

## Chief had 'utmost respect' for his firefighters

OBITUARY • WES CHATTERTON Motto as leader was he was 'the first one in and last one out'

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Former Ottawa fire chief Wes Chatterton, who went from serving as a gunner in the Royal Canadian Navy to battling some of the city's fiercest fires, was described as "the consummate smoke eater."

In 1943, just one year after joining the Ottawa Fire Department, which he described later as "the family business," Mr. Chat-

chief and had the utmost respect for the professional firefighters who worked under his direction," wrote Patrick J. DeFazio, who served with Mr. Chatterton for 25 years, in a letter to the family.

In an era when Second World War veterans made up most of the officer positions in the Ottawa Fire Department, Mr. Chatterton earned respect for his courage and leadership.

"He taught me that as a fire crew leader, you were the first one in and the last one out," said John Chatterton, Mr. Chatterton's son, now a lieutenant with the Ottawa Fire Department.

In those days, the gear was

Mr. Malloy said as firefighting technology developed, firefighters did not accept breathing apparatuses and protective gear — at first.

"You were considered a wuss or a coward if you used one at first," he said. "But Wes was responsible for changing all that."

According to Mr. Malloy, Mr. Chatterton was also instrumental in instituting a master plan to improve fire truck response times across the city.

"His work caused the Ottawa fire service to grow in leaps and bounds," he said.

As chief, Mr. Chatterton served in some of the worst fires

terton joined the Royal Canadian Navy. He was just 17, but would serve as a defensive equipped gunner on the merchant ship SS Point Pleasant Park.

His family describe his wartime experience as "the defining moment of his life." Mr. Chatterton's ship was torpedoed by a German U-boat on Feb. 23, 1945, about 800 kilometres off the

nothing like it is today, making the job of fighting fires far more dangerous.

"Back then, you were lucky if your crew happened to have one breathing apparatus," said Monty Malloy, protocol officer for the fire department, adding that there was approximately one breathing unit per six people back then.

The term "smoke eater" was an expression of admiration for the firefighter who could endure superheated smoke and gases while fighting a fire without any self-contained breathing apparatus, and in the words of Mr. DeFazio, "Chief Wes Chatterton was the consummate smoke

in the city's history, including one that destroyed the Rideau Club and wrecked a historic section of Sussex Drive.

"He gave respect to the professional firefighters under his command, and it was given back," wrote Mr. DeFazio.

That message was clearly passed on to John Chatterton, who in February 2007 was hailed a hero for ensuring the survival of his crew in a threestorey fire.

"I'm not leaving till my crew's out," John recalls thinking. "That's what my father told me you do."

Born on Harvey Street in east Ottawa on Oct. 25, 1925, Mr.

coast of Capetown, South Africa.

He survived, travelling 2,250 kilometres with 20 people packed on a lifeboat designed for half that number. After 11 days, they were rescued by a fishing vessel along the coast of the Kalahari desert.

Mr. Chatterton, who died Thursday at 82, never talked about the ordeal, his family said. But the hard lessons he had to learn to survive the war helped shape the leader he became.

In 1946, he returned to Ottawa and continued to work his way up through the ranks as a firefighter for 39 years, serving as head of the firefighter union in

eater."

According to Mr. Malloy was also one of the most progressive chiefs the city has had.

"The fact that he was a chief as well as a union president is amazing. It requires a mense amount of respect from both sides," said Mr. Malloy, served under Mr. Chatterton seven years.

Mr. Chatterton inherited nickname "Foggy" from his father, Harvey Chatterton, who served with the fire department for 38 years. They earned nickname because of their insistence on wearing protective goggles when fighting fires.

Chatterton was the youngest child of firefighter Harvey Chatterton and Marie Beatrice.

Mr. Chatterton, described as "bright and smiling up to the very end," is survived by his wife, Helen, children, Leigh, Nancy and John, and two grandchildren. Funeral services take place Wednesday.



Former Ottawa fire chief Wes Chatterton was known as being 'stern, but fair.'

1961 and as Ottawa fire chief in August 1975.

"He was a stern, but fair, fire

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