

02-14-1908 Ny Ny – Charles Kruger – FF – House Fire Drowned in Cellar

## Charles "Big-Hearted Charley" Kruger

<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/legends-fdny-heroes-dating-back-18th-century-article-1.2197694>

All of New York City mourned in 1908 when Deputy Chief Kruger, 56, died in the line of duty. A 36-year FDNY veteran, he drowned in a flooded cellar at 215 Canal St. after making a valiant effort to find a sub-basement door to help the men from Truck 8 fight a raging factory fire in the tenement next door.

Kruger was famous for his narrow escapes. As a rookie he fell through a roof to the first floor and incredibly landed on a bale of hay. Years later, he fell from a roof and landed in 4 feet of water in a basement.

He bobbed to safety. In a gas fire on Park Ave., shortly after he was promoted to captain, he made repeat trips into a room filled with poisonous fumes to haul out a handful of his men who had been overcome.

But his luck ran out on Feb. 14 1908. He was weighted down by his own 300 pounds and his heavy, long coat and boots, when he unknowingly slogged into the subterranean pool and couldn't get out. "Boys, I'm going," he said, looking into the wild eyes of two firefighters desperately trying to haul him out.

The city's grief was so intense, a decision was made to build a memorial to all firefighters. It stands today at 100th St. and Riverside Drive.

## 100 Years Ago

<http://www.firehouse.com/news/10494042/100-years-ago>

JAN 31, 2008

### **KANSAS CITY, MO: Feb. 1, 1908**

**TOPEKA, KS: Feb. 1, 1908** -- The short-circuit of electrical wiring leading to the clock tower was blamed for a fire that destroyed the Rock Island Railway Station. The fire raced through the attic during the early morning hours and only some company records could be saved from the flames.

**ROME, NY: Feb. 2, 1908** -- Battling fierce flames and blizzard conditions, firemen struggled to contain a fire that originated in the F.E. Bacon & Co. department store and spread quickly to adjoining structures. Mutual aid responded to the fire from Syracuse and Utica. For five hours, in temperatures approaching zero, firemen worked against freezing hydrants and crumbling buildings.



**Charles  
Kruger**

**BUCKHANNON, WV: Feb. 2, 1908** -- An early-morning fire in the Morrison Hotel was fought for many hours and finally brought under control with help from fire companies from nearby Weston. The post office, four other buildings and a home were also lost to the flames.

**NEW YORK CITY: Feb. 4, 1908** -- A difficult fire was battled in a five-story brick-and-iron building on Worth Street in the heart of Manhattan's dry-goods district. The alarm was transmitted just after 4 P.M. and units were quickly making a push into the heavy smoke. Without warning, a major collapse occurred, taking 15 firemen down into a tangle of broken timbers, twisted steel, extreme heat and heavy smoke. Rescue work began in earnest and man after man was freed from the debris and carried seriously injured to nearby hospitals. Firemen Thomas Eglinton of Ladder 10 and John McConnell of Engine 4 were killed. The rescue work and firefighting continued for more than 30 hours in sub-freezing weather.

**NEW YORK CITY: Feb. 14, 1908** -- Ten days after losing two firemen on Worth Street, the FDNY was sent reeling as one of the most popular and effective fire officers on the job was killed in the line of duty. Deputy Chief Charles Washington Kruger, known by all the firemen under his command as "Big-Hearted Charlie," had served the department for 36 years. While battling a stubborn blaze at 217 Canal St. in Manhattan, the chief entered the cellar of an adjoining building to locate a possible spot to breach a wall and direct a stream into the fire building. In the dense carbon monoxide-laced smoke, Kruger slipped through a trap door in the floor and fell into the sub-cellar filled with more than six feet of water.

The chief's aide found the opening and with the help of several other firemen held the semi-conscious chief above water until they too began to be overcome from the smoke and gases. They reached down and attempted to tie a rope around the trapped man. The chief looked up and whispered, "I'm going, boys." Before the rope could be tied, the chief slipped from their grip and disappeared into the black water.

Fresh firemen took the place of their comrades who were driven from the area and pulled the lifeless fire officer from the water and removed him to the street. Resuscitation efforts were fruitless and the 57-year-old chief was pronounced dead.

**WHARTON, NJ: Feb. 18, 1908** -- The explosion of more than 1,500 pounds of dynamite about to be shipped, and other explosives stored nearby, blew the eight General Explosives factory buildings into splinters. Five men working inside at the time were atomized. The explosive force uprooted trees, broke every window in town and shattered the windows of a train a quarter-mile away, injuring 20 passengers.

**HASTINGS-ON-THE-HUDSON, NY: Feb. 19, 1908** -- Fire destroyed the former home of Admiral David Farragut, the first full admiral in the U.S. Navy and famed for his order, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" The blaze apparently started in the basement of the colonial-style, three-story wooden structure and spread

upwards through the walls. Firemen rescued the current occupants, a woman and her two children, from the second-floor windows with ladders.

PAUL HASHAGEN, a *Firehouse*® contributing editor, is a retired FDNY firefighter who was assigned to Rescue Company 1 in Manhattan. He is also an ex-chief of the Freeport, NY, Fire Department. Hashagen is the author of *FDNY 1865-2000: Millennium Book*, a history of the New York City Fire Department, and other fire service history books.

## Charles William "Charlie" Kruger

<https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=qr&GRid=7373296>

Birth: 1852

Death: Feb. 14, 1908

Charles William Kruger entered the FDNY as a machinist's helper but when he turned twenty-one he joined the uniformed force. Within five years he was promoted to Lieutenant, the position he held for the next eighteen years before being promoted to Captain. From there he moved quickly up the ranks attained the position of Deputy Chief.

"Big Hearted Charlie" was known to be fearless, finding himself in many harrowing situations, usually escaping without injury. He was the recipient of the Stephenson Medal in 1894.

On February 14, 1908 Deputy Chief Kruger was leading a group of firemen into a building adjoining the fire building to breach a wall and fight the fire from this angle. The fire building at 217 Canal Street was five stories and the fire had gained great headway before being discovered. Within two hours, the fire was placed under control. Overhauling was taking a toll on the firemen, overcoming many of them. Chief Kruger entered the basement of 215 Canal Street with his men. Working through the maze of boxes and stock, the build up of heated gases became too much. Just as the men started to turn around to leave they heard a splash. Chief Kruger, who was in the front, had fallen through a trap door into the sub-basement that was filled with six feet of water. The Chief's driver went to his rescue by hanging his legs over the trap door for the Chief to grab. The Chief had grabbed the leg and was trying to hold on but he was losing his strength and soon lost his grip, fell back into the water and drowned. Chief Kruger was married and left two children behind. The fire



had burned out buildings 213 to 219 Canal Street, one of which was the "Harry Howard Hotel" named after the famous FDNY Chief.

At the Chief's funeral, Reverend Henry Potter spoke in glowing terms of firemen generally and regretted that there was not then in existence a public monument as a tribute to their heroism. It was Rev. Potter's idea that a "Firemen's Monument" be erected in the City. It was built on Riverside Drive at West 100th Street and is the site of the FDNY's Annual Memorial Service every October.

Chief Kruger is interred with his parents, brother, and other family members. Chief Kruger was married twice and had two children with his first wife. His second marriage occurred just one year before his death.

Contributed by Gary Urbanowicz (#47731674).



Family links:

Parents:

[Charles William Kruger \(1825 - 1888\)](#)

[Jacobina Kruger \(1829 - 1905\)](#)

Sibling:

[Charles William Kruger \(1852 - 1908\)](#)

[Joseph H. Kruger \(1864 - 1885\)\\*](#)

[\\*Calculated relationship](#)

Inscription:

"Deputy Chief Fire Department New York,  
killed in the discharge of duty."

Burial:

[Woodlawn Cemetery](#)

Bronx

Bronx County

New York, USA

Created by: [Rich H.](#)

Record added: Apr 21, 2003

Find A Grave Memorial# 7373296

