

# The Halligan Bar – By: Rob Fisher

An excellent history lesson on the halligan sent to us by Lt. Rob Fisher from Snohomish County, WA.

One of the most versatile pieces of equipment used by the fire service today is the Halligan bar. This tool has a rich history surrounding it. To many, the tool has been considered one of the greatest advancements in the fire service. Any great fireman would tell you if there was one tool they could take to work any job it would be the Halligan.

But, why is that the case? And, where did it come from?

The Halligan was invented in the 1940's by Deputy Chief Hugh A. Halligan of FDNY.



Hugh A. Halligan was first appointed to the FDNY on June 16, 1916. He had worked countless jobs on some of FDNY's busiest engines and ladder trucks as a fireman and later as a captain. In this time, Chief Halligan worked with the Halligan bar's two predecessors – The Kelly tool and the Claw tool.

The Claw tool was considered to be one of the first forcible entry tool used by FDNY. This tool had been used on the job since the early 1920's and was difficult to use. As most had discovered through painful experience, the Claw Tool was heavy and the striking surface was off-centered, making it very dangerous for any firefighter holding it as it was driven into the door.

Then, a captain from Ladder Company 163, John Kelly, designed the next generation of forcible entry tool to be used by FDNY. Naturally, it was called the Kelly tool. This new tool did not have the large hook with the offset striking surface. The striking surface was inline with the entire bar and had a 90° flat surface (the adz) to the end.

The Kelly tool had a couple of downfalls; like the Claw tool it too was welded and still too heavy. And, in those days, firefighters needed to bring both tools to the building due to their specific advantages. Chief Halligan wanted to design a tool that could be held in one hand; one that would not chip or break at a critical moment; a tool that would not fatigue a firefighter; and one that could be used with safety and full efficiency. After many hours of “trial and error” the Halligan bar was born.

The Halligan bar was made of cross-drop forged from one piece of No. 4140 (high carbon content) steel, weighed 8 ½ lbs. Comprised of an adz, pick, and fork, the Halligan would prove to be one of the greatest forcible entry tools ever made. The standard issue bar is approximately 30” in length, with a 15/16” shaft shaped into a hexagon for grip. The fork is a minimum of 6” long taper into two well beveled tines. Spacing between the tines allows for a gas valve to be shut off. The adz has a gentle curve for additional leverage, with a beveled end. In addition to being used to break something, the pick and adz – only when properly used – provide protection to the arms, hands, and body of the holder during forcible entry operations.



As soon as the tool went on the market it was a huge success. The Boston Fire Department was one of the first to place the Halligan bar on every ladder company in their department.

Now...one would naturally think FDNY had been the first to have them issued to their ladder companies. Unfortunately, there was a small problem. It was determined by those in higher places – let’s just say their favorite colors were white and gold – that there was a “conflict of interest” to have a member of the department selling tools or equipment back to the department in which they worked in. The department’s hands were tied and the bars could not be purchased. However, the bars could be purchased by anyone other than the department itself. Ladder companies across the city began purchasing the Halligan bars with their own money. The first company in FDNY to receive one was Ladder Company 47. Coincidentally, they were the first due ladder to Chief Halligan’s home in Parkchester, NY.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> generation and later Halligan bars were printed on the forks with what looks like AM+D6. It is, however, believed to be AMDG, which is a Latin acronym for Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam or “for the greater glory of God.” This Latin phrase was a favorite of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus. Pope John Paul II routinely used it in his writings. He would print AMDG in the top left of every page he wrote.

Chief Halligan was a very religious man. It has been told that he would hand make a rosary for each new member coming into the FDNY. After this task became too overwhelming, it was thought that Chief Halligan turned his religious influences into his bars by having each one printed with AM+DG. This way he could spread the word to even more.

Folklore...wishful thinking...either way it's a great story. Only Hugh himself knows the true meaning behind this Hieroglyphics. Who cares...the bar speaks for itself!

Most departments who carry the Halligan bar really don't understand the value of this tool. Unfortunately, too many of us do not get enough opportunities to become confident and proficient in the bar's use.

Reading this article has only helped you understand the history of the Halligan bar. To better understand why it's the tool of choice of many firefighters (firemen), one must go to their engine or ladder, take it off...hold it...caress it, detail it and work with it. Never set it down. Bring it everywhere you go. You'll be surprised how many uses there are for this tool. Then – and only then – will they truly understand the impact the Halligan bar has made in the fire service.