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NYPD to once again honor two fallen officers, 50 years after the were killed in the line of duty



BY DENIS HAMILL

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There will be a ceremony in the 66th Precinct on Monday to rededicate a plaque honoring the two brave NYPD detectives who were shot dead during an armed robbery in Brooklyn more than half a century ago.

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This is not just another cop story.

It's a story of fathers and sons. And it's a tale of a brotherhood that never forgets when one of their own has fallen. So there will be a ceremony in the 66th Precinct stationhouse Monday afternoon to re-dedicate a plaque honoring two brave NYPD detectives who were shot dead during an armed robbery in Brooklyn more than half a century ago when JFK was President.

Their names were John Finnegan and Luke Fallon, and they walked in on a robbery in progress at Boro Cigars on the corner of New Utrecht Ave. and 48th St. on May 18, 1962. They died in the shootout.

"My father, Frank Ward, worked on that case," recalls Walter Ward, 54, who was a year old at the time of the killings.

Walter followed in his dad's footsteps, working 31 years as a cop — the last 10 in the Manhattan detective squad.

"My dad was one of the founding members of the Dinosaur Squad of mostly retired WWII-era cops who still banded together twice a year after they retired from the job," Walter said.

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Jerry Rosenberg (center), one of the robbers responsible for the murders of NYPD Officers John Finnegan and Luke Fallon, became better known in the city than the officers who he killed, which bothered Frank Ward, whose father worked the murder case.

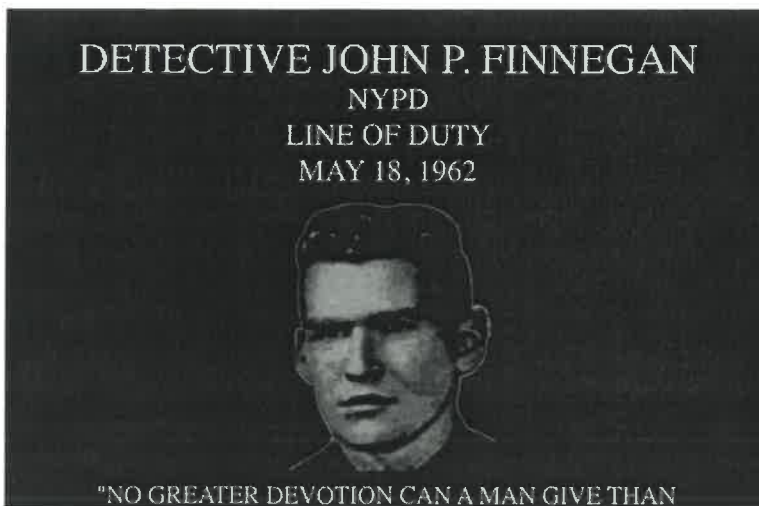
In 1995, Frank Ward led a Dinosaur Squad effort to erect the plaque honoring Finnegan and Fallon on the site of Boro Cigars so that no one would ever forget them. He told me that one of the bandits responsible for the double cop murder was Jerry Rosenberg, the most infamous jailhouse lawyer in the New York penal system. It bothered Frank Ward that Rosenberg's name was better known by the public than the detectives he gunned down.

"But he didn't live to see the plaque ceremony," his other son, Kevin Ward, now Police Commissioner Bill Bratton's three-star chief, told me after his father's death.

Frank Ward died at 69 on the third hole of Dyker Beach Golf Course a few days before the dedication. But the ceremony brought out enough NYPD brass to bring shining attention to Finnegan and Fallon, and, of course, Frank Ward, who never forgot them.

"My brother Kevin and I went to that ceremony," says Walter Ward, who now runs the Dinosaurs that his father Frank helped start. "So back in 2012, on the 50th anniversary of Finnegan's and Fallon's murders, the Dinosaurs wanted to do a wreath-laying ceremony at the site where they were killed. I went to check on the plaque."

Like most of old Brooklyn, the wrecking ball had gotten there first, creating another corner of the new Brooklyn.



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TO LAY DOWN HIS LIFE IN THE LINE OF DUTY "

The ceremony to re-dedicate a plaque for fallen NYPD Officer John Finnegan will be attended by many of the NYPD brass, as well as his son, two of his sisters, and two granddaughters.

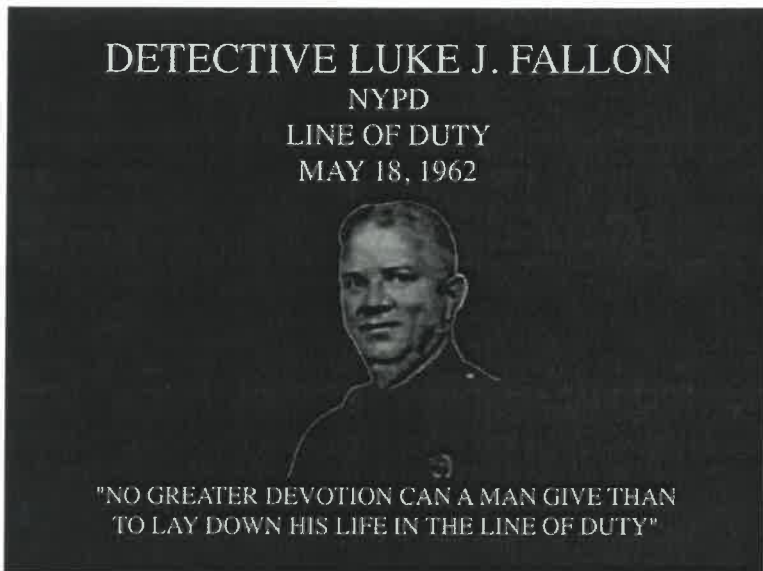
"Boro Cigars was history," says Walter Ward. "There were new condos on the site where those detectives were gunned down in 1962. That didn't bother me so much as the plaque that my father worked to erect to their memory was gone."

Even though the Dinosaur Squad has dwindled to about 50 members, it didn't take long before the old bloodhounds that had solved thousands of crimes between them were on the scent of the missing plaque.

"We finally tracked down the retired owner of Boro Cigars," says Walter Ward. "He had the good sense to preserve the plaque. But he didn't know what to do with it, so he had it in his house. He never thought of calling the cops."

Then the Dinosaurs thought about the proper place to re-erect it.

"We decided to mount it on the wall inside the 66th Precinct," says Walter Ward. "This way, the cops that serve in that command will know that those two brave guys died there over a half century ago protecting the neighborhood people they now protect. A lot of cops don't know anything about the cops who made the ultimate sacrifice working out of the same precinct."



Luke Fallon's wife was pregnant at the time of the fatal shooting, and the son from that pregnancy will be in attendance on Monday, along with his family, to see his father honored.

NYPD brass, including Bratton, will be on hand to rededicate the plaque Monday at 2 p.m. following a light lunch.

"John Finnegan's son will be there," Walter Ward says. "And two of Finnegan's sisters, and three granddaughters. Luke Fallon's wife was pregnant when he was killed, and the son from that pregnancy and his family will be there. They are all overwhelmed and grateful that their loved ones who died in the line of duty are never forgotten."

Chief Kevin Ward and retired Detective Walter Ward will also be there to remember Finnegan and Fallon. And on the morning after Father's Day they will also be remembering Frank Ward, a detective who never forgot a fallen brother.

"My father would be happy that his plaque is going back up," Walter Ward said.

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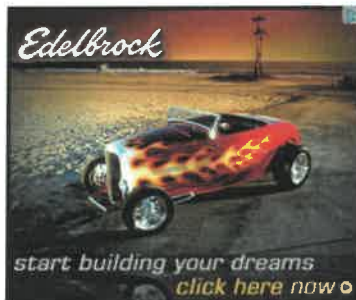
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