

LIFE STORY: Retired Alton Assistant Fire Chief Paul Longbottom kept tradition of fire service alive

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - Retired Alton Assistant Fire Chief Paul Nelson Longbottom, a man who never forgot the importance of being a firefighter, died recently at age 70.

Longbottom, a devoted husband, father and friend retired from the Alton Fire Department in 1996. He started his fire service career in 1971.

Alton Fire Chief Bernie Sebold described Longbottom as “a great guy.” The Jerseyville man was serving as president of the Alton Fire Department’s retirees at the time of his death.

“I have a huge amount of respect and appreciation for Paul,” Sebold said. “Paul was a very hard working firefighter from what the guys told me. He was very involved with the retirees group and I just spoke with him last Thursday on the phone and he made me aware of their meetings. He said the group enjoyed sitting around and hearing what was currently going on with the fire department.”

Sebold said he was given an open invitation by Longbottom to attend any of their retiree meetings.

“The firefighter retirees are a great bunch of guys who cared when they worked here and still care about the Alton Fire Department today, even though many don’t even live near Alton anymore,” Sebold said.

The fire chief said when Longbottom started as a firefighter, they were still riding on tail boards of fire trucks to scenes and didn’t have any breathing apparatuses to fight fire fires. He said it was much more difficult fighting fires back in that era without the equipment and the firefighters were truly “smoke eaters” back in that era as they were nicknamed.

Longbottom was a member of the Illinois Retired Fire Fighter Association and the Illinois Fire Fighter Association Alumni. He was born on May 16, 1945, in Dubuque, Iowa, and he graduated from Southwestern High School in Piasa. He had an AA degree from Porterville Community College and a degree in fire science from Lewis and Community College. He was a Navy Vietnam War veteran and also a member of VFW Post 1308 in Alton.

Present **Alton Fire Department Battalion Chief Brad Sweetman** said for a short time he served as a firefighter under Longbottom, who was captain of Fire Engine 74.

“He was a lot of fun to work with and very passionate about his job and making sure everybody did a good job and did it safely,” Sweetman said. “I remember he was a big John Wayne fan and if you were around him during one of those movies, you had to sit down and be quiet when one of those movies was on.

“Mr. Longbottom helped plan the meetings and events for the retirees and he kept that group going. There were still a few guys with the fire department that saw him every once in a while. I believe he still liked to go fishing. He loved hunting and fishing.”

Firefighting was “a big passion” for Longbottom, Sweetman said.

“He climbed the ladder up to assistant fire chief and was assistant fire chief when he retired,” Longbottom said. “He was a big story teller of days’ past about when he first came on the job.”

Sweetman said what Longbottom did most was keep the tradition of fire service alive.

“He will be greatly missed,” Sweetman said.