

HELMET BLESSING THE HISTORY

Firefighters wear quite a collection of protective equipment: bunker coats, pants, boots, gloves, self-contained breathing apparatus, and much more. But no piece of equipment is more recognizable to the world than the firefighter's helmet.

Jacobus Turck of New York City is credited with inventing the first fire helmet around 1740. It was round with a high crown and narrow rim and was made of leather. Although the exact year the traditional fire helmet was invented is unknown, it is generally agreed upon as sometime between 1821 and 1836. The gentleman credited with its founding was named Henry T. Gratacap. Gratacap was a volunteer fireman in New York City, but made his living as a luggage maker. He had made quite a name for himself because of his innovative luggage, which was specifically designed for ocean transit. It was made of leather that was specially treated, which offered unparalleled durability and withstood wetness without rotting. These qualities were very desirable in a fire helmet as well and Gratacap designed the first "eight comb" fire helmet. It was named the "New Yorker" and originally adopted by the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) in the late 1800s.

The shape of the New Yorker helmet has remained virtually unchanged through approximately 190 years of faithful and steadfast service. "Leatherhead" is a term used for a firefighter who uses the leather helmet for protection from the hazards they face every day on the streets.

Although not a required component of the helmet, tradition also calls for the wearing of a brass eagle adornment that graces the top of the helmet and secures its front piece. Most firefighters have always believed that the eagle adorning the helmet meant something special, maybe the spirit of American enterprise, or onward to victory. But the truth is, the eagle just happened, and has no particular significance at all. Long, long ago, around 1825 to be exact, an unknown sculptor did a commemorative figure for the grave of a volunteer fireman. You can see it in Trinity Churchyard in New York City today; it shows the hero emerging from the flames, his trumpet in one hand, a sleeping babe in the other, and on his helmet, an eagle. Firefighters were not wearing eagles at the time; it was a flight of pure fancy on the sculptor's part. But as soon as the firemen saw it, they thought it was a splendid idea and it has been almost universally adopted.

The Helmet is an international sign of a Firefighter, a symbol that is significant in not only tradition from the early years of firefighting, but a symbol of bravery, integrity, honor and pride. This helmet is a sign of the values and traditions you hold dear, and what you are committed to each and every day.

At this time I would ask the newest firefighters to stand with their helmets in front of their body at the presentation position as we ask for God's blessing on these helmets and those who wear them.

In preparation for an upcoming recruit graduation ceremony, I visited the website about the helmet blessing ceremony originally written by Monsignor Thomas Harrington, chaplain of the Fall River, MA fire department.

HELMET BLESSING PRAYER

Please join me in prayer:

God of all people and God of all nations, we humbly and earnestly ask that you bless these helmets that will be worn by the firefighters who stand before us today.

We also pray that you will help these men and women during times of duress to remember and use all they have learned as they work to protect the residents of our community, as well as our homes and places of business. May they always know you are with them, and may they receive your protection and blessing on each and every call they make. We also pray you will bless them with courage and generosity as they work on behalf of their fellow citizens, young and old.

We give thanks for all of those who have trained these firefighters, and for those who will continue to be mentors for them as they begin their work in earnest. Bless their officers as they give them direction and help each of them to always grow in knowledge, skill, and wisdom.

We especially ask, O God, that you protect their families when they are called to protect and serve others. Keep them safe and help them to keep their memories close to their hearts when they are apart from them. Each and every shift, we renew the prayer that You will bring these firefighters home safe and sound to their loved ones.

We also commend to your gracious and loving care all deceased brothers and sisters who once wore helmets such as these, and allow us to take comfort from the fact we are assured they have been offered from your hand a crown of glory and a lasting peace.

We offer this prayer in humility and in trust of your unfailing and ever abiding love for us. Hold us in your care, now and forever.....

All this we ask in your most holy name, AMEN.

Please feel free to use it as your own.

Continued blessings,

Rev. Doug Farmer

Chaplain, Lowcountry Firefighter Support Team