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## City firefighter dies after fall from truck

Firefighters mourn death of comrade; State fire marshal to investigate accident

By Phillip Yates  
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Amarillo firefighters striped their badges with black mourning ribbons, and flags at city fire stations flew at half-staff in tribute to a fallen comrade who died Monday after suffering critical injuries in the line of duty Saturday.

With wreaths of flowers hanging underneath the low-flying American flag at the Amarillo Fire Department's Central Fire Station, firefighters remained in a state of shock and grief after learning the news that firefighter Christopher Brian Hunton, 27, died Monday morning at Northwest Texas Hospital, said Amarillo Fire Chief Steve Ross.

"They are just devastated," Ross said. "He (Hunton) has his own family, but he was also a part of our family."

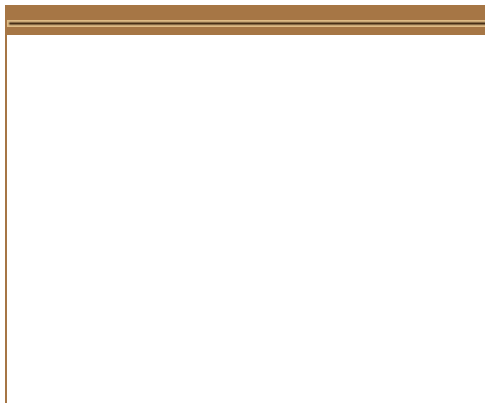
Hunton, who was an AFD firefighter since March 6, 2003, died at Northwest Texas Hospital at 9:53 a. m. after suffering serious injuries when he fell from a firetruck Saturday night, Ross said.

Hunton had surgery soon after the accident and was placed in the intensive care unit at the hospital, but he succumbed to his injuries early Monday, Ross said.

According to an Amarillo Police Department report of the accident, a defective door handle may have been a contributing factor in Hunton's fall from the firetruck.

The department's fire marshal, Terry McKinney, said officials are waiting on the arrival of the Texas State Fire Marshal's Office, which will begin its own investigation into the accident.

"I am just convinced that once the investigation is completed, we will have a very clear picture,"



**Honoring a Brother:** An Amarillo Fire Department truck responds to a morning call as the American flag flies at half-staff at the department's Central Fire Station on Monday in honor of Christopher Brian Hunton.

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McKinney said. "Right now, all we have are assumptions."

McKinney said the department is also expecting an autopsy.

Hunton is the first Amarillo firefighter to die in the line of duty since Kenneth Albert Caldwell, 29, died Aug. 16, 1982, while searching for residents inside a burning Amarillo apartment building. Two other Amarillo firefighters have died in the line of duty since 1936.

The accident occurred about 10 p.m. when Ladder Truck No. 3 was responding to a fire in the 2600 block of South Polk Street. The firetruck, a 1998 Freightliner, left the Central Fire Station at Fourth Avenue and Van Buren Street and went north before turning right on Southwest Third Avenue.

While the truck was turning, Hunton, who was in the left-rear passenger side of the truck, fell out after the passenger side door came open, according to an Amarillo Police Department accident report.

The truck was traveling at a relatively slow speed at the time of the accident, according to police reports.


The fire department has set up a fund in Hunton's name at Amarillo National Bank, and fire officials are in contact with Hunton's family to plan his funeral service, Ross said.

Hunton, who was not married and had no children, will be buried in Lubbock, where his parents live, but a funeral date had not been set late Monday, said AFD Capt. Bob Johnson.

Ross said members of the department will continue to wear the mourning badges and keep their flags at half-staff for the next 30 days to honor Hunton.


"It is out of respect for a fallen brother," Ross said.

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