

*Courtesy of NYPD Lt. Bernard Whalen, who is currently writing a book about the World's Fair bombing and its repercussions*

Detectives Joseph Lynch and Ferdinand “Freddie” Socha, assigned to the NYPD Bomb Squad, were killed in the line of duty on July 4, 1940. The New York Police Department launched its largest investigation up to that time, but their murderers have never been caught.

Prior to becoming a Patrolman, Joseph Lynch, a college graduate of Fordham University, had worked as a pharmacist. Despite a good paying job, he followed his father and brother’s footsteps into the NYPD for the security the Police Department could provide to his wife Easter and their five young children. The family resided in the Kingsbridge section of the Bronx. His partner, Freddie Socha had studied medicine prior to becoming a Patrolman. Socha was also married, but had no children. He lived in the Polish community of Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

Their educational backgrounds propelled them up the ladder quickly. Within four to five years, both men were designated Detectives and assigned to the elite Bomb Squad, commanded by the legendary Lieutenant James Pyke, a munitions expert who would later provide his expertise to the U.S. Army.

On the day of their deaths, the United States was celebrating its independence across the nation. It was particularly festive at the 1940 New York World’s Fair in Flushing Meadows, Queens, despite the fact that a great war was raging in Europe between Great Britain and Nazi Germany. The American public was deeply divided as to whether this country should intervene and both warring nations entertained support for their causes from citizens on these shores.

In early July, World’s Fair officials reported to the NYPD that among others, a man with a German accent had made vague telephoned threats against the fair. The NYPD responded by posting plainclothesmen to look for suspicious persons throughout the fairgrounds over the next several days.

Detective Lynch did not have to report for work on the fourth of July, but had to remain available during the day in case there was a need for his

specialized services. Detective Socha was off duty, but told his partner that if anything came up, he'd accompany him even though it was a holiday.

An hour before he was scheduled to go off-duty, Detective Lynch received a telephone call at home. A suspicious satchel had been discovered inside the British Pavilion at the World's Fair. It had been carried out by two police Detectives to a desolate area behind the Polish Pavilion. Emergency Service Squad personnel had cordoned off the location pending the Bomb Squad's arrival.

Detective Lynch told his wife not to worry and that he'd be back in time for supper, and to go later to visit their eldest daughter, Essie, who was in the hospital. Lynch borrowed his sister's car and picked up Socha en-route to the fairgrounds. The pair arrived at the location and learned that the satchel had been placed under a maple sapling next to a service road near where the elevated portion of the Van Wyck Expressway currently runs through Flushing.

After a briefing by police brass, the Detectives advanced toward the satchel to make a visual inspection. Protective gear had yet to be invented, so they were only wearing business suits, the same as other Detectives. They carefully lifted the satchel off the ground and examined it thoroughly. Although a ticking sound was coming from inside the satchel, there was no way to confirm that it actually contained a live bomb (and most bomb runs turn out to be hoaxes). They decided they needed to peer inside to be certain. Socha carved a small hole in the thin wood veneer of the satchel that Lynch peeked through.

Lynch advised in a hushed voice, "It's the business" -- meaning the bomb was real. Those were his last words.

The bomb exploded before he and Socha could retreat to safety. The blast killed them both and left a large hole in the ground as it stripped the sapling of all its leaves. The explosion also severely injured several police bystanders. Fairgoers mistook the loud noise for fireworks that had been going off on the fairgrounds throughout the day.

Mayor LaGuardia cancelled his summer holiday on Long Island and returned to the City to assure the public that the Detectives' killers would be apprehended. The police launched a large manhunt and rounded up

hundreds of suspects, including known Nazi and IRA sympathizers, but none proved to be the perpetrator.

Detectives Lynch and Socha received Inspectors' funerals and posthumous Medals of Honor. Today, a plaque and stone marker commemorating their heroism is located outside the Queens Museum in Flushing Meadow Park. The building is the last original structure remaining from the 1939-40 New York World's Fair; at one time it had been the New York City Pavilion.

As a result of the deaths of Detectives Lynch and Socha, steps were taken to develop and provide "state of the art" protective equipment to Bomb Squad personnel and establish new safety protocols. The Department also designed and built the LaGuardia-Pyke Bomb Carrier Truck, the first of its kind anywhere in the world. The red colored, tightly woven steel wire mesh cage on a flatbed trailer was used for many decades to transport bombs to remote locations for safe detonation. Although the carrier has been replaced by newer designs, it is still available for emergencies.

Mrs. Lynch never remarried. If she had, she would have lost her husband's pension. To supplement the pension she took a job changing bed linens for the Commanding Officer of the 50th Precinct and received a stipend. The Socha's had no children. Mrs. Socha eventually remarried, forfeited her pension and moved to Maryland.

The Lynch family, in particular eldest daughter Essie Lynch, has worked tirelessly over the years to keep their father's memory alive by attending dedication ceremonies and making the family available to reporters who occasionally write articles about the bombing. The great nephew of Freddie Socha, Theodore Socha followed his famous uncle into law enforcement and is an agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The July 4, 1940 World's Fair bombing case remains open and unsolved to this day.