***Car Accident & Fire***

***with victim trapped***

***August 14, 1988***

***(Lt. Al Warta)***

At approximately 10:50 pm on August 14, 1988, while traveling east on Spagnoli road Plainview New York Fire Lieutenant Albert S. Warta, Jr. observed a fire on the road ahead. Approaching the scene Lt. Warta observed that the fire source was a car which had struck a telephone pole, and the car was heavily involved in flames. No Fire or Police units had arrived on the scene, but there were several civilian bystanders.

Realizing that if this accident just happened, the occupants may if still be trapped within, Lt. Warta immediately stopped and rushed over to the vehicle. In the front seat he found two adult males apparently unconscious.

Despite the intense heat, Lt. to Warta tried to open the passenger door; but he could not, due to the damage. He shouted ‘'get out of the car, you’re are going to burn”. On receiving no response from either unconscious victim, he reached through the window to release the unconscious passenger's seat belt which he did with difficulty, as the unconscious driver was laying across the passenger’s lap.

Although there seemed little possibility of rescuing both men due to the rapid spread of the fire and lack of assistance from Rescue personnel or bystanders (no one of the now numerous bystanders came forward to assist) he finally got the seat belt released and was trying to pull the unconscious passenger through the window. At this time, Mr. Frank Capek arrived to assist Lt. Warta, and together they were able to force the damaged door open and pull the passenger from the blazing car.

Moving to the unconscious driver (a tall, heavy individual), Lt. Warta attempted to pull him from the car but was stymied by the intense heat, , the drivers size and unconscious limp condition, and the fact that his feet were wedged under the dashboard due to damage. Several times Lt Warta tried to pull him from the car, making little headway, and eventually tearing the unconscious drivers shirt. Diving into the car, Lt Warta succeeding in freeing the driver’s feet.

With fire starting to come through the firewall now again the drivers feet caught on the wreckage, and for a third time, Lt. Warta again dove into the car to free his legs. Lt. Warta and Mr. Capek, who arrived back at the car at the time, finally succeeded in dragging the driver from the vehicle.

Placing the driver across the street by the first victim, Lt. Warta, a previously certified New York State A.E.M.T., checked both men for vital signs and found both to be relatively stable. By this time Nassau County PD units were arriving at the scene, and Police Officers instructed Lt. Warta to move the victims further from the car as they felt an explosion was eminent. He did so. Lt. Warta continued to minister to the victims until the Plainview F.D. units arrived on the scene to relieve him and extinguish the fully involved vehicle.

Subsequently, the passenger was taken by ambulance to a nearby hospital, but the driver was seriously injured enough to warrant transport via helicopter to Nassau County Medical Center. Several Nassau police officers, Plainview firefighters and bystanders on the scene congratulated Lt. Warta and Mr. Capek for their selfless saving of the two victims.

Without regard to their personal safety, without any protective clothing or water protection, and despite great risk to their lives, the quick and courageous actions of Lieutenant Albert S. Warta, Jr. and Mr. Frank Capek undoubtedly resulted in saving the lives of both the driver and passenger. Fortunately, other than several minor cuts and bruises suffered by Lt. Warta, neither rescuer was seriously injured.

