showed eight tons of paper missing, the company notified the Safe, Loft and Truck Squad, whose members investigated and made the arrests.

Reprinted with permission from the January 1952 Spring 3100

The “Detective Daggett” – Police Launch

On December 3 (1951), police launch No. 13 was officially commissioned and added to the department's fleet. The new boat was christened the “Detective James L. Daggett” in memory of the late Detective who lost his life in the performance of police duty on September 11, 1951. Detective Daggett was killed in an arson blast while effecting the arrest of three suspected burglars.

The “Detective James L. Daggett” is specifically designed for patrol and rescue problems in and around Jamaica Bay which is frequented by thousands of fishing and boating enthusiasts throughout the year. It is a flat-bottomed tunnelled stern crash boat, 32 feet in length, with a speed of twenty knots and a carrying capacity of thirty persons. The launch will be based at the head of Barbadoes Basin, near Idlewild Airport.

The “Detective Daggett” is the first police launch to be named after a policeman killed in the line of duty. All others were named after policemen who were killed while serving with the Armed Forces.