

The Story of Frederick "Freddie" Edmund Danner III 1948 - 1966

by Jesse Danner and Connie Danner

This is my brother's story of the Loop Fire. My brother Freddie (Fred Danner III) was burned that day at the Loop fire. I understand he was the last to die in the hospital.

Prior to his death he told his story to my mother, Connie Danner. My mother worked as an executive secretary for General Dynamics, Space Division. The company gave her the time-off needed, no questions asked. Since she was a professional secretary, my mother knew how to write in shorthand and that is how she wrote the story down in the hospital. [My mother later transcribed seven hand written shorthand pages into two type written pages.](#)

My mother never told any of us about this letter until the Forest Service contacted and invited us to the 30 year anniversary dedication of a new memorial. That is when I first saw this letter. At the time of my brother's death, he was 18. I was the youngest and in 6th grade. Currently I'm 55. My mother is now 88. This is what she had to say now, in 2011, about the writing of that story in the hospital many years ago. I feel it should be part of the record.

Jesse: I asked my mom what she thought when she first laid eyes on Freddie?

Connie: I was SHOCKED.

Jesse: Who said what?

Connie: Freddie said "Hi Mom" and I said "Hi Babe...tell me about it." He told me, "It was terrible, nowhere to run." We agreed to keep a record. He told his story as I wrote in shorthand.

Freddie did not recognize he was as badly burned as the others. An older set of parents were there and terribly upset. They said "the leaders had experience and should have known better. They led the boys into a trap, right down a chimney."

Freddie was moved to a second hospital (Holy Cross) days later. Freddie was in a bed (someone called it a squirrel bed) that was able to flip him back to front. It looked like a large upright wheel with a bed in middle. Almost like a running wheel in a pet cage. Freddie always laid face down because his back was severely burned. I would sit below on a stool for hours and look up at him as we talked.

With help he could sit up and walk down the hall and back. The other burned boys (approximately nine of them, some died, some lived) would perk up as he walked past and they'd say "Hey man look at Fred," because everyone knew how severely burned he was. As the other boys walked the halls they'd come in and check on Freddie.

Freddie would comment to me after seeing the other burned boys "that poor boy." Freddie was stoic and did not scream while at the hospital. He did not want to scare the other boys.

Jesse: The hospital staff allowed me to visit Freddie one time. The staff said "Because I was so young" (sixth grade). A group of us drove to the hospital from San Diego, my two sisters and one of Freddie's best friends Bill Sabransky (the driver). I was snuck up the back stairs and supposedly the Doctors would not look. Before I walked into the room my oldest sister said to me "Do not cry in front of him." I

walked into the room and saw Freddie laying face down in the squirrel bed. His body was covered with a dark stained looking sheet. I was told later the color of the sheet was stained from a Silver Nitrate chemical used on him. I could see under the sheet, his raw back. It appeared to have no skin. I felt for him. I sat below him on the very short stool and we started talking. We talked about when he gets out of the hospital. What he wants to do. He asked me what I wanted for Christmas? A few minutes later it was over. That was the last time I saw and spoke with my brother.

Connie: Freddie wanted to go outside to see the sky. So one time the staff put him on a rolling bed and he got that wish. I was allowed to live full time in the hospital apartment at the intern's residence. I ate free at the employee cafeteria. There was a market/food store on the back street behind the hospital. Parents of others came every day or lived there as well. The Doctors said earlier, "Do not count your blessings until Freddie walks out of the hospital." Freddie never walked out.

Jesse: Tell me about the day Freddie died? Did you see a change the day before?

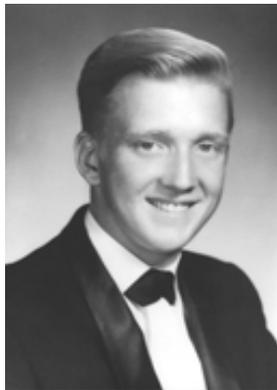
Connie: There was no change. I came in that morning and he had died.

Jesse: I remember you called home to give us the bad news, Freddie died. Grandma (mom's mom had come to live and take care of the children when Freddie was burned) took the call. We all started crying. Grandma walked to all the neighbors' homes to inform them. I watched her from the window. I cried for days, until finally, I cried myself dry. Freddie was a great brother. He was buff and muscular from all the digging up dirt my father made him do. He was a terrific dancer and could make his peck muscles dance, too. He played guitar. He would ride his bike with me sitting on the center bar, side saddle. He was an outdoorsman. He had bought his first car, a VW Bug, a pretty burnt orange color with an EMPI yellow color gear shift knob. The story I remember was that he wanted to be a Park Ranger. It was suggested he fight fires for the summer and that would help him get in the front door.

Even after all these years, I think about Freddie every day. I think of all the possibilities.



Freddie as a young child



Freddie at high school graduation



Freddie (far left) with crewmates Bowman, Brown and Waller



Freddie's grave site