

# Firefighter recalls friend on anniversary of Hotel Vendome fire

**By Aneri Pattani**

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Although it's been 43 years since the Hotel Vendome fire killed nine firefighters, Simon "Dan" Condon can still clearly remember turning to speak to his best friend just moments before the building collapsed and buried his friend under rubble.

Condon, who was a firefighter with the Ladder 15 company in Back Bay, was on the fourth floor of the hotel with his childhood friend, Firefighter Paul J. Murphy, when the southeast section of the seven-story building collapsed without warning.

Murphy was crushed under the rubble, while Condon stood just a few feet away.

"I was just one of the lucky ones," Condon, 79, said in a telephone interview.

The four-alarm fire on June 17, 1972, marked the Boston Fire Department's worst tragedy. Never have so many Boston firefighters died at once. More than 50 firefighters had extinguished the flames after several hours, but just as they were preparing to leave, part of the building collapsed.

Fifteen firefighters were rescued from under the rubble by men like Condon, who recalled digging through the debris. Nine firefighters did not make it out alive.

Condon said he was watching a baseball game at the firehouse when the alarm rang. Ladder 15 was the first company on scene, and Condon was one of the first men to enter the burning building.

He was also among the last to leave the scene, waiting until each body had been recovered.

Every year on the anniversary of the fire, Condon attends an informal ceremony with other firefighters and their families at a memorial that was built in 1997 on the 25th anniversary of the tragedy.

Just off the site of the fire on Commonwealth Avenue near Dartmouth Street, the firefighters remember their fallen comrades, and a chaplain offers a prayer, said Boston Fire Department spokesman Steve MacDonald.

Condon said he still remembers joining the Army with Murphy and being deployed to Korea together. After the war, both friends became firefighters in Somerville in 1958 and later transferred to the Back Bay firehouse in Boston.

Kelly Keelan, Condon's daughter, said she remembers waiting to hear news of her father that day.

"We were just so scared," she said in a telephone interview. "I remember the phone kept ringing that day and just saying, another friend has passed away."

Keelan, who was 11 at the time, said it was very difficult to visit the Murphys, who had children her age.

She said she is proud of her father and his fellow firefighters.

"We're a proud firefighter family," Keelan, 53, said. "I love firemen. They are so generous."

Condon worked as a firefighter for more than 30 years. Today he is retired, and lives in Marshfield with his dog, Duke.

The Hotel Vendome has been converted into condominiums. The cause of the fire was never determined.

Amid the loss and grief, the tragedy has left behind at least one positive legacy, said MacDonald, the fire department spokesman.

"A lot of the children of the firefighters who were killed joined public service and safety, becoming police officers or firefighters themselves," he said.