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Appointment with Death



TAKE a good look at this picture. The officer in centre about to enter the hold of a burning ship is only minutes away from death. Take a look at the faces of his colleagues making the final adjustments to his equipment. They too know the dangers that lie ahead. They too are ready to face them.

Take a good look, chairmen of fire brigade committees, members of negotiating bodies, government officials, newspaper editors and members of the public.

The man you see here alive, and who is now dead, is the 22nd member of the British Fire Services to die in the past 12 months. He, like the others, died a violent death for you, for the protection of your homes, your lives and your property.

He died in the same quiet way as he carried out his duties. He died because he never questioned the possibility of remaining in a safe place while a job had to be done.

He died not in the emotional heat of a battle, not for a cause, but for humanity. His duty was to help others, his heroism was his selflessness. Such was the man who died - Station Officer Douglas Mearns, aged 45, married, father of three children and a member of Glasgow Fire Brigade.

Twenty-two have died in 1960, an average of 350 fire fighters are hurt each year. There are few who go through their Service career without being injured, and many are maimed permanently. Yet how few members of the public, the press and local authorities seem to realise the devoted and selfless service they are getting from their fire fighters.