

FLAMES AND FOLLIES - BACKGROUND

The book *FLAMES AND FOLLIES*® was written by R. R. Thomson and published in 1986. Unfortunately, it is now out-of-print and the publisher is no longer in business. All of the original photographs, artwork, plates, masters, etc. were destroyed with the publisher's demise.

This book is unusual in that it is one of the few books ever published that gives an in-depth, inside look at a volunteer fire department – that of Upper St. Clair Township, Pennsylvania. Because it is so unique and out-of-print, it is contained below, in its entirety. Including are: the text, the 15 appendices, the book's dust jacket (front, rear, and inside), and all 74 photographs. Also included are three reviews published in the magazines: *Firehouse*, *Fire Chief*, and *Pennsylvania Fireman*.



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FLAMES and FOLLIES by R.R. THOMSON



FLAMES and FOLLIES

by
R.R. THOMSON

FRONT COVER AND SPINE



FLAMES AND FOLLIES

By R. R. Thomson

R. R. Thomson was a member of the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department for over twenty years and its chief for six years. During that time, he did much to improve the deficiencies inherent in a volunteer organization, from creating training manuals and programs to providing his small, suburban Pennsylvania township with a nearly professional, committed group of firefighters.

In *FLAMES AND FOLLIES*, Thomson relates in detail how he became interested in firefighting, the effect of his "second full-time job" on his first and primary full-time job and his family, and the many unusual calls he responded to over the years. Some of his stories are funny, such as the woman who politely introduces the firefighters to her assembled party guests as a fire brightly burns away in her home, and some, like the automobile accidents, are horrifying.

INSIDE FRONT DUST COVER

Some are even discouraging, such as the lack of financial support by the public which the fire department serves. All of Thomson's stories will enthrall his readers and carry them away into the lives of the volunteers who protect neighbors and friends at the risk of life and limb.

Thomson addresses the hazards and the rewards of this life of service, as well as the more tedious duties of fund-raising and equipment maintenance. *FLAMES AND FOLLIES* is full of his accumulated knowledge, whether in the form of charts and tables, action-packed photographs, or merely his wise and insightful story telling. After reading this book, even the lay person will have an idea on how to prevent fires before they happen, and the best method of action when a fire cannot be avoided. *FLAMES AND FOLLIES* is a must-read for anyone interested in firefighting and for those whose lives and properties are protected by volunteer departments.



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INSIDE REAR DUST COVER

FLAMES AND FOLLIES

by

R. R. Thomson



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife, "Willie." Her forbearance and patience with all of the many inconveniences and problems associated with my being a volunteer fireman has been remarkable. Without her understanding and tolerance, it would never have been possible for me to serve over twenty years and still enjoy the happy home with which I have been so thankfully blessed.

Acknowledgements

In addition to my wife "Willie," to whom this book is dedicated, my sincere appreciation to the following people is gratefully acknowledged:

To Terri, Marcy and Nancy, my three daughters, who had to share their father's time with the Fire Department;

To Jack Best and Ray Tomnay, the assistant fire chiefs, who made my tenure as chief possible;

To Sandra E. Bielawa, executive editor of Quinlan Press, whose adept use of cutting shears and marking pens has transformed a rambling collection of stories into a readable book;

And finally, to Charles M. Thomson, my father and my "Buddy" whose death at age ninety-six deprived him of the pleasure and pride of seeing this book in print.

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Introduction

Every time someone learns that I have been a volunteer fireman, I am immediately asked a variety of questions such as: how many fires have I fought, what were their causes and why did I volunteer to fight them? And, of course, there are always the more derogatory remarks, like, “Are you crazy?” or “How many windows did you break?” Sometimes I am even asked, “How much beer did you guzzle?” and “When is the next bingo game?”

Regardless of the type of question asked, I have observed that most people are extremely interested in fires, firemen and fire-related stories. In view of this observation, I have attempted to include in this book as many of the interesting and unusual tales as I can recall from my twenty-three years as a volunteer. I do not mean to imply that my experiences are typical of all volunteer firemen, although some experiences are undoubtedly common to many. In fact, I am sure that some of the situations I have encountered are pretty unique. These are some of the stories I would like to share.

Most long-time firemen, whether volunteer or career, can tell you fascinating tales of fires – called “good ones,” “big ones” or “workers.” These are major fires that require extensive effort on the part of all personnel. However, this book is not so much about fires and other emergencies as it is about the various people involved. These people – firemen, victims and spectators – are the real stories, and their actions are highlighted throughout.

While I probably could have made this book a little more interesting by stretching the truth, or adding a bit of hearsay, it was more important to me not to do so. Every word in this book is true and every event actually happened as told, unbelievable as some of it might sound.

I’m sure that many of the stories told herein will be of interest to most readers. In order to make this book of even more value to both firefighters and fire departments, I have included selected operational and technical materials that I have developed over the years. Certain of this material should be of use to line officers, while other portions of use to administrative officers. In addition, the extensive glossary of terms should be of value to all new firefighters.

In the process of preparing this book, I sat back and looked over the years I put in to the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department. What were the highs – the really great feelings I experienced – and what were the real lows of my firefighting career? Interestingly enough, many of the highs and lows involved the same emergency or event.

For example, a week after over half of the department successfully completed a training course in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), we were called to the scene of a horrible automobile accident very close to the firehouse. Arriving almost immediately, we found that the driver of one of the vehicles involved had stopped breathing and had no heartbeat. CPR was administered at once and continued while she was extracted from her car and then while enroute to the hospital in an ambulance. By the time the ambulance reached the hospital, the victim was breathing on her own and in relatively stable condition. Hospital personnel had high praise for our efforts. All members were elated, especially those who had successfully performed CPR

under the very messy accident conditions instead of the ideal classroom conditions on a training dummy. This feeling of self-satisfaction and elation later turned to despair when the victim died several days later.

A very similar situation involved a contractor who operated his own backhoe. At 10:00 p.m. one night, the police received a report that some type of equipment could still be heard running at an otherwise-abandoned construction site. Upon investigation, an officer found a backhoe with its engine running. Not a soul was in sight. Thinking that the machine had been stated by kids who had been vandalizing the area on previous nights, the officer turned it off, made a final routine check around the site, and resumed his patrol. When the contractor failed to return home that night, a relative went looking for him. The two events were eventually connected and the contractor was found: totally buried in the caved-in trench he had been digging alone. Our frantic efforts with shovels, boards and even our hands uncovered the man – alive but in very serious condition. The satisfaction of rescuing him turned to utter dejection when he died enroute to the hospital.

One further event that combined both high and low feelings occurred at a major house fire. Arriving first on the scene, I was informed by neighbors that the young children were home alone and apparently still in the building. Donning an air mask, I crawled through the dense smoke on all fours. I eventually entered a child's bedroom heavily charged with heat and smoke. Reaching my hand through the slats of a crib, I grasped a small arm; desperation overcame me as I knew that the child must indeed be dead. This horrible thought quickly disappeared when I found the arm connected to a very life-like, life-sized doll. I was still smiling when I re-entered the outside world, even though I had fallen part way down a flight of stairs while exiting through the thick smoke. The children were found later hiding behind a garage: their retreat after the fire they started under a bed while playing "would not go out."

To balance these lows, there were many situations which made being a volunteer extremely satisfying and rewarding, such as the kiss from the eighty-seventy-year-old widow whose tears fell like rain after we helped her through a fairly minor emergency and her thanks for helping "an old lady in trouble who had lost all purpose for living," or the cake baked and delivered to my home by an appreciative neighbor and fire victim.

Another satisfying experience involved a serious house fire on a cold Christmas Eve. The living room, the Christmas tree and all the wrapped gifts underneath it were destroyed. Fortunately, the family, including three young children, was safe. A warm feeling of satisfaction came from knowing in our heart that we had done a good job in handling the emergency, and from the many wrapped gifts which instantly appeared for these children to replace the ones they had lost. These were gifts meant to be opened the next morning by the children of several of the firemen.

The negative aspects of being a volunteer firefighter were the personal injuries, the exorbitant amount of time and the many inconveniences involved. Certain events were always depressing – such as the terrible auto accidents, especially when involving children; volunteers injured at, or while responding to, emergency calls; and the unbelievable damage to homes which could have been prevented if the family had just taken a few simple precautions.

Nonetheless, following almost every emergency call there was an inner pleasure and satisfaction that comes from knowing that you did a good job. Such satisfaction was even greater when someone took the time to write and say thanks. Every letter of appreciation was read at our meetings and then posted for all members to see.

Yes, over the years there were highs and lows. For me, the highs normally outweighed the lows. The personal satisfaction that comes from helping those in real trouble has been tremendous. In many such situations I vividly realized how fortunate I was. This appreciation of my own good fortunes and the knowledge that I in some small way have aided someone less fortunate made it all worthwhile for me personally. For this reason I devoted twenty-three memorable years to the volunteer fire service.

1 My Background

The first twenty-five years of my life did not involve fires or fire departments. My youth was filled with the various types of adventures typical of a boy growing up. Such adventures were financed by the jobs as a paperboy, lawn cutter, gas station helper and supermarket clerk. In high school, I even made the football team, but had to give it up when the required practices interfered with my ability to support my "jalopy."

World War II cut short my senior year in high school as I joined the Armed Services. For three years, I was a US Air Force public relations and news photographer stationed in Washington, DC. My duties included photographing various events of interest to the Air Force and photographing various military and political leaders, including General Dwight D. Eisenhower and President Harry S. Truman. Extensive travel, frequently with little or no advance notice, and occasionally assignments that were potentially dangerous were also involved.

This fast-paced, sometimes hazardous, always interesting and challenging duty may have set the stage for my eventual involvement with the fire service.

One such Air Force assignment was associated with the atomic bomb testing on the Eniwetok atoll in the Pacific. While on this assignment, I met and was tremendously impressed with several interesting (and down-to-earth) nuclear physicists. This experience planted the seeds for my professional career, for I subsequently left the service and obtained a Bachelor's degree in Physics from the University of Vermont.

While in college, the photography training, which I received in the Air Force, was put to good use. I became a photographer for the university newspaper, the university yearbook and a free-lance photographer for the daily newspapers in the city of Burlington, Vermont. Photo assignments not only included the usual university events, but occasionally the activities of fires and fire departments in the area.

In 1953 I was awarded an Atomic Energy Commission graduate study fellowship at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. This very intensive program was devoted entirely to studying the intricacies of the then-classified atomic power and nuclear energy. This program led to my receiving a "Doctor of Pile Engineering" degree. While this is not a formal, accredited degree, as is evident from its acronym DOPE, the effort to acquire it and the prestige and respect that it commanded in the nuclear industry at the time were considered comparable to a "real" Ph.D. degree.

At this point I married my college sweetheart and joined the Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory, which is located on the outskirts of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It is a Department of Energy (formally Atomic Energy Commission) facility operated for the government by the Westinghouse Electric Corporation. Employed by Westinghouse as a nuclear physicist, my work involved the design and testing of nuclear power plants for scores of naval submarines and surface ships, which required frequent travel and considerable overtime. Any remaining time was

devoted to my wife and family (which rapidly expanded to include three daughters) and to postgraduate study at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

Becoming a fireman may have been inevitable, as my father and both my brothers were also firemen. My dad was a paid fireman in his youth – for two days. His enthusiasm waned after one hair-raising trip down the fire pole, one breakneck ride on a horse-drawn engine and then alternately roasting from the fire and freezing from the below-zero weather. He quickly concluded that there must be easier ways to earn a living.

My older brother was a volunteer fireman of sorts for many years. He lived on a very small island in Casco Bay, Maine. The island had one ancient truck that responded to fires, which occurred about once every other year. On such occasions, all residents of the island, my brother included, became instant volunteers.

On one such occasion, a call was received at my brother's home – he served as the dispatcher – reporting a fire. While he dashed to the shack that served as their firehouse, his wife called the other "firemen" on the island. When he and several others arrived at the station, the truck was *gone*. Assuming that someone had already taken the truck to the fire, the firemen hurried on the scene to find that the truck was not there, either. How could you lose a fire truck on a very small island? Further investigation revealed that one of the members of the department had taken the truck to a desolate area of the island to drain the crankcase. Since the department could not afford radios or alerting sirens, he was totally unaware of the fire. Oh yes – the fire. I never did hear the conclusion of the story, but apparently it was successfully extinguished without the aid of the truck.

My other brother was a "real" volunteer for many years. Although he would strongly disagree, it always seemed to me that his department spent far more time in water pumping competitions using old-fashioned hand-tub pumpers than in true firefighting. However, though he lived in a rural area with a population of less than 2,000, I have to admit that his department was pretty up-to-date. It even had pull-type fire alarm boxes along the main street, even though it was only four blocks long.

With such a background and with a trace of fireman's blood in my veins, it was not long after we moved to our first home that I became a member of the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department. This was stimulated during the purchase of our home. While signing the closing papers in the lawyer's office in downtown Pittsburgh, we heard the fire trucks roar by. The proceedings were interrupted while the Realtor went to the window to "check on the action," explaining that his behavior was due to his enthusiasm with being a volunteer fireman. We later learned that he was a member of the suburban Pittsburgh volunteer fire department where our new home was located.

Through him, I met several other members of the fire department. Discussion about the department and tours of the fire station were held and I eventually submitted an application (together with the three dollar membership fee). Following the usual procedure, my application was discussed at the next membership meeting. I'm sure there was concern about having an "egg-head" as a member, but I received enough votes for acceptance.

Why, you might ask, would *anyone*, especially a nuclear physicist with a new home and a young family, join a volunteer fire department? In my particular case, I sincerely wanted to participate in the affairs of my community. Serving on township, school or church committees did not really seem right for me. On the other hand, the excitement of being a firefighter and the possibility of helping my friends and neighbors, particularly in time of trouble, held a certain attraction.

Possibly the fact that as a young boy in Haverhill, Massachusetts, we lived next door to the fire chief influenced my decision. I can still recall the excitement of seeing him race off in his shiny, red car when the fire bells in his home began to clang. In any event, I became a member of the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department in 1960 as a rookie hoseman.

2 The Township

The township of Upper St. Clair is located approximately twelve miles south of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and covers an area of about ten square miles. The complexion of this area has changed rapidly in the last quarter of a century from mostly farmland to mostly single-family dwellings. By these I mean *residences*, many in the hundreds of thousands of dollars category. As you may know, Pittsburgh is the headquarters of many large industrial giants, such as Westinghouse, Gulf, US Steel, Rockwell International and Alcoa. Upper St. Clair is the home of many of the human "giants" of these corporations.

Because of the proximity of such large corporations and since it is any extremely nice residential area; the township has undergone tremendous expansion over the years. When I first moved to Upper St. Clair, it had approximately 2,000 residents. When I retired from the fire department twenty-three years later, the population had increased about tenfold. Similarly, the number of schools increased from two quite modest structures to ten "cathedrals of learning."

Such expansion has also significantly increased the funds available to the fire department. The result has been that over the years vast improvements have been made both in the quantity and quality of the fire department's buildings, emergency vehicles and equipment. Also, significant improvements have been made in the professionalism of the department.

In comparison to the well-equipped, exceptionally proficient fire department that exists in Upper St. Clair today, the version that existed in 1960 when I joined would be considered ill-equipped, poorly trained, and rather slipshod. I can still recall having to occasionally push the clunker of a fire truck to get it to start when trying to respond to emergencies. Vivid also in my memory are the leaky old boots and the cracked, rubber rain-coats that provided almost no protection from the water and even less from heat and flames. I can also recall the members digging into their own pockets to buy essential parts for the vehicles that could not be afforded from department funds.

By contrast, the department today has computers, cellular telephones, video cameras, a quarter of a million dollar rescue vehicle and has even used helicopters during training exercises.

From a fire department's point of view, this "bedroom" type community has its advantages. One of these is that there are almost no manufacturing plants or large businesses with the accompanying high fire risks. This, of course, makes the job of the fire department somewhat easier.

Further simplifying the job of the fire department is the absence of river (and thus, no potential drownings and subsequent time-consuming dragging operations) yet the presence of plenty of water from fire hydrants or "plugs." Except for the very early years of my membership, all sections of the township were adequately covered with such plugs. With our ample supply of hose, "drafting" water from ponds or creeks and pumping relays (pumping water from pumper to pumper) were not normally necessary.

We were also not involved with operating an ambulance service. This function was sequentially under the jurisdiction of the police department, the local mortician, a commercial ambulance association and, eventually, a very effective local emergency medical service.

I do not want to give the impression that the community is made up entirely of single-family residences and schools. Upper St. Clair is also home to many multi-family dwellings, numerous churches, many restaurants, several office and shopping complexes, three country clubs and a few small industries and taverns. Each such building presents unique problems in firefighting. The largest shopping center houses over 120 stores, with parking for over 5,000 vehicles. One of the country clubs has a major four-story clubhouse. We devoted scores and scores of hours of training time to determine how we would fight a fire there. This massive structure does not have a full sprinkler system, has limited vehicle access and is located at a considerable distance from an adequate water supply. Fortunately, we never had cause to put this training into practice, but we were well-prepared in the event we ever had to fight a fire there.

Over the years, one thing that did not change much was the number of members. It has always been in the range of twenty to thirty-five. At one time or another, the membership included several engineers, one priest, a few lawyers, a judge, a doctor and, of course, one nuclear physicist. The majority of the personnel, however, were nonprofessionals, sometimes from outside the township.

Such out-of-towners would most often join our department because they worked in the township. In some cases they were, for a variety of reasons, not able or not willing to join their hometown department. For example, in a few volunteer fire departments that I am aware of, you almost have to be the son of a member in good standing to join. In other departments, there were sometimes long waiting lists and stringent, even prejudicial, membership requirements.

In general, blue-collar workers seem to be more likely firefighting candidates than white-collar professionals. This observation has been verified by school children during tours of the firehouse. When the pitch is made to have their dads join, a frequent response has been, "Oh no, he's an executive."

Because Upper St. Clair is composed primarily of professional people who work in the city of Pittsburgh and has relatively few businesses which employ blue-collar workers – who would be potential firefighters – the department always had staffing problems. Because of this, a great concern of mine, especially while chief, was the daytime response to fires. While it was generally possible to get fifteen to twenty-five men to turn out for a night-time call, there were many times when only five men would respond to mid-day calls on weekdays. On only one occasion that I can recall did a truck not respond; one fireman was on the scene but no one showed up to bring the trucks. Fortunately, the fire had been put out using a fire extinguisher carried in a police cruiser and no equipment or additional men were required. As scary as this sounds, the situation is not quite so bleak. Should no one respond to a fire call within a few minutes, the police are instructed to call for outside assistance from neighboring communities with whom we have mutual-aid agreements. While this would delay the response and certainly increase the fire damage, it is of some comfort to know that the township would never be totally unprotected.

With an all-volunteer department, bringing the trucks to the fire can be a problem. If all responding men were to report directly to the fire, no one would be available to drive. This situation actually occurred to us many years back. Eleven men stood in front of a burning home each glancing impatiently down the road for some sign of a red truck or two. After several embarrassing minutes, a police car was loaded with firemen and screamed off to the fire hall and the idle trucks. Immediately thereafter, firm rules were adopted which required all volunteers, with a few exceptions, to respond to the firehouse and not directly to the scene.

Given that the daytime population of the township was predominantly female, a logical question must be, "Why not have female firefighters?" This would certainly have helped the number of personnel responding to daytime calls during normal workdays. Unfortunately, we never had any female members and I'm not sure that I can really explain why.

While we periodically solicited new members (with sex unspecified) via the newspapers, posters placed around the township and mailings to all residents, we never really specifically sought out females. Furthermore, the result of such solicitations never brought any responses from females. Possibly this was because they were never specifically sought, possibly because they felt that they would not be welcome or perhaps they (like certain of our members) felt that they might not be able to adequately carry out certain of the more strenuous firefighting tasks.

I'm sure that had there been any female applicants there would have been some resistance to their membership – even though they were not precluded by the department by-laws. Such opposition would certainly have come from those few members who routinely opposed almost everything, as well as from the machos and the pure chauvinists.

It is also interesting to note that my wife took a rather dim view of the possibility of having female firefighters. Her argument was that while she tolerated the many long hours that I spent at the firehouse every week, she would be much less tolerant if those hours were spent in close association with female firefighters (even though my normal work days at the Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory were spent in close contact with many, very feminine, female co-workers.)

For whatever the reason, we never had any female firefighters even though they would have significantly enhanced the number of workday responders to emergency calls.

In our area there were several old abandoned coal mines. How miners can go down in those deep, dark holes day after day is beyond me. In two separate emergency situations I entered the mines, very reluctantly. In the first, a group of young boys went exploring one of the many such mines. Somehow the group got separated, and two boys failed to come out. Rescue efforts were organized and teams with self-contained breathing apparatus searched the miles of small, dark, half water-filled passages for hours. The boys were smart. When they realized they were lost, they sat down and waited for help to come. By doing so, they avoided the many pockets of deadly methane gas, which filled many of the tunnels. The boys were eventually found and returned to the surface. They must have been glad to get out of there, as I most certainly was.

On another occasion, an abandoned mine caught fire, possibly set by kids who used to break the barriers down to go "exploring". Burning coal seams must be put out as soon as possible. If not, the fire can extend down the miles of tunnels. The fire can go on for years with accompanying problems from smoke, gasses and surface subsidence. Such a situation exists in the town of Centralia, Pennsylvania. A fire has been burning under that area for years. At the present time the abandonment of the town appears to be inevitable.

To extinguish the Upper St. Clair fire, we entered the mine with a large diameter hose and nozzle. The nozzle was fixed to a wooden stand, which we placed in the center of the tunnel. The nozzle was then turned on and aimed at the burning walls ahead. Periodically we would enter and move the hose-nozzle-stand forward. After several days the fire was completely extinguished. I can still visualize the walls of that mine glowing cherry red, feel the terrible heat, and shudder at the thought of being deep underground in a burning coal mine.

In western Pennsylvania, there were many, many bridges. Several were quite old and rickety. Several such bridges were limited weight-wise to limits (such as 7 or 9 tons), which were well below the gross weight of our fire department pumpers (12 tons) or ladder truck (25 tons). Such bridges were well known and the various fire departments carefully avoided them. At least I think they did as I never heard of a truck crashing through. There was however, a case where an area ladder truck did plunge into a river. In this case, several fire departments were responding to a general alarm fire. One department took a short cut to get to the rear of the blazing seven-story building. They crossed a frozen river with their massive ladder truck. Although a pumper that preceded the ladder truck made it safely, the ladder truck broke through the ice and settled in the shallow riverbed, to the embarrassment of all concerned.

As note earlier, there were many very, very elegant homes in our township. Our trucks all carried "hall runners" or rolls of canvas about two feet wide and twenty feet long. These devices were almost always laid down (not infrequently over white rugs) as we entered, to protect the rugs from the dirt and grime associated with firefighting. Another technique for minimizing damage was to remove our boots when entering a mansion. Not only was this good for public relations, but it may have increased our contributions from that family. Particularly on those not infrequent occasions when the holes in the socks of the firemen were quite evident.

Certain of the owner of these mansions were quite proper and formal, even when dealing with the fire department. I often smile when I recall a chimney fire one evening at one of these quarter million dollar bungalows. Being first on the scene and being the chief, the lady of the house insisted on introducing me to her living room full of assembled guests. While this formality was in progress, I kept my ears on the roar in the chimney, the chatter on my portable radio and the sounds of the fire trucks barreling down the road. I have often wondered if the same formality would have been followed if a major blaze was involved rather than a relatively minor, yet potentially dangerous type of fire.

I should not give you the impression that all homes in the town were mansions and that all residents were ultra formal. On the contrary, there were a few homes that did not have city water and some farms that were snowbound for parts of the winter. I vividly recall the frustration one winter night of trying to reach a major barn fire at the end of a mile long lane that was totally

blocked by three foot high snow drifts. Fortunately, the owner was able to remove all of the livestock. By the time we got the road department to lead our trucks in behind a massive plow the barn had been totally destroyed.

Furthermore, just because a house looked expensive on the outside, did not necessarily imply that all was swell on the inside. A few estates we entered were very sparsely and unpretentiously furnished. There were many such residences that had one or more rooms completely void of furniture and furnishings.

And then there was a home with the unmade beds. The call came in at 2 a.m. as a lightning strike. When we arrived the entire roof was afire. We attacked the fire, checking in the process that all of the residents were out of the building. In mopping-up after the fire was extinguished, we tried to locate the family. Where were they? No one knew. How could this be? All of the beds were unmade and appeared as if they had just been hastily vacated. It turned out that the family was out of town on vacation. Possibly not making the beds was standard practice for that family, and maybe for some others, but not in mine! Why, we would always make the beds before we every left the house and frequently before we were allowed to have breakfast.

Occasionally we entered homes that were unbelievably filthy on the inside. By filthy I mean garbage piles in corners, droppings from pets throughout, trash laying around, a variety of odd smells to greet your and general messes that are incomprehensible. At a major fire in one such structure, we were more concerned about being attacked by frightened rats, bats and other animals than we were about the more conventional hazards of firefighting.

The other extreme to messy houses in recalled by the following: one day my wife received a call from a neighbor to come over at once. Upon arrival my wife noticed smoke coming from the basement. The sole purpose of the phone call an my wife's presence was then found to be to help clean up the house *before* a call was made to the fire department and while they were on the way. Unbelievable!

All in all, I have to agree with the road signs that were located at the approaches to the township announcing the proud fact, "Upper St. Clair – a nice place to live."

3 The Fire Department

The Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department was formally chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1939. I am not sure what type of fire protection was available before that. In the early days following its charter, the department consisted of a very sharp-looking, open-cab pumper and less than a dozen men. The truck was housed in a gas station owned by one of the members. Meetings were held at members' homes, with poker, beer and sandwiches following the discussion of the few business matters that might come up.

When I joined in 1960, a second pumper and a small panel truck had been added. Also, a new, two-bay building capable of housing four trucks had been erected. Much of the construction was done by department members and most of the materials were donated by township residents and area suppliers.

In those early days, we responded to fewer than 100 calls per year; most of these were to field fires, which were often pretty scary and involved acres and acres. Yearly fire losses seldom exceeded \$1,000. Twenty years later, we had five trucks: a 100-foot aerial ladder, three first-line, custom pumpers, and a modern rescue vehicle complete with air cascade. The total truck value in 1980 exceeded half a million dollars. The original building had been expanded and completely renovated.

In addition, a substation had been constructed on the other side of the township from the main station in order to provide better protection for that rapidly developing area. In order to appease the residents who objected to a fire station in their exclusive neighborhood, it was necessary to camouflage our substation as a mansion. The total value of this "Silk Stocking Hose House," as it was labeled by the press, and our main station also exceeded half a million dollars.

Neither station had fire poles to slide down, a constant source of disappointment to most of our visitors, particularly the kids, and to several of our members. A more costly and perhaps more important sore spot about our main station was the garage doors. Over the years, it was necessary to widen them three times; not because the width of the trucks increased, but because the drivers frequently turned before the long trucks were fully clear of the building. This wreaked havoc on the doors and walls, to say nothing of the damage to the trucks. On one occasion, over \$5,000 worth of damage was done to the building and truck enroute to a car fire (which resulted in only \$25 damage).

The height of the doors at the main station was increased once as well. This was immediately prior to the delivery of our new ladder truck in 1976 and was necessary to accommodate that vehicle. Unfortunately, this was not an easy change, as the building was not structurally able to take a second floor. In order to achieve the required door height without constructing a second story, we changed the building from a colonial to a modern, stucco design. This enabled a "penthouse" for the roll-up door mechanisms and a design, which still kept the building looking reasonable. While this served our functional needs, "looking reasonable" was

not quit enough for some. It created considerable ill will with many of the members of the very beautiful, colonial church directly across the street from the main station.

In the late 1970s, our membership had risen to thirty-five and the total number of fire calls had increased to over 200 per year, with a yearly fire loss in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The number of field fires declined, and the number of residential fires increased substantially as the township gradually changed from rural to residential.

Our funds came from four basic sources. The state provided about ten percent, with many limitations and controls on how it could be used. Approximately twenty percent came from township taxes, by far the best bargain in the township budget.

Roughly fifty percent of our funds came from a yearly fund drive. A mail appeal was sent to all residents of Upper St. Clair (see Appendices A and B). This was followed by a second, more pointed appeal if there was no response to our first. No matter how the appeals were worded, it was never possible to get more than fifty percent of the residents to respond. The more frequent reason given for this was that many residents felt all our funds should come out of the township budget, and further, that their taxes were quite high enough to support all township functions, including the fire department. We had often considered sending a third letter to those residents who ignored our first two. This final letter was to say in effect, "Don't call us, we'll call you." Fortunately, we never yielded to the temptation of sending out such an "appeal."

The remaining twenty percent came from special projects such as bingo games, horse shows and raffles. One of our most successful raffles offered a \$10,000 first prize. The second and third prizes were \$2,500 and \$1,500 respectively. In addition, the seller of the first prize ticket received \$1,000. In order to support such high prizes, we would only print and sell 1,000 tickets at \$25 apiece. This not only kept the amount of time spent selling tickets down, but also kept the chances of winning up. The first year we attempted this, we sold all 1,000 tickets and made a cool \$10,000. Tickets such as these sold amazingly well in the days before state lotteries; people actually sought them out and were willing to pay the \$25 for good odds on high stakes.

The second time we held such a raffle, we started selling the tickets late, more or less waiting for the requests for tickets to pour in as they had the last time. While we sold enough to pay all winners the full amount promised to them with a little profit left over, we did not sell all 1,000 tickets.

We tried carnivals as well. Our very first was a major, weeklong production; "Do it right" was the motto. We had scores of midway rides, games of chance, concession booths and the like. Other crowd-pleasers were skydiving demonstrations, fireworks, a rock concert and a rummage sale. The highlight of the carnival was one of the largest fireman's parades the area had ever seen. The prizes were fabulous – awards for the best looking pumpers, ladder trucks, rescue units, etc.; for the best bands and marching units; for the oldest equipment; for the unit traveling the furthest distance; and for a wide variety of other categories. Several hundred units, some from as far away as 200 miles, participated. This extravaganza lasted for four hours. For most of the day, the major, four-lane state highway running through our area was completely

closed, much to the dismay of the motoring public. Unfortunately, the weather was extremely poor for most of the week long duration of the carnival, and the proceeds barely covered our massive expenses. Some such expenses incidentally, were the result of damage caused by some over-zealous, rowdy, visiting firemen.

Our next two carnival attempts were much less grandiose. Naturally, the weather cooperated and we made a modest profit on each. We often wondered what our profits might have been if we somehow could have combined the "major production" with super weather.

Carnivals, like any other major fund-raising endeavor, always required enormous amounts of manpower. While most of the department (with a few notable zero-help exceptions) would initially be gung-ho, enthusiasm would wane as the days wore on. For example, several of our members would take several days vacation from their job so that they could help with such events. They would then work long hours (sometimes 12 to 14 hours a day) at some very hard and tiring tasks (pounding stakes, cleaning pots and pans, soliciting sales, working in the hot sun, etc.). On the other hand, there were other members who would be "too busy" to really help, and for the few hours that they might put in, they would want the cushy jobs (like counting money in an air-conditioned room). Under such conditions it is not hard to understand why there would often be a few individuals who would not be on speaking terms by the end of such events.

One other fund-raising event we tried was our Monte Carlo night. This event included various forms of gambling: blackjack, over/under, craps, Big 8, horse racing (cards), bingo and various other games of chance. These events were exceptionally well attended, most likely because our community held few organized social events, and *certainly* nothing like this. They were also quite profitable – for the department, if not for a few of its guests – but took a lot of work, time and manpower. I have two fond recollections of our Monte Carlo nights. One memory brings smiles: one of our underpaid police patrolmen won a great deal of money at our blackjack table. The second memory brings frowns: a couple of hustlers took some of our inexperienced "croupiers" for a ride. We lost a lot to these pros, but fortunately still managed to make a profit.

Most volunteers are willing to devote only a certain portion of their free time to the fire department. If they are asked to give more, they just won't show up, possibly with some encouragement from their wives. This is understandable, as they are, after all, volunteers and have demands on their time. If the time they devote to the fire department is consumed by fund-raising, then other events suffer. Accordingly, the attendance at our normal events would be down for weeks after our fund-raising endeavors. This included not only meetings and drills, but emergency calls as well.

It always bothered me that our precious volunteer hours needed to be spent on fund-raising, instead of what to me is the most important area of firefighting – training. I have never felt that a volunteer fireman gets enough practice and training in a few hours per week. Unlike the career fireman, the volunteer never knows when he might be the only person responding to an emergency call and thus, the officer-in-charge (OIC), at least initially. He might have to: drive the truck; operate the pump, aerial ladder and/or rescue equipment; give first aid; ventilate

the building or carry out any of a hundred other related tasks, most requiring considerable training if they were to be done effectively and safely.

Unfortunately, no amount of training would help us if money weren't available to support our efforts; so fund-raising was a necessary "evil" in order to maintain our standards of first-class firefighting. One of my theme songs to the township fathers at budget time each year was, "You provide the equipment and we'll provide the manpower." It sounded like a fair exchange to me.

Eventually the township commissioners became more receptive to our appeals for funds. By authorizing the purchase of certain of our trucks from township capital equipment funds, less and less of our time had to be spent in time-consuming fund raising endeavors.

For several years, the firehouse was used as a poll during local, state and federal elections. Of course, this caused some problems. Our building at that time was basically a large garage that housed four trucks. At election time we parked the rescue and ladder trucks outside and left the two pumpers inside. This was necessary in order that the 500-gallon water tanks (and lines) wouldn't freeze in the November cold. On one occasion a voter slipped on a small spot of oil on the floor where a truck had been parked. This resulted in threats of lawsuits and various other aggravations. A few times we had fire calls during elections. The siren on top of the building would cycle up and down for a minute and a half. During this time the building would actually shake, and conversation would be impossible. On one call the garage doors were thrown open and the two trucks parked inside roared off. Naturally wind and snow blew in and the building temperature fell rapidly until the doors were closed and the heating system had a chance to reheat the building. After peace, order and sanity were restored, it was found that all cakes, pies and cookies associated with the election bake sale were covered with the dust and dirt thrown up by the truck's exhaust. Another fire call came when the election was over and all the trucks were back in the building. Officials were in the process of counting the paper ballots in the aisle between the trucks. Naturally this slowed considerably while the siren on the roof was blowing. When the volunteers arrived, the election judge announced that no one was allowed to enter while the ballots were being counted. He was bodily escorted to the nearest snow bank, and all the trucks rolled out. In the process, ballots, records and election officials were blown in many different directions. A complete recount was required, and not long after that a less convenient but "more desirable" polling place was found.

No matter what type of community service one performs, there are always those ready to criticize. In the case of our fire department we received two basic complaints. The first was that we traveled too fast in our cars and trucks enroute to fires and emergencies. This complaint invariably came from those not directly involved in the emergency. The second complaint was that we traveled too slowly. Of course, this complaint came from those directly involved in the emergency. When your house is on fire, a few minutes can seem like an eternity.

I can fully sympathize with folks in the latter category. On many occasions I was first on the scene, as the chief is not required to go to the firehouse before reporting to a fire. There I'd be with my boots, coat and helmet on, looking like a lost soul, waiting for the trucks to arrive. The sirens could be heard in the distance, but it sure seemed like forever before the trucks arrived. On such occasions, I would check to see if all people were out of the building, size-up

the fire, spot the closest fire plug, talk to the residents about possible hazards and the structure of the building and, in the case of smaller fires, even attempt to solve the problem with the fire extinguisher carried in my car or with an available garden hose. In other cases, I would don the air mask carried in my car and enter the building if a search or size-up were required. This is a dangerous practice to perform when alone, and not advisable if not absolutely necessary.

Actually, the average time to get the first truck in service (i.e., to get men from home, to the station and on the road with the first truck) was slightly under three minutes. For a fire in front of the firehouse on a meeting night, one minute in service and at the scene was possible. At the other extreme, for long distances and under unusual circumstances (e.g., heavy snow), five minutes might be required to get a truck in service and another five to get to the scene, or ten minutes total. By erecting the substation, we were able to reduce the total time to arrive at the scene to a *maximum* of about seven minutes if no men were at the stations, and to about three minutes if men were at the stations.

During house fires we would permit as few men as possible in the building. From one point of view this was objectionable in that all men, particularly the newer ones, wanted to get experience and all men liked to see the reasons for and results of their efforts. The reasons for restricting the number of people were twofold. One was to minimize the damage from tracking the place up with muddy boots, clothing and hands. The more significant reason, however, was to be in a more defensible position should something turn up missing. I don't mean to imply that our firemen were thieves. On the contrary, in all my years with the fire department, I never knew or heard of any thefts of the property of victims by members of our department. There were, however, two occasions where it was inferred that our members had taken such property, rings in both cases.

After one particularly bad house fire, several of the owner's rings were missing. It was immediately assumed that they were taken by the firemen. The owner subsequently found the rings hidden in their normal location and apologized for even suspecting the firemen.

The second situation involved a bad automobile accident. One lady was dead on impact and was imbedded in the vehicle. It took over an hour with the rescue jacks, saws, torches and tools to free her body and place it in the morgue wagon. A few days later the rings she had been wearing were reported missing by her husband. Once again the shadow of suspicion was cast on all firemen and policemen involved with the accident. Fortunately for us, scores of photos of the body and wreck had been taken by a police photographer. Examination of these photos clearly showed that the victim had driving gloves on her hands from the very first photo to that of her being placed in the morgue body bag.

I won't say that all fire departments or all firemen would not yield to temptations that might present themselves. I did see one event of this nature, which still leaves a bad taste in my mouth. A large supermarket was gutted by fire. The fire was basically out except for small spot fires which were in the process of being extinguished. A small river of water, which resulted from the large deluge streams, which had been used, was pouring out the front doors. Floating on this stream were packages of cigarettes, which had been washed from their shelves. Standing in the middle of all this, in plain view for all to see, was a senior officer of a neighboring fire

department. His pockets and coat were bulging with the packs of cigarettes he was scooping up out of the stream. Clearly he was not salvaging these cigarettes for the storeowner but rather for his own personal use. While you might argue that such materials would eventually be destroyed, that does not excuse the officer's action, which were not only criminal, but which also tarnished the reputation of all firemen.

I personally received many strange calls from friends and neighbors who knew I was a fireman. Calls like:

- "My car is on fire. What should I do?"
- "Do you have a fire extinguisher I can borrow *right away*?"
- "Should sparks be coming from my fuse box?"

One such call was received when I was up on a ladder painting our home. The phone rang and rang. I ignored it for a while since my family was out but eventually climbed down, cleaned the paint from my hands and answered the phone. A friend two blocks away requested that I bring my fire extinguisher as her stove was on fire. Instead of one mad painter, she received five fire trucks as a result of my instant call to the dispatcher.

One likely reason why residents were somewhat gun shy in calling the fire department was our firm policy to have all trucks respond – Code 3 (red lights and siren) for any fire or report of a fire in a structure. This policy became locked in concrete when a neighboring community lost a house (i.e. totally destroyed by fire) when a police car was first dispatched (slowly) to check out a smoldering ironing board. By the time the police arrived, it was a burning bedroom. By the time the trucks arrived, it was a roaring house fire, and by the time the trucks left, it was a smoldering foundation. After that, whenever a structure fire was reported, the wheels were immediately set in motion to give the caller the "full treatment." Once the "go" button was pushed, it could not be stopped by an on-the-scene policeman or the resident calling back to cancel. While such actions would, in CB language, "lift the hammer" a little (or slow us down) it took a fire department officer's orders to stop the trucks or turn them around.

There are two schools of thought on the operation of a volunteer fire department. The first is that there are very few rules and regulations. That is, there are few requirements for becoming a member and then maintaining membership. As long as you don't screw up too badly, then you're a member for as long as you choose to be. The advantage of this is that there will probably be a large number of members on the roster and there should always be a large number of personnel responding to all emergencies. Boy, does this make the statistics look good! Unfortunately, many of the members might be ill trained, in poor physical shape and lacking in the discipline that it takes to manage major emergencies.

The second approach is to have very stringent rules and requirements. The advantage of this is that you can be sure that those personnel responding to emergency calls will be truly ready, willing and able to handle the situation. That is, they will have been superbly trained, in good physical condition and will have frequently participated in a wide variety of training exercises as team members. While this is clearly the best approach, there are probably few volunteers that are willing to spend the time and effort that is required. As a result there will be

relatively few men to not only handle the emergency calls, but also to do all of the other necessary tasks – including fund-raising.

While I was chief there were too few members to run a really "tight ship." You cannot make too many demands on the members if you can just barely provide adequate manpower at all emergencies. There were several of our members that I really would have loved to sack, but I had to exercise restraint because they were "daylight men." That is, they were available to answer emergency calls when the majority of the department was at work. In order to correct this situation, I was an advocate of having a few career firefighters on duty during normal workday hours. To date, this has not been implemented in Upper St. Clair.

A related problem to the above is that there are an awful lot of things that firefighters of today must be knowledgeable of and be able to handle proficiently. This is especially true in volunteer departments where each man must be proficient in essentially all areas since you can never be sure exactly who will show up for each emergency. In addition to the more conventional aspects of fire fighting (such as hoses, pumping, ladders, masks, axes, etc.), there is a wide variety of specialized operations and equipment in use today. Such areas include complex heavy rescue equipment, hazardous materials, helicopter repelling, exotic communications systems, etc.

It has also been my observation that just about all fire departments, no matter how large or how small, want to have the same exotic equipment – no matter how expensive or how frequently it might be used and even though having such equipment would seriously compound their training, maintenance and funding problems. For example, I always thought it was dumb for every department for miles around to have a 100-foot aerial ladder truck and an air cascade system. In the event that a small department ever needed such equipment, they would probably need a lot of additional manpower as well. They could just as easily call for mutual-aid assistance asking for both manpower and a ladder truck and/or air cascade system.

I often thought that these problems could be solved by combining several of the small local departments. Hold on! I'm not suggesting closing up the local fire stations. Heaven forbid! I'm suggesting leaving the local stations with one fire truck (or possibly two) in each to be operated by the local volunteers. These locals, however, would report to and be administered, trained and backed up by a central, first-class, well-equipped fire department, possibly run by the county. This central department would have the specialized vehicles and equipment and maybe some career firefighters and expertise not generally available in all of the local communities.

It is probably pointless in going on with such dreaming. No local fire department wants to hear about giving up any of its turf (or power, or prestige, or whatever). On the other hand, no state or county official is going to propose altering the local fire service, as this would certainly not be politically expedient. I guess the best I can hope for is that this situation is unique to my area and that it will change at some point in the future, most likely by necessity rather than by reason.

Our department could be assessed by the comments of new members who had previously belonged to one or more fire departments. Usually these departments were not in the immediate

area, and more often than not, out of state. Many times, comments would express personal opinions or preferences such "My former company had yellow trucks and I like them better than the red ones here," or "How come this department uses 35-foot aluminum ladders rather than the 24-foot wooden ones that I used to use?" However, I am proud to say that all of the many incoming members who had prior fire fighting experience were very favorably impressed with the Upper St. Clair department.

Every once in a while, we also would receive feedback from former members who had moved from our area. A man who moved away to become a career fireman was horrified at the differences between his former, "sharp" volunteer department and his present, "sloppy" paid department. In another instance, one of our members moved out of state. After getting settled, he visited the department in his new community with the thought of possibly joining. To his amazement, the chief answered most of the following questions with, "None":

- What are the qualifications for drivers?
- What does your training manual look like?
- What do your by-laws require?
- How are the maintenance checks on your trucks handled?

After this visit our ex-member concluded that he was not interested in joining – possibly because of all the time that he would have had to put in to help improve the department. This was too bad as he had a lot to offer – partially because of his prior experience at Upper St. Clair. This decision not to join was possibly a relief to that chief (of over twenty years). If he was like some long-term chiefs that I have known – who dislike all new, progressive thinking "kids," he might well have thought "this guy knows too much, we sure don't want him as a member or he might rock the boat."

Mention was made above of a "Training Manual." Such a manual was considered necessary to correct a variety of existing problems in a complete, efficient manner. Some of these problems were the following:

- Occasionally, different officers would teach or direct the men to do things differently;
- The instruction books for most of our older equipment apparently became the personal property of former chiefs, because they disappeared when the chiefs left;
- State and county fire schools and commercial fire texts taught about trucks, pumps and equipment, but not usually the details of *our* equipment;
- The manuals that came with our custom-built trucks usually consisted of a manufacturers manual for each of the various components on the truck (such as the engines, transmissions, brakes, etc.), covering many different models of the component – buried somewhere in there was our model;
- There was no good way for a new member to rapidly learn the specifics of our equipment and the details of our department and its operations on his own.

With these deficiencies in mind, I undertook the preparation of 400-page training manual and had copies printed for all members. This manual consisted of detailed information in each of the following major areas:

1. Street lists and maps with hydrant locations.
2. Maps, floor plans, hydrant locations, hazard areas, sprinkler valves, gas valves and electric panels for all schools, churches and other major buildings in the township.
3. The details of the operation of the department (rules, procedures, records, etc.).
4. Details of all major equipment and every truck in the department including maintenance and operation instructions.
5. Basic information on fires and emergencies (electrical problems, hose lays, hose packing, pumping notes, sprinkler systems) (see Appendices C and D).
6. Maps of the surrounding communities and our assignments (if any) on calls for assistance to major buildings in those areas.
7. The official by-laws of our department.
8. A glossary of fire terms that a recruit might not know (see Appendix E).

It took me over fifteen years to acquire the knowledge in that book, and two years of part-time effort with some assistance from a few other members to get it written and issued. It was always a great personal satisfaction to give a copy to a new member and say, "Here, you can learn what's in here in a few weeks. Then you will know darn near as much as it took me twenty years to learn." Our training manual was a huge success and soon became a ready reference source for all members and required study for all new members.

Praise also came from a group of insurance underwriters who visited our department for the purpose of obtaining information about the effectiveness of the department. Such information would eventually be used in setting the rate structure for fire insurance in the area. In the process, they were shown our training manual and were amazed at the wealth of information it contained. They had never seen such a book, and requested a copy so they could show it around the country in the hope that other departments might prepare and issue similar documents.

Over the years, I have seen many, many changes which have improved the fire service in general and the Upper St. Clair Fire Department in particular. One area of major improvement was the creation of the self-contained breathing apparatus, which better protects firemen from the extremely hazardous fire gases, which are emitted when the building and manufacturing materials used today burn. These units are infinitely superior to the earlier, filter-type masks that required considerable effort to breathe and which only removed some of the smoke and few of the fire gases. However, even filters were better than the earlier practice of "smoke-eating," or inhaling the contamination without any protection whatsoever.

Another area improved was the alerting and radio communications systems. In my early days, the alerting system consisted of massive sirens mounted at strategic locations throughout the township (such as on the roof of the fire station and certain of the school buildings). These radio-controlled units frequently blew as a result of false "trips," but even more frequently failed to blow during real emergencies. In those days, two-way radios were expensive, temperamental

and few and far between. Eventually all trucks and all officers' cars were equipped with both installed and portable, multi-channel, two-way units. The alerting systems progressed to home radio receivers and then to small, tone-activated portable pagers, which were worn on the belt. These units would not only alert our men to the emergency, but could be used to convey orders to various individuals enroute to and at the emergency scene.

In the early days, the basic rescue tools used were hacksaws, automobile jacks and pry bars. Eventually we acquired hydraulically operated cutting and spreading devices that can exert tremendous force and pressure (popularly known as "Jaws" or "Jaws of Life"®), cutting saws that have either a reciprocating blade (like a saber saw) or a rotating-disk type of blade, oxygen-acetylene cutting torches, pneumatic chisels in which the blade is driven by compressed air, inflatable air bags, extremely powerful winches that operate from the engine of a fire truck and a host of other specialized and expensive rescue equipment. Such equipment greatly simplified the task of extracting victims from the horrible vehicle accidents that periodically occurred.

I can recall many instances over the years where considerable time and effort was spent in extracting victims from mangled automobile wrecks using nothing but a hack saw and an automobile jack. Today it is a relatively rapid and effortless task to use the "Jaws" to snip the roof supports, peel back the roof, pop open all doors, forcefully move the steering wheel or seats as required and gently remove the victims, without causing them any additional trauma (which was not always the case in the "old days"). Of course the newer equipment could and would be used in other situations. Not only was it used at certain fires and other emergencies; it was quite useful at many of our non-emergencies. In addition, frequent requests were received (and generally denied) from firemen, policemen, township officials, friends, neighbors and the general public for the loan of such equipment for a variety of do-it-yourself projects.

Major improvements were made to the fire apparatus itself. Perhaps the biggest change noted over the years was the price. In 20 years, the cost of a new top-of-the line fire pumper went from less than \$20,000 to well over \$100,000 (and close to \$200,000 today – in 1986).

Technical advancements were often met with considerable skepticism, such as diesel engines and automatic transmissions. The concerns were that diesels would not start fast enough for fire service use and that the automatics would not be suitable for use on large trucks. Both of these concerns have, of course, been proven unfounded. The most notable improvement in our ladder trucks over the years was the addition of telescoping waterways, which could deliver over 1,000 gallons of water per minute to a remote-controlled nozzle at the tip of the full-extended ladder, 100 feet up in the air. This was in contrast to the earlier days of stretching hose up a shaky ladder to a clamp-on nozzle that had to be operated manually by a fireman who alternately froze from the icy spray and roasted from the flames, all the while eating immense amounts of smoke and fire gas while wearing an old, filter-type gas mask.

The relationship between the fire department and the other agencies in the township was generally quite good. In some communities the fire department is actively engaged in local politics. For example, in one nearby area it was well known that no one could be elected or appointed to any local government office without the blessing of the local fire department. Our department, on the other hand went overboard to stay clear of politics. We wouldn't let any

political faction use our meeting room since it might appear that we favored that particular group and might offend others.

We always got along exceptionally well with the police department. There were times when this relationship became somewhat strained, however. At one automobile fire, a policeman was inadvertently doused by a fire hose. He screamed that the fireman manning the nozzle drenched him on purpose. Peace was finally restored, but not for long. At the very next automobile fire, a police sergeant was again thoroughly hosed, again accidentally. Fortunately, this policeman was very understanding and even declined our offer to have his uniform cleaned at our expense. Had he been the same officer soaked on the first occasion, we might well have had to contend with a fireman's homicide!

Our relationship with ambulance personnel was very harmonious. As a matter of fact, several of our members were at one time or another members of an ambulance service and/or of a police department. But I guess it is inevitable that every once in awhile we would have a "falling-out." The most serious confrontation with the ambulance service was associated with an accident in which three teenagers were injured.

I heard the call on the police radio in my car and, since I was in the immediate vicinity, responded to the scene. Arriving before the ambulance, I administered first aid to the victims. One ambulance arrived, loaded up two of the three victims, and started to leave for the hospital just as a second ambulance pulled up. At that precise moment a radio message was received concerning a heart attack. Ambulance No. 1 departed for the hospital thinking that No. 2 would pick up the third teenager and then respond to the heart attack call. Ambulance No. 2 thought that No. 1 had all three teenagers on board and therefore left for the heart attack. As a result I was left with the third victim. I therefore requested that a resident of the area drive the slightly injured third victim and I to the hospital.

Needless to say, this situation left a lot to be desired; it was *not*, by any means, standard operating procedure. Unfortunately, the situation only got worse. Once at the hospital – about ten miles away – and after all three patients were taken care of, I asked the driver of ambulance No. 1 for a ride home, since the car I arrived in had already left. My request was flatly and firmly denied, even though the driver knew I had assisted with the emergency and was the fire chief.

The driver muttered something about not having the proper insurance coverage to drive me home. This was pure baloney and I suspect that he was still shook up from the way the ambulance service had screwed up the emergency. Rather than argue the point, I simply called the fire station and someone drove to the hospital and picked me up. When the fire department members heard of my being stranded at the hospital they were livid. A very pointed complaint was delivered to the director of the ambulance service (who was aghast at the way the entire emergency situation was treated). I subsequently received a profound apology and assurances that the entire situation was not in accordance with the policies of the service and would not happen again.

The superior working relationships that were built up over the years among the various public service agencies in the township made all of our jobs considerably easier – in our routine efforts and especially in emergency situations. In these cases, we worked together as a smoothly running machine, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the entire operation.

The last township agency that needs to be mentioned is the local magistrate (called a squire in some places). One of the individuals to hold this office initiated a firm policy regarding juveniles who committed misdemeanors, which usually meant drinking. Offenders could either pay a substantial fine or put in a day's work with a local community agency. This included the police department (washing and waxing patrol cars), the ambulance service (washing and waxing the ambulances), the park department (picking up litter and performing other odd jobs), and, of course, the fire department. Our assignments included washing and waxing the trucks, washing fire hose, pulling weeds, washing floors, washing ashtrays, cleaning the kitchen and the always dirty bathrooms, polishing windows, vacuuming rugs and performing any other tasks that might need doing.

Such "POWs" generally worked hard, did a great job, and were not at all hostile towards the fire department, but rather extremely interested in learning our operation. The largest single problem with this exceptional program was the amount of work it required of the fire department's coordinators, usually the chief and/or the president. Have you ever tried to keep ten or so teenagers busy? After eight hours of running around to keep up with a group of them (usually on a Saturday), I would be ready for a week's vacation. They had to be shown where this was, how that worked, where to put this, and so forth, to the point where it probably would have been easier to do the work ourselves.

All this was worth it, though, as the program really seemed to benefit the kids involved. As we got smarter, we assigned the responsibility for directing the "criminals" to teams made up of members who came in for four-hour shifts. In this way, we were able to use the energetic efforts of the youths to full advantage and, hopefully, they would learn from their brush with the law and become better citizens because of it. Officials, parents, the general public, and even the POWs themselves thought a great deal of the program.

Unfortunately, a few can sometimes ruin things for many. One particular Saturday, six kids were "doing time" around the firehouse, supervised by two firemen. Late in the afternoon, the alarm bells suddenly began to ring and a "house fire, going good," was reported. The POWs were told to call their parents to come and get them, as their work for that day was over. Firemen roared into the station, and the trucks screamed off to the fire; kids were picked up by their parents or set off on their own.

After the fire was extinguished, tired firemen returning to the station to clean up and have a cold beer found that the beer machine had been broken into. It looked as if a case of beer was missing, as well as almost \$100 in coins. At this point, a neighbor called to report seeing some young boys carrying something from the fire hall and heading into the nearby woods. A posse of firemen was quickly organized and the men charged off into the woods. They returned a short time later with three of the POWs, "loaded" after consuming three beers apiece. Their pockets were also loaded – with coins from our machine.

The local police were called in and they removed the now-dual offenders to the juvenile home. Everyone involved was pretty upset: the magistrate who gave the boys the chance to work off their initial offense; the fire department who trusted and tried to help the local teenagers; the boys who got caught and their parents (one of whom blamed the fire department for not adequately supervising his "dear boy"); and finally, the teenage offenders that followed in the future who were hit with \$300 fines rather than given a chance to work off their offenses by spending a day at the firehouse.

Eventually, the program petered out as the juveniles became smarter. No, they didn't stop their transgressing, but rather moved it out of the township where the penalties if caught were minor in comparison to those in Upper St. Clair.

The beer machine, which figured prominently in the last story, was the source of constant debate at the firehouse. What began as an ice chest progressed to a refrigerator and finally became a coin-operated bottle and can dispenser. Mostly it contained soft drinks, but also some beer. Any member who had been drinking to any extent at all was strictly prohibited from driving a fire vehicle or responding to any emergency. This was not enough for some, who argued that it was questionable if beer should be so readily available to members who claimed to be ready to respond to an emergency at any time. Some "purists" from time to time would demand that either that beer went or they would. A newly elected president took this stand, but quickly backed down when it became clear that he was about to be impeached.

In general, the few members who enjoyed a beer from time to time would have at most a couple, usually after a work detail, a bad fire or sometimes stopping off on the way home from work. In all my years with the department, I was never aware of any problems that the beer machine caused in our operations. I expect that, as the department becomes more professional, the beer machine will have to go. I know way down deep that it probably should, but I will always remember the pleasure of returning to an icy cold brew after a long, hot, dirty, tiring field fire that took all the energy and strength that I possessed.

Something that always gave the members of the department great delight were the various symbols and apparel that identified us as firefighters. Although we never had full, formal uniforms, we had a vast variety of fire department-provided clothing: jackets in many different styles, colors and combinations of colors; coveralls; hats; patches; caps; badges; shirts and even trousers. While my wife liked and borrowed many of the jackets for their style or warmth, she was not always overjoyed at having "UPPER ST. CLAIR FIRE DEPT." emblazoned on her back while at the grocery store. At one time I had *eleven*, yes, eleven different baseball-type caps, every one of which was different. There were winter and summer styles; blue, red, white and multi-colored; hats with Maltese crosses and crossed trumpets; hats with names or acronyms such as UPPER ST. CLAIR FIRE DEPT., USCVFD, USC, AMERICAN LaFRANCE (fire truck manufacturer), NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY and MAXI-FORCE (rescue equipment manufacturer) in bold letters across the front. Such clothing was one of the few fringe benefits of being a volunteer. Even though certain members (including myself) would never wear most of it, they would never say no to anything for free.

At one point the department was plagued by sabotage. An occasional tire was found flat, the master switch or ignition of a truck was found on (and the batteries low or dead) or a tire chain was hooked on one side of a tire but unhooked on the other. Any one of these things might have been written off, but a string of unusual occurrences raised our suspicions to the point that the normally unmanned firehouse was kept under surveillance by a team of fire department sleuths.

We knew we had a real problem a couple of weeks later when one of the trucks stalled enroute to a fire. Upon investigation, several partially burnt newspapers were found protruding from the gas tank fill pipe. Although they caused no serious damage, we further beefed up our security. New locks, alarm systems and floodlights were installed and the frequency of police patrols was significantly increased. For a while, armed guards were even planted in the building. The problem stopped immediately, and the source was never determined. Whether it was a disgruntled fireman, a former fireman or a local kook, we never knew. We did know, however, that anyone who would deliberately sabotage emergency equipment and vehicles must indeed be sick.

Although as a volunteer fire department, we did not receive any monetary compensation for our services, there were various schemes by which we could receive some form of reimbursement for our expenses. These included reimbursements for such items as gasoline and automobile expenses, soiled and torn clothing and scores of other expenses which would not have been incurred if we were not firemen.

The first reimbursement scheme was known as our "pension system," designed to keep members from leaving the company after a year or so. Basically it worked as follows: points were credited for each emergency or firehouse activity attended, for each position held and for various other good reasons. For example, three points were awarded for each emergency call; for being chief, 300 points were bestowed. If a member accumulated 250 points in a given year, he was eligible to participate in the "pension" for that year. Unfortunately, this was easily possible for most members to achieve with little effort by mid-year, after which some coasted for the rest of the year. At the end of the year, a sum of money from the contributions made to the department was voted for the pension pool. This pool was then equally divided between all eligible participants and their share was put into separate pension accounts, which could not be touched until after a member left the company. If he left before five years, the account reverted to the fire department. If he left after five years, the account was his "pension."

There were two problems with this system. First, since the members voted funds for the pool, there was a tendency to make it as large as possible – even at the expense of needed fire department equipment or equipment repair. Second, while it did serve to keep members for five years, most members intentionally left soon after in order to get their much needed "pension" money in cash.

After years of arguing, the majority of the membership finally agreed that the system had to be changed and so it was modified to a "point plan." Points were given for activities attended (such as three points for a fire call) and points were *deducted* for assigned jobs not completed, or not completed on time. Points were not awarded for offices held. A truly active member might

receive 300 points in a given year. A vote was taken at the end of each year to determine a dollar amount for each point; this value was fixed by our by-laws between a minimum of zero to a maximum of one dollar per point, depending on if there was any excess money in our treasury and on how many total points had been accumulated. Under this more equitable arrangement, an average fireman might receive about \$200 for his year's services. While the amount was not enough to be considered compensation, it did, in part, cover many of the out-of-pocket expenses incurred. It also provided a way to penalize any members who did not carry out assigned tasks.

My wife was always impressed by the extremely wide variety of jobs that a volunteer firefighter is called upon to do. She anticipated the more obvious ones, like fighting fires and training for this duty, but she never dreamed of all the other activities I eventually became involved in. Over the years, some of the emergencies I responded to were:

- floods, water in basements and broken pipes;
- wires down, transformer explosions, other electrical problems and sometimes even electrocutions;
- vehicle accidents – many involving extrications, wash-downs, stand-bys and clean ups;
- mutual aid calls for out-of-town assistance;
- searches for missing children, elderly folk who had wandered off and missing or lost items of importance;
- gas leaks, gasoline spills and various other hazardous material leaks and spills;
- explosions and bomb threats;
- police department requests for manpower – *fast*; for various reasons including for traffic directing and crowd control;
- rescue efforts from roofs, holes, mines and cave-ins;
- stand-bys at the station during major storms, when phones were out, roads impassable or during civil disturbances;
- requests for our specialized equipment (emergency power, jacks, rope, saws, fans, compressed air, etc.) and expertise;
- escaped animals that had to be herded off main roads;
- lightning strikes;
- airplane crashes;
- all kinds of sounds, sights and smells labeled "suspicious";
- and, of course, fires at residences and commercial buildings, in vehicles, chimneys and fields; as well as false alarms and "out-on-arrivals".

Some of the various non-emergency activities I participated in were:

- training programs on local, state and national levels;
- fund-raising endeavors;
- station, vehicle and equipment repairs and maintenance;
- conducting tours of the firehouse and fire prevention presentations;
- driver training, qualification and re-qualification programs;
- participating in parades;

- answering non-emergency police and medical calls;
- providing stand-by electrical lighting at the high school stadium;
- pumping out basements and swimming pools;
- washing off streets and parking lots;
- filling cisterns and delivering water;
- participating in community activities, such as clean-up days, township fireworks displays, pep rallies, teen work programs, Boy Scouts, Little League – and making the fire station available for voting and other events;
- helping other firefighters with moving, car repairs, plowing driveways and the like;
- visiting members who might be hospitalized;
- sometimes visiting emergency victims in the hospital;
- attending the funeral of members, their family members, policemen and members of nearby fire departments;
- testing hose and checking hydrants;
- touring (for purposes of familiarization) buildings, streets and other areas of the community;
- learning CPR and first aid and participating in disaster and civil defense drills;
- conducting controlled burns of fields and condemned buildings;
- attending business meetings and social events;
- using our ropes and ladders to raise and lower various items (such as cats);
- and last, but not least, participating in all those darned special details and events dreamed up by the chief.

These are all activities that I can recall without going through department records (in which case, the list would be a lot longer!). I also haven't mentioned all the many activities limited to the chief and/or various other officers or to the various specialists (in communications, photography and the like). Based upon this listing, it should be quite obvious that the job of a volunteer fireman involves far more than just fighting fires. It also should be apparent what a tremendous service the volunteers perform for their communities. I have often wondered who would perform many of these functions if it were not for the volunteers.

Of all the various activities that I participated in over the years as a volunteer, there were three basic types that I objected to. These were: when we had to solicit (and sometimes even beg) funds so that we could continue to provide our services for free; when the effort that we put in was not appreciated; and when our free services were exploited so that the recipient would not have to have such services performed by professionals at commercial rates.

All in all, I would consider that the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department is not unlike the thousands of other volunteer fire departments scattered throughout Pennsylvania, the United States and, for that matter, the world. (It may be of interest to note that there are approximately 900,000 volunteer firefighters in the United States – that's about 80% of all firefighters in the country; see Appendix F). Such departments are made up of extremely dedicated individuals (and a few freeloaders) whose primary objective is to respond to any and all calls for assistance from anyone and everyone in time of need.

4 The Fire Trucks

One of the major concerns of any fire department is maintenance and operation of its vehicles. Fire trucks normally receive very little road mileage. However, they do receive considerable "engine mileage" while pumping or merely idling at emergency scenes and training sessions. Such trucks must start instantly and be able to operate immediately at high speeds from a cold start.

You never know who will respond to an emergency call in an all-volunteer fire department; therefore, all members should be qualified to operate all vehicles. If only certain members can operate the vehicles, then it is possible that someday, at some emergency call, only the non-drivers will respond and the trucks will have to stay in the barn. As an example of this, a neighboring town bought a very expensive new pumper. For over a year, the only man qualified to drive it was the fire chief. If the chief could not respond to a fire call, neither could this vehicle.

The size and weight of fire vehicles are considerably greater than the vehicles most volunteers are accustomed to handling. Therefore, the training of drivers can often be a problem and a considerable amount of time behind the wheel is necessary to acquire the necessary skills, judgments, familiarity and confidence.

Another obstacle to training is that many individuals are only familiar with automatic transmissions; that is, they do not know how to use a clutch to shift gears, as is required by most of the older fire trucks. Instructors with nerves of steel are required to train these "student drivers" using five-speed manual transmissions on very expensive fire engines over very narrow and winding roads, as well as in heavy traffic.

During my years as chief, a detailed set of training and qualification requirements was prepared and implemented for new members. These included what the drivers must know about each vehicle and its operation, the minimum number of practice runs they had to make, the testing procedures, the maintenance checks, the required records and so forth (see Appendix G). This became necessary when the state of Pennsylvania changed its Motor Vehicle Code to give the responsibility for licensing the drivers of heavy fire department vehicles to the local fire chief.

Every member of our department was encouraged to qualify to drive all vehicles, but several members never attempted qualification for a variety of reasons: they did not want to take the necessary time; they did not have the self-confidence that it took to pass the tests; or they did not want the immense responsibility of operating an emergency vehicle under high stress, emergency conditions. Drivers normally were trained and qualified in non-emergency situations, although emergency conditions were sometimes simulated for practice. Driving to a real emergency is a lot more hectic, as adrenaline pumps, the radio barks, the siren screams and traffic often responds in very unpredictable ways, while the fireman riding shotgun may be saying something about a Volkswagen passing on your right. I was always more than a little

nervous when a recently qualified driver was at the wheel responding to his first real emergency call.

With a large number of qualified drivers and a small number of emergency calls per year, most drivers did not receive a great deal of emergency driving experience. Because of this, a retraining and requalification program was established and implemented. This program included specific requirements for the minimum yearly amount of actual driving time. Fire trucks therefore frequently roamed throughout the township with members acquiring their minimum time behind the wheel. While this increased the wear and tear on the vehicles, it improved the drivers' experience and confidence levels, as well as displayed to the residents that their township had some pretty sharp-looking fire equipment ready to protect them.

I was always trying to think of ways to make our driver qualification/requalification programs even better while I was chief. Local and state police, as well as professional drivers from area bus and trucking companies, were considered as possible instructors. I even considered going to the Teamsters Union for their expertise. Fortunately, our training personnel and programs were always considered to be reasonably good. Furthermore outsiders might not be that helpful in training our personnel with *our* equipment in *our* community.

In one further attempt to improve our drivers, I collected beer and pop cans for months, with the idea of building an obstacle course for driver training. The cans were to be used to outline the course, instead of the larger, more expensive traffic cones, hundreds of which were needed. Unfortunately, the first time the course was set up and used, the small cans could not easily be seen, and a year's supply was crushed in less than an hour.

In order to be prepared for service, emergency vehicles are normally kept in heated stations with their fuel tanks full. Dual batteries and dual ignition systems are frequently employed to provide backup in case of the first system's failure. Even with dual batteries, positive starting cannot be assured for various reasons: the infrequent use, the strain when used and the extremes in maintenance quality that occurs. For example, we had periods of time when the individual assigned to battery maintenance apparently did nothing except sign the logs that he had performed the required checks. On the other hand, there were times when the batteries were checked and charged by several different members each week. On one occasion, I smelled strong fumes in the truck bays. Investigating, I found a battery had been on full charge constantly for several days. In the process, it ran totally dry of fluid and a very expensive battery was destroyed. Many of these problems were eventually resolved by installing automatic chargers, assigning specific responsibilities to specific people and establishing formal, written maintenance procedures and records.

Another major problem associated with fire trucks is that of tire chains. While it only takes a few seconds to drop such chains and to remove them, it requires a lot of hard work to put them on, as the vehicle must be jacked up. Time to install the chains is not available when an emergency alarm comes in; therefore, our general policy was to keep the chains on throughout the winter months. If the roads were clear at the time of an emergency, the chains were dropped. If they were left on they would unnecessarily slow the responding truck. In addition, the bare pavement would rapidly wear down the chains. If but one link were to break, either the vehicle

had to be stopped and the chain repaired, or the risk run that the flapping chain would tear up the fender. Occasionally, the chains could be left off for several days at a time because of clear skies. Sometimes, we would get "caught," and the chief would get a call from the police in the middle of the night reporting that the roads were getting slick. On a few occasions, as chief, I got out of bed and chained all five trucks alone. Most often, however, I would wake up a few others to carry out this dirty and tiring task with me.

While on the subject of chains and tires, I might mention one other thing that the non-fireman may not appreciate. When tires, particularly radials, sit for – long periods of time supporting a heavy truck, they become a little flattened or "bent out of shape." In responding to an emergency with these tires, you can hear and feel a FLUMP, FLUMP, FLUMP until the tire gets back into its normal, round shape. This can cause a lot of concern if you don't know what it is the first time you experience it.

One additional problem fire truck drivers encounter, that drivers of passenger cars do not, is weight and height considerations. Our largest vehicle weighed twenty-five tons. There were several bridges in our area with three-, seven-, nine- or fifteen-ton weight restrictions. In addition, there were areas where less than the eleven feet clearance needed for our ladder truck existed. Therefore, all drivers were drilled on these facts and such areas were detoured under all circumstances. It was not considered wise to take a twenty-five ton truck over a three-ton bridge, which might destroy the truck and bridge, kill or injure personnel, lead to lawsuits and close the road for months or years. The gamble was not worth it. The only time one of our members violated this rule – he took a twelve-ton truck over a nine-ton bridge without any consequences – he was immediately suspended and fined. Later he lost his membership when he refused to pay the fine.

Over the years, very few members were ever dismissed from the department. There were, however, several cases where members were suspended or fined (or both) for traffic violations in either their cars or trucks while responding to emergency calls. And there were a few similar penalties for infractions of the rules (such as borrowing department property without proper authorization, failure to carry out specific orders, etc.)

By far the most frequent action taken against a member or potential member was his failure to make the "team." That is, after an individual joined, he was on probation for one year. At the end of that time, a vote was taken as to whether to make him a full member or drop him from the rolls. There were many individuals dropped at this point. The most prevalent reason was that the individual had not demonstrated that he was truly interested or it was judged that he would not make a good fireman. In some cases, an individual would be voted out because he, for some reason, had offended several of the members, and thus could not get the required number of votes. Situations such as this were quite rare, however. If a man was not well liked, the peer pressure alone would force him to resign long before it came time for his election to full membership.

One of the most depressing forced departures from the department involved a member with multiple sclerosis. This man was the whiz in charge of all of our radios and electronic equipment. I can still recall the hours and hours that he and I spent on top of a ladder, in either

the bitter cold or under the blazing sun, with our heads inside a siren control box trying to adjust the very temperamental radio controls for the unit. I can also remember visiting him in the hospital where he was having a few tests run for some "funny feelings" in his legs. The problem turned out to be M.S.

For some time after that he remained extremely active, even after he required a cane and then crutches to get around. After several bad falls at the fire station, a very emotional membership meeting was held. Having really no choice in the matter, the department suggested that for his own safety, he not come to the station any more.

Although he eventually moved to an out-of-town rest home, he still (even after 25 or so years) maintains contact with some of us old-timers. He still asks about *his* fire department and I'm sure he has a radio scanner or two to monitor the local fire frequencies. It is certainly hoped this book might enable him to relive some of the memories from his firefighting days with the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department.

Getting back to our heavy trucks, it was generally possible to detour bridges that might not take the weight of our vehicles without losing too much time. There were, however, two private bridges that were the only way to reach two houses. We had to formally advise the owners that our vehicles would not cross these bridges under any circumstances. Local politicians wanted us to agree to cross the bridges, but we held out firmly until the township engineer would certify that they were safe. He never did and I am sure that our policy had a major effect on the homeowners' fire insurance. Luckily, there was never a need to cross the bridges and, thus, never a situation "with flames bellowing on yonder shore" in which our do-not-cross-the-bridge policy was put to the test. If it had ever been, knowing our members, I am sure that certain of them would have risked all in the endeavor to fight the flames, particularly if any lives were endangered.

With five trucks, our preventive maintenance program was quite extensive. Every year there were ten state inspections (one per truck each six months) dictated by the state and 260 weekly truck checks (one per truck each week), and sixty monthly truck checks (one per truck per month) required by the chief. For the weekly checks a checklist was completed each week, for each truck, by assigned personnel. These lists included checking: fuel, oil and water levels; tire pressures and battery charges; the operation of lights; the position of switches and valves; and so on. On a monthly basis, each truck was examined in greater detail, including: lubrication, fluid reservoirs, and checks and operation of all equipment and tools carried. These weekly and monthly checks (see Appendix H) were in addition to the checks the driver was responsible for after each use (fuel, oil, water tank level, switch/valve positions, etc.) and the special checks and maintenance (see Appendix I).

Over the years, several different approaches were taken to perform maintenance and major repairs on our fire trucks. Work was done by mechanics in local garages, members who knew (or thought they knew) how to hold a wrench, the truck manufacturers, a mechanic employed full-time by the township to work on public vehicles, a mechanic employed part-time by the fire department and by various combinations of these approaches. The most effective and probably the most economical approach was to use the services donated by volunteers together

with those of a part-time professional mechanic paid from fire department funds. The secret here is to obtain an individual experienced on large trucks or buses who wants to supplement his income by working for the fire department in his spare time. We were very fortunate while I was chief to have an experienced, professional truck mechanic living in the area. He devoted about five hours per week to the maintenance and repair of our vehicles. Our members provided the previously mentioned routine checks and maintenance, made minor repairs such as replacing light bulbs, and even, on occasion, major repairs. In many cases, our members would carry out the dog work of a major job, such as removing and replacing a starter, transmission or radiator, while the professional mechanic would provide guidance and would perform only those tasks that required his finesse and expertise.

While it was expensive for the fire department to maintain a professional mechanic even part-time, it was considered to be in the best interest of the department to do so. The equipment received continuous surveillance and devoted, tender, loving care by a single experienced individual.

Our major repair effort was also significant. Several of the problems that arose while I was chief included:

- rebuilding two truck transmissions and a truck rear end;
- replacements: of the starter on the same truck four times, of a radiator when its mounting broke loose and fell into the fan, of wiring which burnt up in the engine compartment, of a 500-gallon water tank which cracked and rusted and of copper water lines which froze and ruptured when the vehicle was left outside in cold weather while undergoing a state inspection;
- having the engine oil analyzed when metal chips were discovered while draining the oil (the engine was okay);
- repairing damage resulting as vehicles left the station with a side equipment door on the truck open on two occasions, and once when the station overhead door closed automatically and hit the exiting truck;
- checking the twenty-five ton ladder truck after it tilted into soft earth when driven off the pavement;
- and repairing damage resulting from several "fender-bender" type accidents.

One of the most serious and trying difficulties encountered was a rear brake drum problem on one of our vehicles. While changing a tire approximately one year after purchasing the vehicle, both the left and right rear brake drums were found to be cracked: not small, hair-line, heat-caused ones, but major cracks that went completely through the drums so a ten-cent piece could be inserted. After haggling with the manufacturer and some delay, both drums were replaced by the truck manufacturer.

Fifteen months later, the right rear drum was found to be cracked again. Following more arguments and delays, it was replaced. This time, for the sake of expediency, the fire department paid the air freight and installed the drum supplied free by the manufacturer. When the left drum was once again found cracked only nine months later, I got mad. I was tired of hearing promises from the sales, warranty and maintenance managers. A polite, but pointed letter was sent

directly to the president of the truck manufacturing company. Heads rolled, the latest cracked drum was replaced, checks were made by brake specialists and a solution to the basic problem was designed, manufactured and installed. We were happy – for one month, that is, until the right rear drum was again found to be cracked. Needless to say, it was replaced, more studies made and further modifications carried out. Thankfully, that was the end of the problem.

The three-year period was trying, to say the least. While most of the cost of the new drums and their replacement was borne by the manufacturer, the fire department also "paid." Not only was this major piece of equipment frequently out-of-service for long periods of time, but there was always a lot of apprehension when it was in operation that a drum might be cracked and we might not know it. In addition, there was the hassle with the manufacturer, particularly after the warranty expired, as to who should do what, when it should be done and who should pay for it. While we persisted and eventually corrected the problem, there were many discouraging moments and temper tantrums along the way, and hours of precious volunteer time wasted.

Over the years three separate trips were made to the manufacturing plant during the assembly of new fire trucks for the department. These trips could be classified as "junkets," as the members went at the expense of either the truck manufacturer, the salesmen or the fire department. On the first trip, all five members of the "New Truck Committee" made the visit. They got a quick tour of the plant and briefly looked at our new truck. After that it was wine, women and song (or so I was led to believe). I guess the rationale is that boys away from home will be boys, especially when playing with someone else's toys.

On a similar visit two years later, only myself – then chief – and an assistant chief made the trip. Apparently the manufacturer expected the same type of blast as the previous one, with only a cursory look at the \$128,000 aerial ladder truck sitting on the production line. The company was flabbergasted when we showed up stone sober at 8:00 a.m. with copies of the contract, specifications and drawings in hand. We went over every inch of our new truck with a fine-tooth comb. Scores of deviations and deficiencies were noted. The delivery date was extended for weeks while the necessary modifications and corrections were made.

Having established this reputation as sticklers, the stage was set for our third visit for another truck a few years later. This time, the truck was flawless; not one single deficiency could be found. So far, so good, except that this brief, one-day visit was extended to three full days and nights due to the three feet of snow which fell the first day. Stranded in the motel, there was absolutely nothing the "New Truck Committee" could do except eat, drink and be merry – all on the expense account. I think that after these three visits to the manufacturer's fair city, it's not clear if we'll ever be invited back – or even if our orders for new trucks in the future will be accepted.

While on the subject of truck manufacturers, a major flood hit the area where one of our trucks was in the process of being manufactured. Although we were assured that our truck was not "involved," we were removing mud and silt out of its various nooks and crannies for years after its delivery. All this points out that the old adage, "Let the buyer beware," holds true, even for buying fire trucks.

Another example of design deficiencies was associated with the water tower portion of our aerial ladder. Telescoping pipes (called waterways) were located on each side of the ladder. These pipes would extend as the ladder was raised and could deliver 1,000 gallons of water per minute at a height of one hundred feet via a remote-controlled nozzle. In the design of the truck, a connection was provided at the top of the waterway near the nozzle. If you needed water on the roof of a building, all you had to do was raise the ladder to the roof, supply water to the base of the waterway, attach a hose to the connection at the top, and use that hose on the roof as desired. So far, so good. The only problem with this grandiose scheme was that while using the hose, there was no way to turn off the main nozzle at the top of the waterway. Therefore, most of the water would flow from the main nozzle down the side of the building, with little water (at very low pressure) delivered to the hose line. That is, almost all of the water being delivered up the waterway would flow out of the large, main nozzle with little water left over for the hose line. After two years, we finally got the engineers of the truck manufacturer to recognize this deficiency and to engineer and install a solution to the problem, which was a questionable one at that.

Another design problem that always bothered me was that fire trucks were built with tons of chrome and stainless steel (which do not readily deteriorate) on the parts of the truck that show, while materials that rapidly rust are used in areas that aren't noticeable, like the water tank. This seems just plain dumb to me; fortunately, this is not as prevalent as it once was. Apparently, manufacturers assume that the group or individual who writes specifications for trucks and equipment knows exactly what is needed. Also, the group or individual who prepare the specifications must think it is more important for the truck to look good than to be practical.

I should hasten to add that my first and only training in preparing specifications came from participating in a sixteen-hour seminar at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland, entitled, "Fire Apparatus Purchase and Maintenance." Of course, this was after I had already prepared my last of several sets of such fire truck specifications.

Every once in a while, one of our vehicles would break down while on the road. If we could fix it on the road, great! However, if it had to be towed, we had a serious problem on our hands. First of all, you could not tow a twenty-five ton vehicle with your ordinary, everyday tow truck. Furthermore, you could not simply use a tow chain, because without the engine running there would be no air pressure and thus no braking capability. If the towing vehicle had to stop and the towed vehicle couldn't, there would be a big bang. Rigid tow bars were therefore required for all such tows. The net result was that such "events" required super-monster tow trucks. Fortunately for us, the owner of the biggest tow giants in the area was sympathetic to volunteer fire departments, and his services were performed gratis. It's a good thing, too, as his flat fee plus his rate per mile charge were pretty costly for normal customers. After one free tow, we sent him a thank you note signed by all the members of the department. To him, this was more valuable than gold, and we (hopefully!) earned his eternal gratitude.

As everyone knows, red is the traditional color of fire trucks. Gradually, however, trucks painted lime-yellow, chrome-yellow, and various other colors, are becoming more common;

supposedly, yellow is safer than red because it's easier to see. Our trucks remained red; in fact, to suggest a yellow truck would probably get you kicked out of the department on the spot!

At one point during my tenure as chief, another officer and I went to the manufacturer's plant to inspect our new truck before delivery as mentioned above. There on the assembly floor next to our all-red vehicle was a similar truck, except its cab had a white roof. What a contrast! Ours looked drab next to the "sharp" white-over-red truck. Right there and then, we altered the contract to have our cab roof repainted white. When the vehicle was delivered, the two of us held our breath. Fortunately, agreement was unanimous; this was indeed a good-looking truck. No one even mentioned the unauthorized change to the contract. Since then, all of our future vehicles were ordered with white cab roofs, until our entire fleet was standardized as white over red.

Like most departments, our men had a great deal of pride in our vehicles. They would shine and polish them for hours and then go to parades to show them off. There was always the hope of winning a trophy for the best-looking unit at the parade. As chief, I did not like having a vehicle and crew out-of-town and thus out of service, as it reduced the township's degree of fire protection. My dislike for parades was also based on observations I had made in the past, such as: firemen drinking on vehicles in the parade or spraying water at parade spectators; fire trucks at parades over 200 miles from home; and all trucks (and most members) of a given department at a distant parade. I have to admit, though, parades did enhance our esprit de corps and keep the equipment well shined. I frequently agreed therefore that one vehicle could attend parades in neighboring communities but only under stringent conditions.

I guess by way of conclusion you could say that fire trucks were a lot of work. One thing you couldn't argue with was that they were a necessity. For that reason, we had the best trucks available to the fire service, and we kept them in tip-top shape. Next to outstanding firemen, our outstanding vehicles were our most valuable assets.

5 Causes of Fires

Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that most people are very curious about the causes of fires. For example, following almost every fire I would be bombarded with the question, "What caused it?" While I am certainly not an expert on the subject, I do have an opinion. However, my observations are based on poor statistics, and are not necessarily in agreement with the causes professionally determined and periodically reported by such agencies as the National Fire Protection Association. With that by way of a disclaimer, I can now proceed with my biased observations.

In my mind, the biggest single cause of fires is *stupidity*. For example, one man tried to start a fire in his fireplace. About the best he could do was to get the logs to smolder, so he poured some gasoline into a jar and threw the contents into the fireplace. When it flashed back, he ended up doused with flaming gasoline and sustained major burns on his hands and face, which led to permanent disfigurement. When we arrived, we extinguished a small fire on the living room rug, which had started when he rolled around trying to extinguish the fire in his hair and clothing, and the still smoldering logs in the fireplace, which never really did burn. Meanwhile, first aid was administered to the man and I can still remember his agony. He, and the firefighters present, will remember forever this example of a just plain dumb thing to do.

Another example of sheer stupidity is the woman who placed her hair dryer on the bed when electric power in the area was interrupted – then left. This resulted in a \$10,000 fire when the electric power was subsequently restored. Or the automobile expert that tried to start his reluctant engine by pouring ounces (if not pints) of gasoline down the carburetor. And then there was the weekend chef who started his grill with a heavy dose of starter fluid in his garage one rainy Sunday, with severe damage to the overhead garage door. A further example is a mechanic who poured gasoline down a pipe in the floor of a service station, which supposedly went into an underground storage tank. Unfortunately, that particular pipe merely drained onto the basement floor and the entire basement was soon in flames.

If you review most of the fires discussed in this book, you will find that most of them were caused by someone who didn't think. A few were caused accidentally (although even here stupidity often contributed), and relatively few, in our township at least, were deliberate (i.e. arson).

Children have been directly responsible for many of our fires. One instance that immediately comes to mind is a young scientist who made a rocket with his home chemistry set. While working on the device in his bedroom, it accidentally "blasted off." His panic-stricken parents rushed him to the hospital for emergency treatment for his burned hands and face, overlooking the smoldering rocket remnants scattered throughout the room. In no time, fire erupted and home and furnishings were extensively damaged. The Fourth of July brought another episode. A ten-year-old girl had been given a box of sparklers for the occasion. In advance of the big day, she thought she'd test one or two to see how they would look. Unfortunately, in the strong daylight the sparklers were not very spectacular. The obvious solution was to take one into a closet and shut the door. She later stated, "It looked real nice in

there!" The only problem was that the clothes hanging in the closet caught fire. By the time the fire was brought under control, the entire bedroom was destroyed. Luckily the girl's mother shut the door to the bedroom when smoke began to pour out or the rest of the house might have been heavily damaged as well.

Another major fire was caused by children but compounded by parents. In this case, the children were home alone playing with matches and started a small fire in a bedroom. One of the children called their mother, who was at work, and informed her of the problem. Her response was, "Put the fire out and stop playing with matches!" This was accomplished to the extent possible by the children but it wasn't good enough. Smoke and children were soon pouring from the building. Eventually, a neighbor noticed the commotion and turned in the alarm, unfortunately not before over \$100,000 damage resulted to the home and its furnishings.

In one instance, the cause of a fire could be directly attributed to Santa Claus, and to a fire department Santa at that. Shortly before Christmas, our five trucks, each carrying a Santa, were touring the neighborhoods passing out candy to the young ones. One woman had brought her children to the curb for the event and was busily snapping photographs. Unfortunately, she forgot the food on her stove. She returned to the house to find the kitchen in flames. A Santa-bearing truck was on the scene instantly. Four other trucks, complete with Santas, were soon assisting. It was a strange sight to see several Santas pulling hose. It was also somewhat embarrassing to see the puzzled looks on the kid's faces, while they tried to figure out, "How come five Santas?"

On two separate occasions, emergencies were a result of dangerous chemicals stored in private homes. In the first instance, a call came in to respond to a "chemical explosion" at such and such an address. When we arrived, we found the family in the street in a panic. They stammered that their son's chemistry set in the basement had exploded. We naively assumed that it was one of those little \$30 lab sets that grammar school kids tinker with to make strange smells and to watch litmus paper turn color. Nothing could be further from the truth; we found an extensive, fully equipped chemistry laboratory, which filled a 20-by 20-foot room. The owners' son was majoring in chemistry in college, and this was where he did his after-school and summer experiments. Fortunately, we were wearing self-contained breathing apparatus, and the problem turned out to be relatively minor, except for the parents' nerves. A small bottle of some relatively unstable chemical blew its top. We checked on the chemical, ventilated the building, and then cleaned up the mess. As we left, the mother could be overheard telling her husband, "I've told you time and time again that we shouldn't let junior have that lab, and now you both damn well better"

On the second occasion, we received a call that "poisonous gas" was filling a home. When we arrived, the family was in the street and it was obvious from the smell even at 50 feet that something "bad" was in the air. Someone mentioned in passing something about a chemistry set, and so, on went the self-contained breathing apparatus. The area was evacuated, hose lines were charged and, very cautiously, two men entered the building. They found a vast array of chemicals that were not immediately visible. By vast, I mean *pounds* and *gallons*, not milligrams and milliliters. The problem as it turned out, was that one of the bottles was leaking and its contents were mixing with a box of chemicals below it. As soon as they were separated,

the reaction ceased. We confiscated all the chemicals on the spot and turned them over to the chemistry teachers at the local high school for disposal. I doubt if this action was legal, but the parents did not object. On the contrary, they seemed pretty relieved.

Another major reason for many of our calls was food left on the stove or in the oven. Over the years I lost count of all of the charred lamb chops and steaks we extracted from smoke-filled kitchens. Also, many calls were received because of self-cleaning ovens. It seemed that many housewives had a tendency to leave potholders, utensils with plastic or wooden handles and even chopping blocks in the oven prior to starting the cleaning cycle. In such charred food and self-cleaning oven traumas, we would ventilate the smoke from the kitchen and suggest that the culprit be taken out to dinner that night. Based upon my personal experience, suggesting a dinner out always will lift my wife from her gloomiest depressions, and any day that a housewife calls the fire department must certainly be classified as a gloomy day.

I can remember fires caused by careless gasoline storage and use and by pennies placed behind electrical fuses despite awareness of the dangers involved. Another fire was started by a teenager who, in an attempt to get rid of bees nesting in the walls of his home, sprayed cologne into the cracks around one of the windows. When this didn't appear to have immediate success, he held a lighted match to the area. A short time later, heavy smoke began pouring from the eaves. You must give the boy credit: he got rid of the bees – and most of the walls surrounding the window, which we had to remove to get at the fire between the partitions.

Each winter, we responded to several chimney fires. In most cases, these were caused by the owner trying to burn his Christmas tree after the holidays, or a huge load of paper or trash. Neither of these activities is recommended because the intensely hot flames that result can reach up into the chimney and set the accumulated creosote afire. A chimney fire in progress sounds as if a railroad train is speeding through a house – understandably unnerving to the residents. We could handle the situation with a variety of methods. Most often, we would let the fire burn itself out or use a special flare that emits volumes of oxygen-starving smoke (hopefully up the chimney and not throughout the house). However, sometimes the flames had spread to the wood near the chimney, typically between the walls and we would be on the scene swinging axes for some time.

T.V. sets – particularly the instant-on type when first introduced – were the cause of many fires. Since there were over twenty such fires in our township over a three-year period (two serious fires were even in the same house), my non-scientific conclusion is that those early instant-on T.V. sets were fire hazards. I felt so strongly about this that my first set of this type was always kept unplugged when not in use.

We responded to a dozen or so calls each year involving lightning strikes. Usually such strikes knocked bricks out of the chimney, cracked plaster or did other structural damage. For example, one strike blew the plaster from over all nail heads in the ceiling and walls of several rooms. Another strike neatly sliced through a chimney at the roofline and toppled it into the yard with almost no other damage to the chimney or house. And yet another strike totally destroyed a massive chimney almost brick by brick. In this case, the individual bricks – almost entirely free of mortar – were widely scattered over the roof, the yard and the driveway.

Occasionally a lightning strike would cause electrical problems or cause a minor fire. But every now and then a lightning strike would lead to a major fire that would totally involve the attic and the roof before it could be extinguished. During several electrical storms, more than one building in the township was struck, and the almost simultaneous fire calls that resulted always created some confusion and severely taxed our capabilities. The general practice was not to commit all equipment and manpower to the same area during electrical storms, as there could be (and frequently were) additional calls in other parts of the township. During one particularly violent electrical storm in the area, lightning and thunder were on the rampage. The fire sirens blew and the dispatcher radioed that he had over a dozen house fires reported and more calls were still coming in. All but one of these calls was from the same general area. It turned out that one lightning strike, or a series of essentially instantaneous strikes, hit the electrical system in the area. This caused the wires and fuse boxes at 15 separate homes to smoke, spark and, in several cases, burn. We handled all calls with our usual professionalism, or so it seemed outwardly – way down deep I was pretty apprehensive enroute to that situation. In any event, it all ended well, and I'm sure the neighborhood had lots to talk about for weeks thereafter.

As I'm sure you all know, a violent electrical storm can be really frightening, especially if you are out in the open or, worse yet, up on a roof during such storms. Of course, the helmet, raincoat, bunker pants and boots kept the downpour off of me, but it was only the will of the Lord that kept the lightning itself away.

If I was a little worried during such storms, it was nothing compared to the folks in the buildings struck by lightning. They were generally devastated by the experience, especially when the lady of the house was home alone. In all such cases it was quite obvious that they truly appreciated having several stocky firemen on the scene – not just to control the physical damage, but to soothe some of the mental anguish as well.

Typically, ten percent (20 out of 200) of our calls a year were for automobile fires. They were generally caused by smoking materials dropped in the upholstery, gasoline leaking on a hot engine, electrical shorts or by backyard mechanics pouring flammable liquids into the carburetor. Generally such fires were out-on-arrivals or quite minor and easily extinguished. Because of this, the attitude was frequently, "Ho, hum, just another car fire." And of course, then we'd have a corker – a vehicle totally involved in flames and thick black smoke reaching for the sky. With such a fire (and even with the less spectacular fires), there was always the possibility of someone in the vehicle, of the gasoline tank exploding, of energy absorbing bumpers blowing off, of who-knows-what in the trunk detonating and various other hazards being present. For some time after such a fire, all vehicle fires would be approached with the respect that they deserved. It was something like passing a bad wreck on the highway. For the next few miles, all drivers proceed slowly and with great care. After a while, however, they are back to their old ways. Because of this tendency to get somewhat lax in responding to automobile fires, our training sessions frequently dealt with their many hazards.

Another type of call to which we frequently responded was "the odor call." Whenever there was an unusual smell, the immediate reaction by many people was to call the fire department. For example, every year we received a few fire calls which were subsequently

traced to the characteristic odor which results from stirring up the dust in the heating ducts as the system is started up for the first time in the fall. And then there were the fire calls that came as a result of the smells given off when skunks were trapped in basements, garages and window wells. Why the callers could not recognize this characteristic odor, I'll never know.

Another easily recognizable odor was that given off by an overloaded electrical motor. In the wintertime, I would frequently walk into a house from which a fire had been reported and immediately and correctly diagnose the problem as the furnace motor. In such cases, the residents would be amazed at my expertise (or more precisely, at my well-trained nose). And then there were the smells of relatively minor fires, such as those associated with plastic utensils resting on the heating coils of dishwashers, or burning embers at the bottom of a fireplace ash pit.

Strange noises were also a source of many fire calls. The most frequent was the "chirping" noise that most smoke detectors make when the batteries are in need of replacement. Every so often this noise would be interpreted as the smoke alarm itself. As a matter of fact, there were occasional calls where the emergency dispatcher recognized the "chirping" in the background when speaking with the caller on the telephone. In such cases, he would handle the "emergency" over the phone without the need to roust the volunteers.

Yes, there were many fire calls received as a result of strange odors and noises. At one point, we were receiving so many such calls that they were referred to as "smells and bells" runs.

And of course, there is always the false alarm. In my later years with the department, approximately fifteen percent (30 out of 200 calls) per year might be labeled as false alarms. The vast majority of these, however, were associated with the malfunctioning of alarm systems. Typically, only three or four false alarms per year of a malicious nature were received, with most such calls being from pull boxes in the high school.

There were many fire calls that might be classified as inadvertent false alarms. These were reports of fires where the caller truly believed there was a serious fire, but where, upon investigating, there was no problem at all. For example, such calls might be for the glow of a charcoal grill reflecting in a neighbor's window, or for the flames visible in a portable heater left in a home under construction to dry the plaster. Perhaps the most frequent false alarm of this nature was the report of "smoke" coming from a dwelling that turned out to be the hot, damp air vented from an automatic clothes dryer in cold weather.

In a relatively small, suburban community like Upper St. Clair with its extremely low crime rate, the possibility of arson occurring might seem pretty remote. Yet, while this was true in the 1960s and early 1970s, the number of arson related fires increased substantially in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. Sometimes it was very obvious that a fire was deliberately set. On one occasion, we were called to extinguish a fire in a kitchen. The room was ablaze. The source of the fire was traced to several pieces of furniture stacked on top of the kitchen range and all burners turned on high. A domestic quarrel was subsequently determined to have led to this arson fire.

The front, rear and garage doors of a vacant home were all on fire in another instance. After extinguishing the flames, it was evident that gasoline had been poured under all three doors and ignited – clearly a case of arson. It was later learned that the home was in the process of being sold to a minority family. Those responsible were never found.

The police responded to a report of an unlocked door at the home of people away on vacation. Upon investigation, evidence of nine separate fires was found in different locations in the basement – again, clearly arson was the cause. Thankfully, the fact that the house was completely closed up resulted in all fires extinguishing themselves when the supply of oxygen in the house was depleted. Another family away on vacation was not so fortunate. Their home sustained heavy damages as a result of gasoline being poured down the window wells and into the basement.

New homes under construction were frequently the target of arsonists. In one case, a major fire with damages in excess of \$150,000 in a nearly completed home was followed a few weeks later by a major fire with damages in excess of \$85,000 to another new home under construction. Both of these were clearly arson.

Even the high school was not exempt from arson fires. There was a string of relatively minor fires followed by a major one that destroyed several rooms. All had quite obviously been deliberately set. And then there were several relatively minor trash fires at a local shopping center. Each of these fires was discovered by the same newly hired security guard who just happened to be in the area to discover them. A careful review of his background revealed that he had discovered several fires on each of several previous jobs and, as this was a little bit more of a coincidence that was believable, he was terminated immediately. The fires at the shopping center ceased.

Old, vacant barns and buildings slated for demolition seemed to often fall victim to arsonists. I never understood how such buildings could burn without assistance. The suspicion was based on my first hand experience in trying to set deliberate fires. Let me explain – we occasionally received permission (from the owners and insurers, as well as from the local, state and federal regulating agencies) to burn a building for firefighting training. It usually took gallons and gallons of fuel oil and gasoline to get any kind of fire going. Due to the lack of furnishings and materials in which a fire could get a good start, it was not infrequent to have such roaring fires go out by themselves before our trainees could raise their hoses.

Following all fires, whatever their cause, a formal emergency report was filled out by the chief. Such reports contained such information as the resident's name, the owner's name, location, time, nature of the emergency, actions taken by the fire department, firefighters present, injuries if any and a wide variety of other related, pertinent information (see Appendix. J). Reports were kept on file by the fire department and copies were frequently requested by insurance companies and sometimes subpoenaed by the courts.

One of the blanks on our emergency report form was for "Suspected Cause." In many cases, this would be easy to fill out. For example, if an individual poured a pint of gasoline down the carburetor of a vehicle and it was soon engulfed in flame, the individual's action would

be listed as the cause – even though "Stupidity" might more appropriately fit the bill. On the other hand, there were many situations where the precise cause of the fire could not be pinpointed, and "Unknown" had to suffice.

In every case where the fire was of suspicious origin, an arson investigation was undertaken. Personally, I was never very good at these because I was not suspicious enough; in fact, I was generally overly sympathetic to the fire victims. One of my assistants, on the other hand, was very suspicious and far from sympathetic. On several occasions I had to smooth the ruffled feathers of people he had browbeaten while conducting his investigation. He would suspect the resident, the owner, the builder, the mortgage holder, the neighbors, the kids, the firemen and anyone else who might in any way have ever looked or walked by a property that had burned. When someone is asked a wide variety of questions that subtly and not so subtly imply that they (or their family or friends) might have been involved with the cause of the fire, needless to say they get a little bent out of shape. In such situations, I would be the sympathetic one and attempt to explain the need for such questions.

In such arson investigations, even the firefighters were not above suspicion. Occasionally some or all of the members would undergo lie-detector tests or be called upon to make depositions. In addition, the department by-laws required that all members have their fingerprints on file with the local police department.

While I disagreed with many of our arson investigator's techniques, I couldn't argue with his results. He was extremely successful; the vast majority of the arson fires in our township were solved by this man – a far cry from typical arson cases. He did such a good job, in fact, that his services eventually were sought throughout the county, and he later became a fire consultant-primarily to insurance companies – and is doing rather well at it.

Of all the causes of fires I encountered, the ones most repugnant to me were those deliberately set by firemen. Every so often, the media reports that a few volunteer firemen have been arrested and charged with arson. Generally, this means someone has set fire to an old barn or vacant building, or that someone has caused a trash or grass fire. I can see how this might happen. Many volunteer departments train and train but get very little opportunity to utilize such training. Some eager beavers might therefore decide to encourage a fire or two to demonstrate their proficiency and to possibly become heroes. (I should hasten to note that it is not only the volunteer firefighters who are occasionally involved. In 1984 for example, seven men were indicted, for setting 269 fires in the Boston area: two of the defendants were firefighters and three were police officers.)

For whatever the motives, all such cases have a very detrimental effect on the image of all fire departments, and the vast majority of all firemen that I have ever known have absolute contempt for *any* individual who would deliberately start a fire and even more contempt if that individual was a "brother" firefighter.

In reviewing the causes of the various fires discussed in this chapter and throughout the book, many have one thing in common: they could have been prevented with just a little care and forethought.

Some of the precautions that people can take to better protect themselves, their families and their property from the ravages of fire include the following:

- Installing smoke detectors and periodically checking their operation.
- Establishing escape routes and periodically practicing emergency exit drills in the home.
- Locating emergency escape routes from every building entered.
- Maintaining an active awareness of the possibilities of fire and of its dangers.
- Exercising care in the storage and use of flammable and hazardous material, and periodically checking the safety of its storage.
- Being extremely cautious when using portable heaters and in using all open flames.
- Being cautious with electrically operated devices and avoiding overloading electrical circuits.
- Knowing, or having immediately available, all local emergency numbers.
- Displaying house numbers so that they are clearly visible from the street.
- Periodically having all heating systems, including chimneys and flues, professionally inspected.
- Exercising caution with all smoking materials and certainly not smoking in bed.
- Providing both moral and financial support to the local fire department.
- Making sure that youngsters are never left at home alone and certainly never letting them play with (or have access to) matches, lighters or open flames.
- And last, but certainly not least important, using good old-fashioned common sense.

THE TOWNSHIP



WESTMINSTER CHURCH
(A TOWNSHIP LANDMARK)



SOUTH HILLS VILLAGE



ST. CLAIR COUNTRY CLUB



HOME CHEMISTRY LABORATORIES THAT
LED TO HAZARDOUS MATERIALS INCIDENTS



THE FIRE DEPARTMENT



ORIGINAL MAIN STATION



AFTER 1975 REMODELING



MAIN STATION AT NIGHT



MAIN STATION REAR ROOM
(AFTER 1975 REMODELING)



SUBSTATION GROUND
BREAKING (1976)



USCVFD SUBSTATION
(SILK STOCKING HOSE HOUSE)

THE FIRE TRUCKS



**"OLD BETSY"
1937 WARD LaFRANCE**



**USC'S FIRST LADDER
1945 85 FT. PIRSCH**



**USC'S FIRST
RESCUE TRUCK**



**1978 AMERICAN LaFRANCE
1500 GPM PUMPER**



**1976 AMERICAN LaFRANCE
100-FOOT AERIAL LADDER**



**1983 AMERICAN LaFRANCE
WITH SAULSBURY BODY**

FIRE DEPARTMENT OFFICERS



CHIEF BOB THOMSON



CHIEF BOB THOMSON



ASST. CHIEF JACK BEST



**ASST. CHIEF RAY TOMNAY
CAPTAIN JOE RICKETTS**



**LT. RUSS RAUCH
RESUSCITATOR OPERATIONS**



**LT. DON GERLACH
AIR CASCADE SYSTEM**

THE SANTAS



SANTA'S SLEIGH
LANDED ON A ROOF



THE FIRE DEPT. RESCUED
AND PARADED HIM



SANTA PASSES OUT CANDY
(NOTE THE LACK OF SNOW)
(AND THE SKINNY SANTA)



PART OF A CHRISTMAS CANDY
PASS-OUT CREW



EVEN THE CHIEF SOMETIMES
GETS INTO THE ACT

THE FUND-RAISING CARNIVALS



FUND RAISING IS PART OF THE JOB - BUT NOT INVITING LITTLE GALS TO GAMBLE



THE TRAINING



FIRST AID TRAINING



RAPPELLING FROM A
TEN STORY BUILDING



RAPPELLING FROM A
HELICOPTER



CPR TRAINING



BUILDING RAPPELLING



HELICOPTER RAPPELLING



THERE IS EXTREME DANGER
WHEN THINGS GO WRONG



PREPARING VIDEO TRAINING TAPES



AN OXYGEN-ACETYLENE
CUTTING TORCH IN USE



USING A K-12 ROTARY SAW

WATER AND ITS USES



FOR WASHING THE TRUCKS



FOR TRAINING



FOR PUMPING



FOR FIRE FIGHTING



IT FREEZES IN THE WINTER



AND SO DO THE FIRE FIGHTERS



WATER IS USED IN FIGHTING THE "BATTLE OF THE BARREL"

THE ACCIDENTS



SOMETIMES EVEN FIRE TRUCK HAVE ACCIDENTS
IT IS SURE DEPRESSING TO SEE ONE OF YOUR PUMPERS ON ITS SIDE



MULTIPLE FATALITY ACCIDENTS, WHICH REQUIRED EXTRICATION

THE FIRES



SINGLE ROOM FIRES



ENTIRE BUILDING FIRES

THE FIRES (Cont.)



BARN FIRES



VEHICLE FIRES



CHURCH FIRES



NIGHT TIME FIRES



FIRES IN THE RAFTERS



PORCH FIRES



ROOM FIRES



TOTALLY INVOLVED FIRES



THE AFTERMATH OF FIRES

6 My Involvement

For twenty-three years the fire department was an integral part of my life. This, of course, had a considerable effect on my family. For them, there were many, many disadvantages and very few advantages associated with my being a volunteer fireman. One real advantage was in knowing what was going on. Whenever the sirens would wail, my home monitor would bark out information on the emergency and its location. Shortly after, our phone would be ringing constantly with queries from many of our friends and neighbors. My wife would be the all-knowing expert on why the sirens were blowing, a position which she rather enjoyed.

My home radio was also a source of entertainment and excitement for the baby-sitters we occasionally would have when our daughters were small. One sitter told us years later that she always felt so secure baby-sitting for us, because if she had an emergency, all she needed to do was go to the fire radio and ask for help. I didn't have the heart to tell her that the radio would only receive calls and not transmit them.

The home monitor would go off at the most inopportune times: when I was in the bathtub, eating dinner or high on a ladder painting the house. My wife was elated when we went out to dinner (and she still is); not only did she not have to prepare a meal, but it also meant a few hours away from the darn home monitor. Eventually, electronics progressed to the point where even in the local restaurants (and theaters, and stores and funeral homes, etc.) you were not isolated from emergency calls due to a small beeper or pager that clips to the belt. About the only time I could be sure that the monitor or pager would *not* go off was when I would take a week's vacation and stay at home. Of course, nothing would happen.

About the only time I ever found it possible to get a sound night's sleep without one ear always cocked to hear a possible fire call was when I was out of town. Even then, a fire siren in the night would generally have me up looking for the sky-glow to see if I should get dressed and go watch a "good-one." Whenever I slept anywhere other than my own house, I made a ritual out of checking for possible escape routes in the event of a fire. The only time this caused a problem was when I asked for a different room at a friend's home as the one assigned to my wife and I would be impossible to escape from. The request and subsequent room change embarrassed my wife and possibly irritated our hosts, but I did sleep relatively soundly during our stay.

This practice is part of a more general ritual which I acquired years ago and still practice today: that is, being observant of, and often actually checking on possible emergency escape routes from every building I enter. In the past I have taken a lot of kidding from our friends when I suddenly disappear for a few moments shortly after being seated in a new restaurant to check out the various exits. This sometimes also brings frowns from the chefs in the kitchen and from the management, but it makes me feel more comfortable. Our friends also smile understandingly as I provide free, unsolicited fire prevention advice concerning their homes or attach stickers listing emergency phone numbers to their telephones.

While the home monitor would instantly arouse me from a deep sleep, my family eventually became immune to it. For example, my wife would sleep right through its screaming, even with a huge extension speaker under our bed (placed there so I wouldn't miss any calls). This got me in trouble on one occasion. One day our next-door neighbor asked my wife where the fire was the previous night, as she heard me drive away from the house. My wife, having slept through the alarm as usual, stated that there wasn't any fire call during the night. My neighbor started to argue that there was, but grew pale as she envisioned that I might have been going to a middle-of-the-night rendezvous rather than to a fire. Her obvious suspicion passed instantly to my wife. I got an urgent phone call at work to explain, posthaste, where I had gone in the middle of the night. Fortunately, I had three-quarters of the fire department and one-quarter of the police department to testify in my behalf that we did, indeed, have a fire, and my marriage was saved.

Basically my family enjoyed my fire radio. They objected when I had four different fire monitors plus two police scanners and one CB radio going at the same time. The two-way radio in my car also used to impress my daughter's girlfriends. Their boyfriends were equally impressed with my four-wheel drive vehicle complete with a "FIRE CHIEF" sign, siren, red emergency lights, radios, and loaded with emergency equipment. Although many people thought the township or fire department provided such vehicles, this was not the case. I purchased a four-wheel drive vehicle to avoid putting tire chains on at each forecast of snow or freezing rain.

A one-car garage, two cars, a narrow driveway, and limited parking on our street also presented some problems. I insisted that my car (red, of course, when I became chief) was never blocked in. This required frequent juggling of cars, particularly when we had guests or worse yet, when the beaux of our three teenage daughters came courting. It also meant that my car was normally not housed in the garage. On cold winter nights I would therefore have to take a few extra seconds to quickly scrape the windshield. Since the defroster would not be immediately effective, I would frequently also have to respond to the emergency with my head out of the window.

Over the years my cars have really taken a beating. After an all-night fire at a major shopping mall in below-zero weather, I returned to find my Bronco covered with ice – actually frozen to the ground. That same night I had seen various firemen sitting inside trying to get warm, which meant the engine and heater ran all night. Another time, I drove my car into the area of a major field fire. A wind shift caused me several anxious minutes as flames closed in on the car, but I managed to get the car and myself out in time.

One car of mine really got clobbered. It was parked in the firehall lot. While the trucks were being put away after a fire call, a member very sheepishly asked if I could come outside for a moment. A sick feeling came over me as I saw the end of a shiny red fire truck protruding into both doors and both fenders of the right side of my relatively new car. I can still see the eyebrows of my insurance agent go up when I told him I was hit by a fire truck. He just assumed that I was hit in the middle of an intersection by a truck speeding to a fire.

Over the years I always had a vision of my car running out of gas while responding to a call. Although this never happened to me, it did happen to several of our members (one of whom owned a gas station). The closest I ever came to such embarrassment was when I hit a pothole and blew a tire. Thankfully I wasn't ahead of the trucks and didn't create any traffic problems. My wife and one of our neighbors were not so lucky. An alarm a few blocks away came in while they were having a mid-day coffee session, and they decided to go watch the fire. One block away their car broke down, blocking the road before the trucks had gotten through. My wife and I had a heart to heart talk that night.

Twice I saw smoke coming from my car while at emergency calls. The first was when I left the portable spot light (used to locate the address) "on" and laying on the front seat. On the second occasion, my car was parked roadside with the engine running at an accident scene. Suddenly the car disappeared into a massive cloud of smoke. Further investigation found that it was only steam resulting from a ruptured radiator hose.

On yet another occasion I was responding to an emergency call when suddenly I heard a tremendous clank. The rear drive shaft had snapped in two. Since it was a four-wheel drive vehicle, it was possible to continue on to the emergency, by shifting and delivering power to only the front wheels.

While we did not have a woman's auxiliary, my wife and other member's wives volunteered for all types of jobs. These included: helping with the fund drive mailings; typing reports and letters; washing and mending fire clothing; making deliveries and pickups throughout the township and county; making curtains and slipcovers for the fire hall; helping clean and decorate the fire hall for special occasions; and manning ticket booths for our carnival.

During one Monte Carlo night my wife sold raffle tickets at the door of the fire hall. She was assisted by an equally attractive young lady. At the end of the evening my wife could not understand how her associate had sold so many more tickets than she had, or why the woman drew so much attention from the incoming men. She understood after I explained that the girl in question was an area prostitute – a fact known to many of the men in the township and certainly to all of the firemen – one of whom was responsible for inviting her to assist with the affair. My wife was quite impressed, as she had never to her knowledge met a “real live prostitute.” She was somewhat disappointed though, because if she had known this at the time she would have asked the girl a lot more questions.

The wives of volunteer firemen must truly put up with a lot, so much so that on the average one member was divorced each year. I should hasten to point out that several of these divorces involved the same few firemen (with different wives) over the years. Fortunately, my wife was quite tolerant of my dirty-smelly-torn clothing, my partially eaten meals and my cold body climbing back into bed. She even did not mind my dashing out of church in mid-sermon when the fire siren wailed, an event I halfheartedly hoped for each time I entered the church.

However, she did get very upset on two occasions in my twenty-three years as a fireman. The first "acid test" of our marriage occurred when our daughters were one, three and five years old. We were driving past the firehouse on a cold, dark night when the alarm sounded. True to

the cause, I pulled into the station, opened the car trunk to get my helmet and other gear and dashed off for the trucks and the fire after first telling my wife to drive the car home. Three hours later I returned to find three crying daughters and a wife who was provoked, to say the least, because I had run off with the car keys in my pocket.

The second occasion that created a serious strain on my wife's good nature occurred at a friend's house with four tables of duplicate bridge on the agenda. Five minutes after we arrived, I dashed out for a two-hour fire that left me tired, dirty and worst of all smelly when I returned. In all the years my wife and I played bridge in the township, that was the only time that I really caused a problem (other than bad bids or bad plays.) While our various friends were, I'm sure, always apprehensive about inviting me to their home. This was partially offset by their curiosity about all the goings-on at the department and all the rumors within the township.

On yet another occasion, we had a fireman friend and his wife over for dinner. We were interrupted three separate times during that evening by emergency calls; one just before dinner, one just before dessert and one just after dessert. On each occasion, my friend and I roared off to what turned out to be minor problems while our wives patiently waited; three calls in two hours were extremely unusual in that we had only three or four emergency calls per week, on the average.

With all that my wife had to put up with over the years, the only times she really got upset was when a radio blared that a fireman was "down" and an ambulance was called to the fire scene. She often threatened that if she ever heard that I was hurt, she would be there in a flash. I used to caution her that all we would need is another car blocking the path of the ambulance and another, even more excited, individual trying to "help." This never happened. That is not to say that I was never hurt; on the contrary, I suffered my share of burns, smoke-filled lungs, cuts, bruises and exhaustion. Some of my more memorable injuries were the loss of two toenails and nearly my toes from frost bite during an all night conflagration in below zero weather; dashing from a building, and falling unconscious from a porch into the arms of a policeman after getting an overdose of heat and smoke; having the cap of a hydrant blow off under two hundred pounds per square inch pressure and strike my hand on the way by. This was my only "Code 3" (red lights and siren) ride to the hospital. Fortunately, I suffered no broken bones, only major bruises.

I had many, many near misses – like the time several of us were fighting a fire in the basement of a commercial establishment when a portion of the floor came crashing down, together with a massive refrigerator. Fortunately, there were no injuries. And, of course, I endured many physical discomforts (other than over-eating at the annual fire department picnic) such as frequent aches, pains and colds (from extremes of heat and cold – often at the same emergency), a bad case of poison ivy caught while fighting a field fire in low cut boots and short pants (which is no longer permitted by department rules), and being so exhausted at a fire scene that I could not lift an axe off the ground.

By far the most painful situation I was ever in involved our aerial ladder truck. The truck had four hydraulically operated outrigger jacks or "legs." These legs, which have a spread of eighteen feet, raised the rear wheels of the truck off the ground and provided a solid platform

from which the ladder then operated. During a fire, I was at the hydraulic controls at the rear of the truck raising the jacks, which lowered the truck. In the process, I unconsciously leaned my right leg against the rear tailboard of the truck that was about two-and-a-half feet off the ground at that point. While I operated the hydraulic controls, the tailboard of the truck basically slid down my leg. Had my leg been a little further under the truck the leg bones and kneecap would surely have been shattered beyond repair. As it was, my leg sustained a very nasty injury. Even today when the weather is damp or when I do too much walking, I can feel the slightly rearranged muscles start to protest.

There were three occasions during my firefighting career when my actions almost led to accidents. All three of these involved the operation of our trucks. Since the people involved have long since departed, I suppose I should not dredge up these prior personal embarrassments. However, since they do give additional insight into some of the hazards of being a volunteer firefighter they deserve mention.

I was driving one of our pumpers to a major fire at an out-of-town bowling alley complex. Arriving first on the scene and seeing heavy smoke and flames, I pulled up to the nearest fire plug and planned to hook up with our large diameter hose. Almost immediately the out-of-town pumpers arrived and demanded that their somewhat larger pumper hook up to this choice hydrant. Since it was their fire I shifted to reverse, glanced in the mirror, blew the backup signal on the air horn and immediately let out the clutch. It was only then that I realized that the men on the tailboard had stepped off and were starting to pull hose. I stopped instantly and no one was hurt, but I still get a chill when I think of what might have happened in this moment of excitement (and stupidity).

I was at the wheel of our first ladder truck, a twenty-year-old monster with an eighty-five foot steel ladder. We were responding, hell-bent for election to some type of fire. Proceeding down a main highway, we were supposed to turn at a rapidly approaching off-ramp. When I failed to slow down or turn off, the officer riding shotgun gave me a verbal blast and his well known "you idiot" look. It was only then that he noticed the foot brake was all the way to the floorboards and my frantic attempts to down shift and engage the emergency brake. After the monster was finally brought to rest, I received a reluctant "well done" and his thanks for not trying to take the off-ramp.

The last incident, although it could have had tragic consequences, was actually rather humorous. While learning to drive one of our big pumpers, I pulled up behind a passenger car at a red light. In the process of depressing the clutch, my left foot hit the siren button on the floor. The siren blared out its urgent wail – about ten feet from the open window of the stopped car. Its matronly driver panicked and shot straight through the red light and into the middle of the busy intersection. Fortunately the intersection was clear at that particular instant, but the sound of the rapidly dying out siren was drowned out by a fiery barrage of language that was certainly unbecoming from this grandmotherly type.

I can remember one episode that made me quite nervous to say the least. At four o'clock one morning I was returning home after a fire call. As I turned off the main highway, I noticed the car behind me also turned. This was a little unusual, as most streets in our community are

normally deserted all night long. I made several left and right turns and noted in the mirror that the car was still behind me. My pulse quickened as I turned into the dead-end street on which we lived. As I pulled into my drive the other vehicle parked in front of one of the other five houses on the street. I grabbed my portable radio, raced over to the car, and demanded to know what was going on. My portable radio was poised, ready to call for assistance should that be necessary. The startled driver of the other vehicle said, "I'm leaving seventy copies of the morning newspaper for the paper boy who lives here. What's your problem, Mac?" I sheepishly went home to grab an hour's sleep before the alarm clock went off at five-thirty.

Of course, being a volunteer fireman had some effect on my job. Fortunately (for my career) I worked more than ten miles from the fire station. This was basically out of siren and radio range and was normally too far to return for routine emergencies. (I sometimes did race home when my wife would phone me to report a "good" fire going.) Thus, whenever I left for work, I was "out of service" until I returned ten hours later. Had I worked within or closer to the township I am sure my boss would have fired me for leaving work to respond to the many daytime calls which I certainly would have answered.

During my years as a hose-man, I was late to work about twice per year and took about two vacation days each year on the average as a result of fire department activities. This occurred when a bad fire extended into working hours or when I was just so tired from a late night fire that I could not possibly respond to the toll of the work bell. As chief, a *lot* more vacation days were spent on fire department business. For years I spent almost no time on the telephone at work on fire department matters; however, this also changed radically while I was chief. There were days that my understanding secretary threatened to answer the phone with "Chief Thomson's Office."

Perhaps the most unusual work/fire department-related incident was a telephone call that came in the middle of the night while I normally would have been home in bed. The call originated aboard a nuclear-powered submarine undergoing physics testing for which I was technically responsible. When difficulty arose with the test a call was made to my home. My wife informed the caller that I was out; she failed to mention that I was engaged in fighting a roaring house fire. My unavailability resulted in the call reverting to my immediate boss. Like many managers, he knew few of the details of my work. Therefore, he called my wife and then on her advice, the fire department dispatcher. Several minutes later, I was providing classified, technical advice from the fire ground over our fire radio and a phone patch to the control room of the submarine. My boss chuckled about that "exciting night," but I'm sure his bosses (and certain Navy brass) would have had strokes if they knew about it.

Perhaps my least favorite type of emergency call was the "dumpster" fire. A dumpster is a massive trash bin that can be seen behind most commercial establishments. It is carted in on a large truck and left there until it is full. Then, it is picked up and hauled off to the dump. The contents of such bins frequently burn, often in the middle of the night. Generally there was little possibility of danger to anyone (except the firemen) or anything. Of course the smelly smoke might be of concern to the residents of the area as well as to the environmentalist. In such cases, the only thing to do was to attack the fire.

Trying to fill the massive bin with water and thus drown the fire was always a great idea but it never worked. You had to pull all the trash and garbage out and soak it down. This was a long, tedious and smelly job. It was also somewhat dangerous, as you never knew what kind of trash had been deposited in the bin. There might be paint cans, aerosol cans, fireworks, explosives, poisons, and a wide variety of other hazardous materials. I always hated these types of calls but always went. As a matter of fact, such calls really separated the dedicated firefighters (who always responded) from the dead-beats (who almost never showed up at such calls).

About two weeks before Christmas each year four of our trucks would each load up with candy and a Santa Claus. The candy was passed out to children at street corners throughout the township. Santa on top of a big red fire truck was a sight to see. This brought smiles from young and old alike and cameras were constantly clicking. It was not infrequent that someone would pass you a check (for the department) or offer you coffee (or something even stronger). In addition each year around Thanksgiving, Santa would jump from a helicopter to a local shopping mall. After landing, he would ride around the parking lot on top of one of our trucks throwing candy canes to the enormous mob of people (young and old) who would turn out.

One of the more impressive arrivals of Santa went as follows. The high school band marched through the throngs of people assembled in the parking lot of a local shopping mall. Also included in the line of march were various radio and TV personalities. But alas, where was Santa Claus? Suddenly someone spied him atop of one of the buildings (he got there via the stairs shortly before this). The cheers went up, as did all eyes. What to do? Over the public address system came the solution. Call the fire department to affect his rescue. On cue our 100-foot aerial ladder came from its concealed location with its sirens screaming. Up went the ladder and down came Santa much to the delight of the assembled crowd of several thousand – both young and old. While this "rescue" was well executed, I often wonder what the reactions would have been if the ladder failed to operate properly or if Santa was dropped or somehow injured in the process.

All such parades and candy trips were always of concern to me as a fireman and even more so as chief. The thought of a young one (excited by a fire truck and Santa) dashing in front of or under a truck gave me chills. The precautions of having one of our members walk beside each wheel was of some comfort, but I always felt relieved when such events ended without incident.

By way of summarizing my years as a volunteer (23 including six as a chief) I would estimate the following:

100 emergencies/year x 23 years = 2,300 emergencies

10 hours/week x 50 weeks/year x (23-6) pre-chief years = 8,500 hours

20 hours/week x 50 weeks/year x 6 years as chief = 6,000 hours

Total hours = 14,500.

In comparison to a normal 40 hour per week job this amounts to:

$$14,500 \text{ hours} \times \frac{\text{week}}{40 \text{ hours}} \times \frac{\text{year}}{50 \text{ weeks}} = 7.3 \text{ years.}$$

That is, I donated the equivalent of over *seven* normal work years to our community.

7 The Chief

For my first fifteen years in the department, I consistently declined all major offices. I reasoned that I did not have the time to devote to anything that would require a major effort on a regular basis. I did serve on the board-of-directors for about ten years, which entailed a dull, twenty-minute meeting once a month. For about eight years, I was also in charge of our annual fund drive, to which I devoted a few hours each Sunday evening. The first year on this assignment, my wife and I personally addressed, stuffed, sealed and stamped about 3,000 letters by hand. After that first year of sheer drudgery, I was motivated to create all types of laborsaving devices. Eventually most of the fund drive efforts (except counting the money) were done by computer and other machines.

During my fifteenth year in the department, the existing chief resigned over the bickering and infighting that occurs in most organizations and a new chief had to be elected. Although it is changing today, the election of a chief in many volunteer fire departments was based more on popularity than on experience or qualifications. At that time, neither the liberal nor the conservative factions had a candidate who could be elected. Since I had never strongly defended nor offended either camp, I was the obvious choice to appease all. In a weak moment I consented to run. While I admit that it was certainly an honor, I agreed to serve as chief with a great deal of apprehension.

I soon learned that it was not possible to make everyone happy, nor was it possible to please many members on any specific issue. I also found that the demands on my time, that I had feared for years, were far worse than in my wildest dreams. There were calls with questions ("How should I clean my chimney?"), calls with complaints ("Your siren makes my dog bark!") and calls from friends ("Can you fix a police ticket?"). There were summonses to appear in court (to testify in insurance and accident cases) and frequent requests to speak at and/or attend various functions (Rotary, Scouts, church groups, etc.).

The only thing that made it possible to carry out the tremendous responsibilities of a chief was having two outstanding assistant chiefs: one who handled the time-consuming tasks of fire code inspection and enforcement, permit-issuing, and fire investigations; and the second who handled all vehicle maintenance and repairs. Without the assistance, cooperation and dedication of these men, it would have been totally impossible to function even semi-efficiently as a part-time volunteer fire chief. With their help and the basic support and assistance of most of the other members of the department, it was possible to do a self-satisfying job, to make numerous improvements and to keep my family on speaking terms with me.

The job of fire chief sounds impressive. It is what a lot of young boys (and many older men) dream of becoming. Believe me, it is not always the glamour of racing to the fire in a shiny sedan with sirens screaming and yelling orders through a trumpet. While there are always budget, personnel and equipment concerns, my major worry came from the awesome responsibilities associated with emergencies. When you're first on the scene of a major emergency, a lot of questions race through your mind: about people (Is anyone trapped? Is anyone injured? Is anyone in danger? Will firemen be injured? Will *I* be injured?); about

property (How can we control the situation? How can it *best* be controlled? How can we minimize the damage?); and of course, the questions after the fact (Did we do the right thing? Did we compound the problem? Why did it happen? Who is responsible? How can similar events be prevented in the future?).

In addition, there's always the possibility that you might be sued. In today's environment, you, your department and your township are quite apt to be sued if you do anything at all wrong. Or you might well be sued even if you do everything right but don't do it either as quickly or as well as someone perceives it should be done. A classic example of this was the judgment against the city of Pittsburgh for over \$800,000 for fighting a major \$10,000,000 fire in a warehouse in 1973 in what some people thought to be a "negligent" fashion.

A fire chief receives a tremendous amount of mail. There are the many bills, ads, sales pitches and requests. In the latter category, I received scores of requests to: donate old (and new) fire hose to small, struggling fire departments and to just about everyone who owns a boat (for use as bumpers); pump cellars and pools; fill swimming pools; deliver water to cisterns; give people rides on the fire trucks; make speeches and give tours and demonstrations. However, the most prevalent request was for fire department patches. It seemed to me that half the world collects such shoulder patches and continually hounds the various fire chiefs for one or more. If I had sent patches, to all the people who requested them, I would have used up most of our already limited budget on postage, even if the patches were free.

A far more serious concern for me the entire time I served as chief was the training of my "troops." Well-trained and highly disciplined firemen (both career and volunteer) are essential in any fire department. This is especially true in those all-volunteer departments that have relatively few emergency calls. The following scenario should illustrate why:

- * The dispatcher receives a report of a fire. He promptly alerts the fire department with the message, "Some type of emergency on Washington Road." (No address given and Washington Road is several miles long.)
- * In responding to the alarm in his own car (with blue light flashing), a volunteer collides with another vehicle at a busy intersection – the police department and an ambulance are requested to respond to the accident.
- * In hurrying to get on a fire truck, another fireman slips on a grease spot on the floor of the firehouse. A serious back injury results and another ambulance is dispatched to the firehouse.
- * One of the fire trucks fails to start because both of the batteries are dead (due to improper maintenance) – a battery charger is used to get a jump-start.
- * Since the roads are bare, the tire chains, which are normally on in the wintertime, are unhooked and the truck attempts to drive out of them. Unfortunately, one side of one chain wraps between the dual wheels – the truck stops and men get under it to disengage the tangled chain.
- * Another truck incurs damages to a compartment door that was open when the vehicle left the station.

- * Enroute to the scene, the fire trucks have to waste time by detouring the intersection blocked by the accident, the responding police car and ambulance, and the resulting traffic jam.
- * One truck misunderstands the location of the initial call and heads to the opposite end of town – unnecessary commotion on the radio is needed to get him pointed in the right direction. This is compounded by the very heavy radio traffic as most trucks and fire officers are trying to obtain the precise location and exact nature of the original emergency from the harried dispatcher.
- * In turning a corner, a compartment door flies open on one of the trucks and several cases containing air masks, which would eventually be needed at the emergency, spill out on the roadway.
- * The truck assigned to lay a hose from the hydrant to the fire scene is unaware that the closest hydrant was two houses away and lays over a thousand feet of hose from a hydrant on the next street.
- * The man left at the hydrant to hook up the hose completes his tasks and opens the hydrant before the pumper at the fire scene is ready to receive water. As a result, a river of water flows from the yet-to-be-connected hose.
- * When the pumper is finally hooked up and receives water from the hydrant, the pump operator advances the throttle to build up pressure. The truck then starts to move away since the pump transmission is not properly engaged and the brakes are not firmly set (nor are the required wheel chocks in place).
- * When these problems are corrected, adequate water pressure cannot be obtained because: (1) the hose from the hydrant is connected to a pumper outlet rather than to an inlet, (2) all the drain lines are still open and most of the water was running from the bottom of the vehicle, causing major damage to a nearby lawn in the process and (3) the truck's water tank is overflowing because of an improperly positioned valve.
- * When finally ready to deliver water to the attached hose lines, a discharge gate on the pumper is jerked open and the resulting water surge throws the man on the nozzle to the ground while the hose whips wildly until the water can be turned off.
- * Somewhat later (after an unlocked door has been forced open – and the building is totally involved with fire), control of the deluge nozzle operating from atop the raised aerial ladder is lost and 1,000 gallons per minute of high pressure water beats down onto the cab roof. In the process, the roof is dented in and the paint stripped off. The water does, however, help to cool the rest of the paint on the cab, which is being blistered as a result of the truck being positioned too close to the burning structure.
- * Due to the jumble of fire trucks, police cars and private vehicles of several of the volunteers (who responded directly to the scene), an ambulance has great difficulty getting an injured firefighter to the hospital.
- * At about this point, one of the trucks runs out of fuel. Somewhat later, in shutting the hydrant down, its stem is broken and the water cannot be turned off.
- * Next comes the arson investigator who demands the devastated owner explain why he started the fire. At the same time, the chairman of the fire department fund drive is hitting the owner's sobbing wife for a donation.

Had enough yet?

Sound like a Laurel and Hardy movie?

Of course, I'm being facetious. I certainly do not want to give the impression that the above scenario was typical of our department (or hopefully any department). On the contrary, ours was, and still is, an extremely efficient organization and better than many other departments with which I am familiar. However, each of the above events did, in fact, occur (although some are slightly exaggerated). Fortunately, they did not all occur at once but rather over the fifteen years prior to my becoming chief. I have carefully omitted all goofs that occurred during my tenure for two reasons. First, I would like you to think that the men were so well trained that there were no blunders, and secondly, it's possible that I was not aware of some of the less serious screw-ups, because the "troops" try to hide such things from the chief who would rant and rave for days.

A fire department cannot afford mistakes in emergency situations. You might get by with a minor slip every now and then, but multiple, major errors can be disastrous. So you train, drill, practice and critique while the officers cuss, scream, chew and threaten. Then you do it all over, and over, and over again. In the process, the chief gets gray and develops an ulcer worrying about how his troops will do when the next alarm comes in. If it is any other way, even a minor emergency might turn into a major catastrophe and the already hazardous job of firefighting becomes even more so. A great deal of my time as chief was thus devoted to trying to assure that my firefighters received the best possible training.

The training of volunteers is certainly a challenge. There is an immense amount of material to be covered and relatively little time available in which to do it. Typically, one two-hour training session per week (or the equivalent) is held. Unfortunately, all members cannot (or do not) attend all training session. Jobs, vacations, sickness, family and other commitments and responsibilities often interfere.

Training endeavors are further complicated by the quality of instructors, who normally have little or no professional teaching experience and generally less time available for training than do the trainees. The lack of money can also be a problem. In the early days, we used to train with fully expended canisters in our "gas" masks due to the expense of new canisters. Similarly, for training purposes we often used a water-liquid detergent mixture rather than the costly foam concentrate.

In view of such difficulties, it is possible for a volunteer to go for years without receiving adequate training on various specific items. This was particularly true since our by-laws required attendance at only fifty percent of the training sessions. As chief, I tried (without complete success) to require each member to be formally trained and qualified (and periodically retrained and requalified) on each specific item on a very long list.

The first step in this was to establish a master listing of what each fireman should know and be able to do. (One version of this list is given in Appendix K). Next, a chart was posted on the station wall that identified the qualification and requalification status of each member on

each of the items on the master list. Peer pressure alone helped to get many of the members checked off and up-to-date on this chart.

Various other motivating ideas were also used in an attempt to improve training. Such ideas included the following: the use of pre-printed drill forms, enabling the last-minute presentation by substitute instructors for drills which could then be carried out simultaneously by several small groups of trainees; the use of surprise drills that simulated actual emergencies and which were thoroughly critiqued upon completion; identifying in advance the subject of future training sessions to encourage individual pre-session study, effective in that most members (and the instructors) did not want to appear stupid at the training sessions; modifying training sessions to enable individuals to complete required qualification on individual items as rapidly as possible (since the new men were gung-ho and wanted to learn as much as possible, as fast as possible and since this was in the interest of both the new men and the department, I attempted to encourage it as much as possible); and finally the use of a "Question a Month." For this last idea, a specific question was posted each month in an attempt to stimulate individual study. Members who turned in an answer by the end of the month, when the correct answer was posted, were given special recognition (a star by their name). Those that got the question close to right were really given the VIP treatment – a gold star. A typical question in this series was as follows: "What is the total combined length, in feet, of all rope, hose and cable carried on all of our vehicles? Show subtotals for each vehicle and for each type. Also show any assumptions made."

In order to further assist with the basic problem of training personnel, we utilized commercial training materials (movies, transparencies for overhead projectors, film strips, texts, manuals and slide/tape packages). Unfortunately, these materials were not specific to *our* equipment, *our* operations and *our* unique problems. To offset this, we generated our own training materials in several areas (35 mm slide programs, our unique training manual and various local procedures).

Eventually I received authorization to purchase a minimum basic video system (for approximately \$3,000). This consisted of a color camera, a recorder (and playback unit), tapes, lights, a battery pack and other related equipment. Some of the advantages of using video equipment over other forms of training included:

1. Immediate playback without waiting for film processing.
2. Training tapes produced locally utilizing and emphasizing *local* equipment, *local* procedures and *local* personnel.
3. More flexibility in training sessions.
4. Better utilization of instructors' time.
5. Training sessions instantly available.
6. Periodic retraining/requalification using the tapes.

In addition, the requirements for attendance at training sessions could be increased since it was relatively easy to make up sessions that were missed.

Of course, all this required experience, particularly to zoom, focus, control lighting and perform on-camera tape edits – sometimes while operating hand-held equipment at an emergency scene.

We produced scores of tapes of remarkably high quality using this equipment. These included several tapes on the operation and use of our trucks and equipment. A major set of tapes was prepared to illustrate, in detail, how we laid, used and repacked our fire hoses. Also included was how both the fire hydrants and pumpers are hooked up to supply water.

A portion of an in-depth, formal presentation to all new members was taped. This discussion reviewed all rules, regulations and operations that were essential for new members to know. It also provided advice, guidance and encouragement to the new members. An in-depth look at the fire department was also prepared for small groups of visitors and for use at small community gatherings.

While most of our efforts concentrated on taping various training operations, we also used the video equipment for such activities as:

- Taping emergencies (when and if an operator could be spared from his firefighting duties) for review and discussion after the emergency.
- Taping fire department activities for subsequent showings on the local TV station.
- Judging the performance of various instructors and illustrating areas for improvement.
- Taping actual visits through major buildings in the area to supplement other pre-plan information (printed and slides).
- Interchanging tapes with other departments in the area (in particular, tapes of major emergencies involving mutual aid to analyze firefighting performance and tapes of the fire pre-plan of buildings that would involve mutual aid).
- Showing young visitors to the fire station how they look on the TV screen (with fire helmet and boots on), thus adding to the excitement of their visit.
- Modifying the department's by-laws to require that even more training sessions be attended since making up missed sessions had become considerably easier.

While initially I took a lot of flak about this video program ("Cecil B. de Mille-Thomson"), the entire membership came to appreciate and enthusiastically endorse its use in our department.

I spent a great deal of time developing our training manual. When an article on the manual was published in *Fire Engineering* scores of responses were received (all favorable) from all parts of the country. Extracts from such letters included the following:

"Congratulations on helping to bring your department into the 1980s with your excellent training manual."

"I read the article with great interest having shared your frustration relative to learning how to be a fireman."

"I think you have taken a giant step."

"As I read your article I relived the last 25 years of my life in the fire service."

"I thought only departments in my part of the country were unique in that information was hard to come by. After the first two paragraphs of your article, I find we are not unique after all."

"Thanks for your article because it got me off dead center so I too can provide information to our people."

Many letters also contained requests for copies of our manual. Unfortunately, printing and mailing copies of the 400-page manual would have been extremely costly. Also, much of the manual was, as intended, specific to our equipment, our vehicles and our operations. What I was able to do was make copies of the Table of Contents and of approximately thirty pages that I felt would be of assistance to others in the preparation of their own training manual.

When sending this material to the scores of requesters, I asked that a nominal check (for one or two dollars) be returned to cover the cost of reproduction, envelope and postage. My faith in personnel in the fire service was badly shaken when only about five in 100 returned anything. While this proved to be an expensive lesson, I did take satisfaction in the belief that such materials might have helped to improve the knowledge of a few firemen somewhere.

In addition to the publication of the training manual article, I had many other articles published in national fire magazines and journals including: *Fire Engineering*, *Fire Command/Fire Service Today*, *Firehouse* and *Rekindle*, as well as in the state journal, *Pennsylvania Fireman*.

Due to the difficulty many of our members had in understanding the various water pipes and valves associated with our pumpers, I prepared a simplified plumbing schematic drawing (see Appendix L). Because of its effectiveness in training our members, it was published in the fire service instructor's journal, *Rekindle*. In addition, since this drawing was directly applicable to our American LaFrance pumpers, and since it was far better than the diagrams that came with our pumpers, I also sent it to American LaFrance for possible inclusion in their future manuals. To my knowledge this was never done.

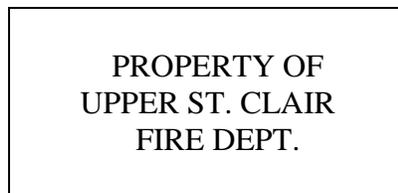
Other improvements I made while chief were the development of qualification and requalification requirements for the operators of our emergency vehicles (see Appendix G) and the development of improved methods to keep track of the vast amount of equipment owned by the department. Such methods included:

1. Vehicle inventory sheets, used to list and periodically inventory all equipment carried on each vehicle.

2. Station inventory sheets, similar to the above sheets but for all equipment housed at the stations.
3. Equipment identification practices, used for the marking, and in some cases, the serialization of all of the department's equipment.
4. Equipment removal sheets, used to sign out and to show the current location of all equipment removed from service.
5. Vehicle and equipment problem sheets, used to identify all deficiencies that should be corrected (it can't be fixed unless you know it's broken).
6. Equipment training forms, used to familiarize new members with all of the department's equipment and in the periodic retraining of all members.

I also helped make our two buildings more readily recognizable from the road as fire stations. I purchased and had mounted massive signs that pictured a fire truck and spelled out in large letters "FIRE STATION." These signs, which cost over \$50 each, were an instant hit. Within a week of the erection of two by the highway near the main station, both were stolen (either by local teenagers for bedroom decoration or possibly by visiting firemen who thought they would look great near *their* station). We replaced them as they periodically disappeared.

Along the same lines, I began utilizing property stickers. At major emergencies involving different fire departments, it was generally difficult to tell what equipment belonged to what company. Similarly, when equipment or furniture was borrowed from our department (such as folding chairs), there were usually minor disputes afterwards about what belonged to whom. To help remedy this situation, I had scores of adhesive stickers prepared which read:



I attached these stickers to essentially all our equipment and furniture. For years after, I took a real riding over this, and I'm not really sure why. While it did help to keep track of our property, there were many occasions when these stickers mysteriously appeared on my coffee cup, on my eyeglass case and occasionally on the pencils and pens that I attached to our clip boards by long strings to help discourage their inadvertent removal.

I also improved on electrical safety. For a considerable period of time, all our electrical equipment was powered using un-grounded, two-wire extension cords. This included an electrically powered hose washer, for which the operator had to stand on a water-covered, cement floor. It is a wonder someone was never electrocuted. One of my first "edicts" was to absolutely prohibit the use of all two-wire, non-grounded electrical systems and to convert all of our electrical equipment to the much safer three-wire, grounded systems.

For many years, our department was somewhat lax in meeting requirements such as six-month truck inspections, five-year hydrostatic testing of all air/oxygen tanks/flasks, periodic testing of the purity of our breathing air and the notification of the state police of emergency

lights on the vehicles of members. Upon becoming chief, I insisted upon full compliance with these and all other laws, rules and regulations.

When I became a member, there was no indoctrination into the department, no explanation of the rules, and little help in learning the "business." Under my supervision, this changed. I required each new member to undergo a two-hour indoctrination session before he was allowed to do anything. In such sessions, most aspects of the department were reviewed, as were the member's rights, duties and responsibilities. In addition, a training manual was issued and specific study assignments were given. By so doing, there could be no excuse that a new man did not know what the rules were or what was expected of him.

I wrote a monthly article on our activities for the local newspaper. In addition, a presentation consisting of 100 action-packed, full-color slides dealing with the fire department and its operation was prepared and presented to any group that would listen. I also initiated the preparation and publication of a pamphlet that was mailed annually to all residents of the township, together with a request for funds. This pamphlet included various statistical information about fire department activities together with a listing of all emergency calls for the previous year (see Appendix M).

An in-depth summary of all fire department activities was published yearly, primarily for the benefit of township officials. This summary included such items as the most likely time for an emergency (between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. on a Saturday in April). While such conclusions were not particularly meaningful, in that they were based on very limited statistics, they always brought smiles. In view of the public interest in fire-related activities, extracts of these yearly reports were always published in the local newspapers.

With my training in photography in the Air Force, I was the department's photographer for years. This included taking photos of fires (primarily of practice fires or of real ones after they were extinguished), trucks and equipment (for training) and local buildings (for use in our fire pre-plan training).

The best of such photos were framed and decorated the walls of our main station. As chief I also made it a practice to present to each line officer (at my expense) a mounted photo at the end of the year. These photos were my way of saying "thanks" for their assistance.

Another major accomplishment during my tenure as chief was the enactment of a very tough smoke detector and sprinkler ordinance in the township. In substance this legislation required:

1. A minimum of two smoke detectors in all residences and in various other buildings (both new and existing) to be enforced upon the transfer of the property or upon the issuance of a certificate of inspection for remodeling.
2. An approved sprinkler system in all new or modified industrial, mercantile and office buildings in excess of two stories.
3. An approved sprinkler system in all new or modified industrial, mercantile and office buildings in excess of 7,000 square feet.

4. An approved sprinkler system in all new or modified multifamily dwellings in excess of two stories.

The instigator and prime mover behind this legislation was the township fire marshal (and assistant fire chief) with support from the entire fire department. The principal opponents were many of the builders and developers in the area. It was a long, drawn-out battle with many public hearings, extensive media coverage, some name-calling and a few hot tempers. In the middle of this debate, the MGM Grand and the Hilton Hotel fires occurred in Las Vegas. These disasters aided our cause even though some critics argued that such things "could never happen here."

Eventually the legislation was passed to our satisfaction. The next step was to set a good example for the township and to comply with the spirit of the new law. Although our two fire stations did not fall under these laws, we installed fully automatic sprinkler systems in both of them. This also gave us the satisfaction of knowing that our two million dollars worth of trucks, buildings and equipment was reasonably well protected. Protected from what, you might ask: from fires that destroy several fire stations each year with disastrous effects on the communities (to say nothing of the embarrassment to the fire departments involved).

During the course of public hearings on improving the township fire code (with the news media present), a local "expert" challenged the fire department's estimates of how many hose lines (each flowing about 250 gallons per minute) the department could handle. He alleged that, "you can get 250 gallons per minute from a garden hose and that fire engines can deliver 1,500 gallons per minute."

Because of this it was necessary to take the time to write a nice open letter to the township, to the press and to the "expert" which explained that: (1) a garden hose would only deliver about 10 gallons per minute and (2) that while our pumpers could indeed deliver 1,500 gallons per minute, a minimum of three firemen were required to hold each hose line flowing about 250 gallons per minute.

This was an example of a type of unsolicited assistance that we did not need.

One of the many frustrating aspects of being a firefighter in a volunteer fire department (and probably in a career department as well) is not knowing all of the details about the various emergency calls. When the alarm sounds, you stop whatever you are doing (sleeping, eating, bathing, etc.) and dash off to the fire station. Here you don your protective equipment (helmet, boots, bunker pants, fire coat and gloves), climb aboard the next truck to leave the barn and race off to the scene with the siren screaming.

Frequently a radio message will be received before you arrive at the scene, ordering you to return to the station. Such orders come from one of the chief officers, who respond directly to the scene in his own, radio-equipped vehicle. In such cases, they have sized up the situation and have concluded that further assistance is not needed. In some cases, by the time you have arrived at the station, all remaining trucks have already been ordered not to respond at all. In either case, you remain at the station until it is clear that additional manpower will not be needed

and that you are thus free to leave. You can then return to your bed, or dinner, or grass cutting or whatever you were doing before being summoned by the fire alarm. You might also elect to remain at the station and shoot the breeze. Even at 4 a.m. a group of guys would gab for the rest of the night. Not me – I would generally scoot home to try to catch a few more winks before the darn alarm clock went off at 5:30 a.m.

Whether you stayed or left, you normally knew very few details of the emergency. The chief would eventually come back to the station and immediately head for the seclusion of his office to prepare the required report. After its completion, a copy would be hung on a clipboard for all to see, but it gave little insight into the details. The report would contain brief factual information but nothing dealing with the human side of the matter. This was always frustrating to me. When I lose sleep in the middle of the night, I really like to know all the minute details of why. Also, when my friends and neighbors asked me about the details of a specific fire call, I always felt a little stupid when I knew little more than anyone who had monitored the fire frequency on the radio.

After I became chief, all this changed – for me at least. Now I went directly to the scene, generally arriving first and certainly before the arrival of any fire trucks. I would obtain all the details needed to handle the emergency and write the report and whatever else might be needed later, possibly for insurance companies or even courts of law.

By far the most interesting information I obtained pertained to the emotional aspects of the situation, which usually never showed up on any reports. On many occasions I would even stay and have a cup of coffee with the folks who had had the emergency to help calm them down or to offer advice and guidance on recovering from the problem (what steps to take next, thoughts on insurance, etc.). I was often amazed at how emotionally shook-up people are who have just experienced a fire. This was not only true for the little old ladies home alone with major fires, but for large, otherwise stable families, with relatively minor fire problems (such as a little smoke coming out of the ash pit).

As chief, I tried to avoid calling off the fire trucks too soon, but I would certainly call on the radio and tell them to come in slowly, without sirens, if they were not really needed. This would let the troops feel they were directly involved. In addition, having the trucks seen in the neighborhoods had to be good for our fund drive, even if the people who called the fire department would have preferred much less commotion. Especially if the problem was, or subsequently turned out to be, quite minor. (It is interesting that most people that I dealt with were embarrassed to have called the fire department – except when dealing with major fires.)

I also tried to make the many details of all emergency calls available to all members in reports, subsequent formal critiques and informal discussions. I'm not sure that I was always successful at this, but I sure remembered how I, as a hose-man, use to long for the details of each call. Possibly the answer here is that if you want such details, then you should work hard and someday you may be a chief officer and in a position to learn everything you ever wanted to know and then some. On the other hand, if you're not interested, then just stay on the tailboard of the fire truck (that is, remain a hose-man) or better yet, stay in bed, as you would not be much

of a fireman if you're not always looking for the cause of fires, how to stop them faster, how to prevent them in the future and how to aid and comfort the fire victims.

My biggest disappointments in being a fireman and then a fire chief usually stemmed from the feeling that I was not able to do even more to: stop fires before they did so much damage; better educate the public to the dangers of fire and the merits of the fire department; better motivate the members to be the most efficient firemen possible; and to maintain the trucks, buildings and equipment in the finest possible condition.

Other disappointments came from: not being able to convince the membership to change the department by-laws to require such things as periodic physical examinations for all members and competitive examinations for all line officer positions; not being able to provide the township with more reliable fire protection during normal working hours on weekdays (our most vulnerable time), possibly by means of a few paid, career firemen; and not being able to turn the reigns over to a full-time, paid, career fire chief who would not only be available to answer daytime and most other calls but who would also be able to devote far more of his time than I was to the very important and extremely demanding job of fire chief.

While I was chief, the average number of hours of time put in per man was about 6 1/2 hours per week. This figure was for all 35 members and reflects only the events for which time was officially recorded (fires, drills, schools, etc.). This did not include the many events for which times were not logged (informal meetings, social events, committee work, driver training, etc.).

Of course, the time put in by a chief was considerably greater than that by the average member. When I think of the phone calls, letter writing, informal meetings, report writing, lectures, preparing for meetings/drills and all the other duties involved with being a chief, I typically devoted well over twenty hours per week to the department.

This reminds me of a story my wife tells. When one of our neighbors of a year or so heard that I was a nuclear physicist she said, "Oh, no! You must be wrong – he's the township fire chief." She could not believe that I could handle two major jobs as well as being a husband, father and homeowner.

After six years of being chief, I decided to step down. This decision was based on several factors: first, I felt I had used up many of my ideas on how to improve the department; second, I thought that new blood was needed in any position after five years or so; third, I was getting older and it became increasingly difficult to keep up the pace; and fourth, my three daughters had moved to different parts of the country and my wife deserved more of my time; and finally, I grew discouraged at the amazing lack of appreciation (by the public and by the members) of the time and effort involved.

Accordingly, I reverted to being a hose-man once again and subsequently retired completely from active duty. After I retired from the fire department, I immediately *lost* twenty pounds. That's right, *lost* weight. How could that be? All my worries were over; the stress and strain stopped as did the ringing of my phone; my wife and I went out to eat and on vacation trips

far more frequently; the hectic pace and considerable physical activity came to an end; my sleep was no longer interrupted by the darn fire alarm; and there were no more missed or partially missed meals resulting from dashing away on emergency calls.

It finally dawned on me. During the long hours spent at the fire station, there were always plenty of snacks to be had. A monstrous bag of potato chips was frequently open on the radio desk and there was always something readily available to drink. Following many events (emergencies, drills, meetings, etc.), someone would go out for pizza or hoagies (or have them delivered). For early morning events, a donut run would be high on the priority list. On the way home at night, a few of us would stop at the local ice cream shop for dessert. Then there were the picnics and the parties that were really food orgies in disguise.

Based on these observations, maybe I can sell the idea that the potbellies on many volunteer firefighters are the result of such bad eating habits, rather than from the popular belief: beer guzzling. I am now convinced of this, but I'm not sure that too many others will buy it.

Over the years there were a few "well done's," but not many. There were also a few comments upon my retirement such as, "the guy who follows you, whoever he might be, will never do as good a job as you." My favorite comment, however, and that which I think is typical of volunteer firemen was, "You did more good than harm." Even considering the source, I still don't quite know how to take that one.

I should note that my retirement as chief did not go unnoticed. There were several articles in the area newspapers as well as a super dinner at a local hotel, with all members of the department and their wives (or girlfriends), local and state officials, representatives from the surrounding fire departments, and many, many friends in attendance. It was a splendid night with many speeches, surprises and gifts – an occasion that both my wife and I will always remember. Subsequently there was a dinner and an award presented by the area Rotary Club. Such recognition went a long way to offset my observations over the years that many people, if not most, have little appreciation for the fine job done by millions of volunteer firemen throughout the world.

8 Unusual Calls and Stories

I'm sure that our police and fire dispatchers could fill pages and pages with tales of the many "unusual" calls that they have encountered over the years. Several of those that I am familiar with are discussed herein. Occasionally a caller would report that his or her house was on fire and then hang up. About all we could do with such a call was to send out the trucks to different areas of the township and wait for more calls. Of course we had another option – to wait for smoke to show on the horizon. On one occasion, a caller asked if the fire department charged for its services. When the dispatcher assured her there was no charge, the caller requested that the trucks respond to what ended up being a potentially serious basement fire in her \$300,000 home. Apparently she would have attempted to negotiate the best possible price before making a commitment if there was a charge. One caller even said, "I only have a small fire. Please send an unmarked truck."

Of course, many calls transmitted over the police and fire networks must have really sounded strange to the people monitoring these frequencies. I'm sure more than a few chuckles were caused by the following transmissions:

"Truck Six, please return to the scene of the last fire."

"Truck Six returning. What's up?"

"Truck Six, you forgot the Chief."

"Any car available near Lambeth Drive?" Silence; no cars answered. The dispatcher then altered his call to say, "A naked female reported to be in the middle of Lambeth Drive." Several cars immediately reported to be available for the detail and the dispatcher responded with "Calm down guys, she's only four years old."

"Car Four, respond to a call by a lady who said, 'Send a car at once. My husband just ran out with a baseball bat chasing a car turving our lawn.'" A few minutes later, Car Four requested, "All cars be on the look-out for a yellow VW with a smashed windshield and a broken headlight."

"There's a house fire on Warwick Drive."

"Truck One enroute to Warwick Drive."

"Ten-nine, Truck One." This meant that the dispatcher did not understand Truck One's last transmissions and requested that it be repeated.

"Truck One, ten-four." This last transmission meant that Truck One understood the dispatcher. Thinking that "ten-nine" meant return to the station, Truck One did just that – while the fire on Warwick Drive burnt merrily away.

"Dispatcher, can you give me a more precise location for 37 Morrow Road?"

Irate response: "Yes – it's the house with a lot of black smoke coming out the second floor windows."

Some of the dispatchers did a super job. They obtained and then relayed all details of an emergency, the location of the closest water supply, the exact location of the fire and various other useful and necessary information. On the other hand, some dispatchers merely relayed what they had been told (or possibly even less) by an often-distraught caller – for example: "The fire department is needed at Berkshire and York." With this as the only information, it would not be clear whether we were needed for a fire or an accident, if the problem was in a building, in a vehicle or on the street. For that matter, it wouldn't even be clear that an emergency existed at all. We wouldn't know what equipment to respond with, or what to look for when we did.

Another type of dispatch that caused problems was the "Fire at Joe Smith's house" call. While the dispatcher might indeed know where to find Joe's house (and sometimes this wasn't even the case), you could be sure that not all the responding firemen would know. This was not always the dispatcher's fault. Sometimes the only information received from a panicky caller was that there was some type of fire-related problem at some vague location. In fact, it might be anything from an overheated lawnmower to an overturned 18-wheeler near the high school loaded with high-octane gasoline.

I guess that's what made being a volunteer fireman so interesting. You never really knew what the call would be when you were alerted (especially in the days when all alerting was done only by pole-mounted sirens), and you never really knew what the apparent problems were until you arrived at the scene. Generally, each emergency was quite different; many involved real surprises, and almost all had to be handled differently.

Talk about surprises. One night we were called to a relatively minor appliance fire during a blinding snowstorm. Everything was soon under control and we were about to leave. At this point, the elderly resident collapsed into our arms with a heart attack. Apparently all of the excitement was just too much for her. Prompt first aid was given and she was quickly transported to a hospital (during the fierce storm), where she soon recovered completely. Possibly she would not have survived had we not been there (on the worst night of the year) to provide assistance. On the other hand, she might not have had the heart attack had we not been there, but I would prefer to believe the former.

My sympathy always went out to people who were caught doing what might politely be called "unusual" things but were really quite dumb things. A prime example of this is the girl who got two fingers stuck in the small, ring-size holes in the arm of a theater seat. We got the call as a "rescue" at the auditorium of the local high school. When we arrived, we found the musical show interrupted and the house lights raised. A thousand people watched while we attempted to free the girl. Unable to free the finger on her left hand from the left arm of the chair, we cut off the chair arm with a hacksaw, rationalizing that her finger could be removed from the hole at the hospital. It was only then that we realized that a finger on her right hand was stuck in a hole in the right arm of the chair. The second chair arm was sawed off, the girl was taken to the hospital, and the

show resumed. I often wondered how the poor girl got up the courage to return to school the next day after her "rings" were removed (by soaking for hours in cold water).

Over the years, I never ceased to be amazed at the episodes of people simply not using their heads. Such as the individual who "tested" his fire alarm (wired to the alarm panel in the dispatcher's office) at midnight. He suspected that his system worked when he heard the sirens wail – he knew for sure when the trucks arrived and several disgruntled firemen pounded on his door. Or the housewife, who placed a large roast in the oven, set the timer to self-start the oven at an appropriate time for dinner and then left for the Thursday afternoon bridge game. Unfortunately, she set the self-cleaning cycle rather than the normal oven controls. The result was a cremated dinner, fire damage to the stove and part of the kitchen and a house full of very thick, greasy smoke.

And there was the garage owner working on one of our fire trucks who decided to park it outside in the bitter cold for a few hours, forgetting that it contained hundreds of gallons of water. The result was several ruptured tubing lines. Or the policeman who in a panic radioed that his car was full of smoke and on fire, only to have the fireman find out that it was a dry powder-type fire extinguisher in the trunk that had discharged by accident.

Some incidences were not so funny; such as the policeman who lost control of his cruiser and crashed into the side of a house while responding to a fire call – no major injuries, but loads of damage and embarrassment. Or the boys who filled a length of copper tubing with match heads, and then tamped in the heads with a screwdriver for a tight pack. The result was an ear-shattering explosion that seriously injured the boys with flying shrapnel.

Firemen, of course, were not exempt from acts of stupidity – such as the probationary fireman undergoing driver training on a hill. A fast start dropped the entire load of hose (3,000 feet) on the roadway. The department had to be called out to repack it. Or the experienced fireman who failed to notice a length of hose dragging behind the truck enroute to a small field fire. The consequence was 3,000 feet of hose laid enroute, with all available personnel needed to repack the truck. Another time, an officer was conducting driver training on our new ladder truck shortly after its arrival from the factory when it ran out of fuel in the dead center of an intersection. The result was many irate motorists, who had to detour until someone was found who could prime and restart the first diesel engine in the area. When our next diesel-engine truck arrived, this same officer was somewhat smarter. While conducting driver training on this truck, he immediately stopped and shut down the engine when the fuel tank ran dry and the engine coughed. Although the engine did not have to be primed, he was embarrassed to have to call for more fuel over a secondary radio frequency. He was even more embarrassed when the fuel was delivered – not secretly by his buddy, but by the irate fire chief who had been monitoring this particular radio frequency. And then there was the new fireman who spent his first five minutes at his first fire trying to find a pair of rubber boots that would fit over his shoes. They don't!

Of course I committed my share of dumb acts. I should probably tell about one of them or several of my friends will demand equal time. My most embarrassing moment came one very cold winter night. It was one of those rare occasions when my car was parked in the garage.

Responding to a three o'clock call, I shoved open the roll-up garage door, jumped into the car, started it up and let out the clutch, all in the same breath. The crunching, tearing sounds were unbelievable. Lights came on in bedroom windows for at least a block. In my haste, the garage door had gone up and then silently rolled back down, part of the way. The rapidly moving vehicle did an excellent job of ripping the door from its tracks, sending splintered wood throughout my yard, the street and the neighbor's yard across the street. I resisted the temptation to (1) cry, (2) put the car away and go back to bed or (3) drive over the mess and head for the fire. Instead, I turned off my red emergency light, cleared the debris, waved to the peering heads and slowly drove to the fire station, where all trucks were backing in by now

While I plead guilty to this goof, I would hasten to note that similar "accidents" occurred at the firehouse on several occasions. On one of these, a fireman, checking our first diesel, pushed the start button while standing next to the truck. The truck roared to life, and as it was left in gear, took off through the garage doors. Thankfully, it stalled out against an embankment across the street.

Another incident involving our garage doors was as follows. In responding to emergency calls, we normally never stopped to close the doors. Heat was lost in the winter, and the building was vulnerable to damage and theft from uninvited visitors. So, we installed automatic garage door closers, which lowered the doors three minutes after they were opened. One day a truck made it to the end of the driveway before it was ordered by radio to return. The driver shifted to reverse – and backed up. Yes – you guessed it: the heavy overhead door came down, mashing in the cab roof, bending radio aeriels, breaking lights and doing considerable other damage.

I can see the humor in most of these situations now, but at the time, it was pretty difficult. Sometimes episodes were so scary that looking back I still shudder to think about them. One such situation involved the ever-unpredictable garage door opener. An automobile in a garage was on fire, and the garage door was open. We had partially knocked down the fire when two firemen entered the garage with a hose line. It wasn't until they were well inside the garage that the control circuitry for the door shorted out due to the fire and the garage door closed. Several anxious minutes passed for those two men, who were trapped in a smoke- and heat-filled garage with their only exit blocked. A few hastily placed axe blows corrected the situation.

Fires involving propane tanks were always of great concern. Fortunately we never encountered major problems, even though the number of propane-related emergencies increased significantly over the years when natural gas was in short supply. These tanks were used in connection with the heating of residences and commercial establishments, for cooking (indoors and out), in industry and for the propulsion of certain vehicles. One particularly scary situation occurred at a major fire in an area restaurant. A masked fireman emerged from the smoke-filled building to announce, "Several propane tanks in the kitchen are about to blow!" Panic reigned. Eventually it was found that the tanks contained compressed gas used to carbonate drinks and were far less dangerous than propane. One of the tank connections was leaking slightly, giving off a soft hiss. There never was any real danger, but we certainly didn't know it at the time.

One unforgettable emergency several years ago was reported as a furnace explosion. When we arrived, the furnace room was fully involved. My partner and I grabbed a hose and

attacked the fire with a vengeance. In short order, we had knocked the fire down and busily set about congratulating ourselves on a job well done. For some reason, after you have gotten a lung full of hot, dirty smoke, a cigarette tastes really good. We were enjoying just such a smoke, still smiling about our "great save," when the chief burst in and raised hell. "What are you resting for when everyone else is killing themselves, and the house is in danger of being lost?" he demanded. We found out what he meant when we emerged from the basement. The entire roof of the building was ablaze. The flames had made their way straight from the basement to the attic between walls that did not have fire-stops. After several more hours on the scene, we managed to save not too much more than the foundation and the chimney. The lesson here is what fire textbooks call "checking for fire extension" before assuming the fire is under control.

Early one evening, a fire started in the trash behind a small local store. The rear of the building was slightly involved, and a considerable amount of smoke had filled the building. Upon entering, we found an employee washing his hands in a smoke-filled men's room at the rear of the building. For some reason, he wouldn't respond to our requests to leave, so we forcibly ejected him from the premises. Only then did we learn that he had burned his hands trying to get some of the flaming and smoldering materials away from the building. He wasn't washing his hands, but trying to cool them and subdue the pain. Naturally we felt pretty bad about his rough treatment.

I was to jump to conclusions again years later, while I was chief. A call came in as an electrical fire in a residence. The two assistant chiefs and I responded in our separate vehicles. When I arrived, I found one of the assistant chiefs sitting in an overstuffed living room chair. In a voice ringing with sarcasm, I asked if he was quite comfortable. He had turned his ankle upon entering and was in severe pain. My concerns at that point became twofold: the electrical fire (which turned out to be quite minor), and the injury (which was quite serious). It has often been said that when a fireman is injured during an emergency, you not only lose that man but at least two others, who must attend to the injured man, as well. This fire call was a perfect example, and this story was frequently retold in our training sessions – minus my sarcasm.

Some calls were not so much unusual as they were bizarre. One strange call concerned an assist to the police department in search of an injured boy. A car, traveling down the state highway that runs through the township, hit a boy on a bicycle. The bike smashed the windshield of the car, and the boy was tossed to the road by the impact. The driver immediately stopped and dashed into the closest house to call for an ambulance. When the police arrived, there was no sign of the lad. It was thought that he must have crawled into the nearby woods in shock, or maybe in embarrassment. The fire department was called to assist.

While tramping through the woods, we were informed that not only was the boy missing, but also his damaged bicycle. Our search broadened further and further, and a long hour went by. We would probably still be searching had a curious spectator not volunteered some information when he heard what our search entailed. An hour earlier, he had seen a young boy carrying a very beat-up bike on his back down a side road. We gave up our search. Although the police continued to investigate for weeks, neither the boy nor his bike was ever found.

There is still the possibility, however, that the driver's insurance company might someday get a claim resulting from this "hit and run" accident – where the running was done by the victim.

Late one night, we again were called out to assist the police. They had surprised a burglar as he attempted to break-in to a residence. He fired a pistol at the police and headed for a small patch of woods nearby. Scores of police converged on the area to seal it off. The fire department was called upon to flood the area with light while the police flushed out the culprit. The wives of most of our members – and even a few members themselves-did not appreciate the fire department being used for such a hazardous assignment. I thought little about the possible risk – until later, that is, when the burglar was found hiding not more than twenty feet from where I had been standing during most of the search.

It often seemed as if our strangest calls did not involve fires. For example, one night a water flow alarm was received at a large mall in our township, indicating that either one or more sprinkler heads had let go or that a fluctuation in the water pressure had resulted in a false trip. Since the water gong outside the building was not sounding (it was later found to be defective), we thought we had just another of our periodic false alarms. To double-check, however, we went to the sprinkler control room and found that water indeed was flowing somewhere. But where? In which of the thirty or so stores and offices – all of which were closed for the night? Hand lights were flashed in all doors and windows. Nothing seemed to be out of the ordinary. We couldn't just bust in thirty or so doors, so calls were placed to all the store managers to come and open up. While these calls were being made, someone noticed that water was coming from beneath a solid door at the rear of a bank. With some glee and enthusiasm, we broke into the bank, activating the burglar alarm. We found that a sprinkler head had malfunctioned in a records room upstairs. Records were soaked and floating. The water had seeped through the floor, ruined office calculators and drenched computer equipment at the rear of the bank on the floor below. Our tarpaulins, mops, buckets and squeegees really got a workout that night. A few weeks later, the problem recurred. This time the bank and stores were open – not for long, though, as it was necessary to close both the bank and the department store below it due to the cascading water.

There were many unusual rescue calls that called for a lot of ingenuity. One such call involved a worker who had fallen into a 24 inch in diameter, 30 foot deep bore hole at a construction site. How could we get him out? The ground around the lip of the hole was relatively soft and the possibility of a cave-in existed. The answer was simple. We positioned our aerial ladder about 100 feet away with the ladder fully extended –almost horizontally. A rope was lowered into the hole from a pulley at the tip of the ladder. Attached to the end of the rope was a harness that the worker squirmed into. We then pulled on the rope and, slick as a whistle, up came the worker. He is still singing our praises.

Almost all emergency calls are different; therefore, there's always something to be learned from each one. One classic educational experience was as follows. In our department, there was a standard practice at all vehicle accidents. Part of this practice was to hook up a hose line to a truck's water tank, with men standing by on the nozzle of that line. To the general public and to certain of our members, I'm sure this used to seem unnecessary. At one particular

accident scene, however, this procedure was followed while other members were in the process of freeing a victim trapped within an automobile. Two firemen had climbed inside the demolished vehicle when the entire area exploded into flame as spilled gasoline, radiator alcohol, and other flammable fluids ignited. The men on the standby hose immediately controlled the situation. Afterwards, there were seldom any questions or complaints about that particular procedure.

Another lesson was learned the hard way on the roof of a building on a cold night. A small fire between the walls was put out by dousing it from above with water. To be sure that it was out (without cutting into the walls), we waited for several minutes. All smoke had long since dissipated. As a precaution, we put in a few more gallons of water from the hose being fed by the tank on one of our pumpers. Immediately, smoke rose from the opening. More waiting, more water, more smoke. By now, we were ready to open the walls. At this point, some sharpie pointed out that it was not smoke but steam – from the warm water hitting the cold bricks down below. Where did the warm water come from? From the pump on the fire truck churning the same water over and over all the time we waited for the last ember to die, thus causing it to heat up.

During my career, I was at only one fire in a spaghetti factory. However, it was a corker – an assist call to a distant city. The entire top floor of a multistory building was on fire. Large deluge guns on the ground and on aerial ladders poured water on the top floor. At this point, the local chief told me and a few other hosemen to grab axes and come with him. We proceeded to chop holes in the bottom of scores of large vats on many of the lower floors. This seemed to be a very questionable operation, but it soon became apparent that this operation prevented the tons of cascading water from filling the vats. Had this happened, most likely the entire structure would have collapsed from the massive weight. From such unusual calls and stories, as well as from the relatively routine ones, come the lessons and knowledge that makes experienced firemen – and interesting storytelling!

9 The Members

The membership of the fire department varied from a low of fifteen to a high of thirty-five. These men were truly a mixed bag. Employed and unemployed, professional and nonprofessional, ethical and (very few) unethical members made up our rolls over the years.

There are many different ways to categorize volunteer firemen, such as why they belong or what turns them on. For example, there are the siren blowers, the bell ringers, the daredevils, the machos, the heroes, the free-loaders, the party-goers, the parade men and, of course, the gung-ho firefighters. At one time or another we had them all.

Members usually stayed for only three or four years – mostly due to the highly transient nature of our community. In some cases an individual became disenchanted with one or more aspects of being a volunteer fireman. After a year or so, the "glamour" and excitement wears off or becomes outweighed by the hard work involved. Of course, a few individuals only lasted for one or two fires, or for one or two meetings and/or drills. After realizing the tons of hard work involved, getting barked at in the heat of an emergency, or observing one of our typical meeting arguments, the thrill of belonging to the fire department could rapidly wane. This turnover seriously hindered our training efforts. I always felt at least three years of part-time effort was necessary in order to develop reasonably effective firefighters.

One of the more memorable – or flakier – former members was an individual who was so lacking in self-confidence and coordination that he didn't know how to quit. After six months, we strongly suggested that he take a few fire-related courses at the community college. He eagerly jumped at the chance – and was never heard from again. Or the doctor who had good intentions but who at the end of his first year had not qualified on one single training item and was therefore let go. And then there was the lawyer who attended just one of our business meetings (which involved a forty-five minute discussion on the color of new jackets for the members) and promptly resigned. And finally the policeman who attended just enough of our business meetings to see "democracy at work," and quickly resigned.

I seriously questioned my own membership after my first big fire. The chief of some ten years and I were out one Sunday afternoon inspecting fire hydrants in our small rescue truck. A report of a house fire – "going good" – blared over the radio. Moments later we drove up a barely passable road to the old, abandoned, four-story farmhouse. Smoke and flames were visible from almost every window. The chief ordered me to take the booster hose line and "check" the fire until our other trucks arrived. Check the fire my foot! With only 150 gallons of water in the truck tank and with my limited experience, I doubt if I could have checked a small bonfire. Our pumpers finally arrived but could not negotiate the farm road, so we had to hand lay the heavy hoses for what seemed like miles. I eventually sank to the grass from heat and exhaustion. I then began to wonder, as I watched the building collapse in total ruin, "What am I doing here? Six years of college to bust my tail for nothing?" I somehow over-came the urge to quit and stuck it out for twenty-plus years.

The backbone of the department was the men who struck it out for ten, twenty, even thirty years. For the most part, the fire department was their first love. It was in their blood. Unfortunately, there were always a few men who were only in the fire department for what they could get out of it. These hangers-on never failed to attend or vote for a free party, never passed up a free cap or jacket, and mysteriously never said no to the free textbooks, even though they had no intention of reading them. These were also the ones who would vote against such things as: required periodic physical exams, qualification exams and requalification exams for all members and officers; and for taking any disciplinary actions whatsoever, against any member, for anything but major infractions of the rules. These men were unreliable during emergencies (if they showed up at all). Somehow they managed to meet the absolute minimum requirements of membership. As long as the company was at less than full strength, I rationalized the presence of these "leeches." They just might show up and might be of some use at an emergency when we were short of "good men." When our rolls were full or nearly full I was forever pressing to rid the company of the dead wood so someone better might literally "full their boots."

My wife and I still chuckle over the offer made to me by one of these twenty-year "duds" when I became chief. After congratulating me, he said, "If you ever need any help, just let me know." I was elated. I thought just possibly this man might work for me, although he had never done anything constructive for the prior chief. I immediately seized upon this opportunity and suggested he could take over the maintenance of our air compressor. I guess I moved too quickly. He responded, "Oh no, what I meant was, please feel free to call me anytime you need any *advice*." The last thing I needed was advice from dead beats. What I needed were workers!

Our business meetings were usually pretty vocal, to say the least. Arguments developed over minor points, while certain major decisions were passed without comment. The monthly phone bill, for example, was always a bone of contention. Each member had a telephone in his own home and each therefore considered himself an expert on the subject. A simple twenty-five-cent toll call would set off demands for formal investigations and threats to remove the telephone from the firehall. There were also twenty opinions on whether or not we should get an electric brake on the siren of a new truck being ordered. This device, which costs about \$50, is used to slow and stop a siren that is blowing at full speed. Since each man had some experience in using a siren, he therefore considered himself an expert on the subject. Hours of discussion (almost to the point of exchanging blows) went on over this item. On the other hand, almost all of the more technical aspects of the \$90,000 truck were approved without exception, argument or discussion.

Every once in a while, a "procedural expert" would try to win an argument at a business meeting by recalling something he read in *Roberts Rules of Order*. After many arguments were reluctantly settled by hear-say from this "bible," the department invested in a copy. Unfortunately, trying to extract a solution from that book in the midst of a heated debate didn't work very well. It was eventually discarded and subsequent procedural matters settled by the more convincing of the more vocal members.

Many of the required jobs around the firehouse would get done automatically without asking. For example, several members would frequently wash and shine the trucks without being asked. On the other hand, some jobs would never get done without some prodding. Such tasks included emptying ash trays (which were always full), sweeping the floors, and picking up

the clutter. Specific personnel would therefore be assigned to carry out such tasks, and they would thus eventually get done with only a modest amount of grumbling. However, no one would ever volunteer to clean the restrooms, and if assigned to the task, open revolt would often result. We tried threats, fines, prizes and various other techniques, but the common response was **"I don't clean the commodes at home or at work, so I'm damn sure not going to do it here as a volunteer."** As a result, for most of my days with the volunteer fire service, our restrooms could be described as filthy at best. About the only time they were clean was when we paid to have them cleaned professionally (generally using the money paid in fines by our members who could not or would not "stoop so low").

Some of the more memorable stories about the department members include:

- an emergency fire call to the parking lot of a local pub, called in (on a mobile radio) by the wife of one of the firemen who was in a fight with some out-of-town tough guys; Needless to say, we settled the argument (in our favor).
- the longtime member of the department who could not light a railroad type flare when at an emergency scene – his excuse was that he had never been shown how, and that he was *not* a nuclear physicist!
- the member in charge of our communications committee who forgot about the FCC. This individual did an outstanding job in preparing the specifications for a \$20,000 radio paging system, handling the bidding and procuring the system. The only thing he forgot was that a special FCC license was required to operate it. This would not have been too bad except that at first the FCC denied our after-the-fact licensing request. It took numerous phone calls and considerable worry before the license was granted.
- the member who, when told to turn off a smoking neon sign, announced over the radio that he could not find the gas shutoff valve. While there were some he-haws at this, at least he was aware that neon was a gas, a fact that many of the other firemen present didn't know.
- the member who, when arriving at a mutual aid fire call at a nearby hospital, stepped off the truck and promptly threw up from all the excitement of his first major fire. Several hospital staff nurses then comforted this "brave fireman" who apparently was sick from his gallant firefighting effort. For years after that, his fellow firefighters frequently asked if he needed oxygen when pulling up to almost any fire scene.
- the member's car – with windows steamed up – parked behind the firehall. Upon investigation, we found him in a rather compromising position with a lady other than his wife.
- and the officer who excused himself while at a chief's convention to call his bookie back home – 2,000 miles away!

Belonging to a relatively small group comprised of members with varying backgrounds had certain advantages. For example, there were members with tow trucks (which came to the rescue of my wife and daughters when they were confronted with car problems); pick-up trucks (which helped move furniture, fire wood and various other items too big for passenger cars); snow plows (which beat paths to the doors of many of our members before the township road crew had their coffee); and law degrees (to offer advice and guidance on legal matters).

For a brief period of time we even had a priest as a member. I'm not too sure how he was talked into joining, but it probably had to do with "community involvement." Actually there was a lot of merit to having a fire-priest. He could provide comfort to any sick or injured members and to the families of any member who might pass away. He could also provide comfort to the victims of emergencies and their families. Most important from the fire department's point of view, however, was the fact that a priest would be available during the day to answer emergency calls – except on Sunday mornings that is. Unfortunately our fire-priest did not stay too long, I suspect just long enough to find an opportunity to gracefully drop out. I'm sure he learned a lot during his brief stay, particularly about firemen and their use (or misuse) of the English language.

One big plus in being a volunteer was having a group of guys I could call upon for help at any time. There was a lot of comfort in knowing that my wife could get quick, willing assistance from any number of guys if a problem, large or small, were to develop while I was out of town or otherwise not available – or that I could, for that matter. One memorable event where a member helped me out was when I needed to do some work on my lawn. I asked one of the guys to dump a little topsoil in my yard the next time some was available. A few days later, my wife ran to the window just in time to see one of the biggest trucks she had ever seen dump its load in our front yard. What I had wanted was a few wheelbarrows full. What we got was a whole mountain. I really can't complain though, as the price was right – free. It took two full years to get rid of it all, and only by means of a "Free – Help yourself" sign and the efforts of folks from all over the neighborhood.

Our members were always willing to help one another. Although we were frequently at odds at our meetings, and although the various members and their families were not too active socially, there were very few members who would not do almost anything, anytime, to help one of their fellow members when asked. This spirit was most noticeable during emergencies. We could respond to any emergency, even immediately following a violent meeting where only a few members were even talking to each other. On the fire ground it was teamwork and cooperation in working to resolve a mutual problem. I never ceased to be amazed at how twenty or more individuals, *and I do mean individuals*, from diverse backgrounds could all work so harmoniously together during emergencies. It was also fortunate, as mass chaos would have resulted if it had been any other way.

Of all the experiences associated with many different members of the fire department, the most joyous occurred on Christmas Day in 1977. At noon all radios were set off and Christmas dinners interrupted by the announcement that our assistant chief's wife had just given birth to twins. After three marriages, these were the first children for this totally dedicated fireman. The happiness and excitement that resulted from this single message is just one of the many

indications of the brotherhood and fellowship that exist among the members of a volunteer fire department.

There were a few events almost all our members would make an extra effort to attend (in addition to our parties and picnics): the funeral of any member or relative of a member and the wedding of any member. When a member got married, it was customary to transport the bride and groom from the church to the reception (or at least part of the way) in the cab of the ladder truck. The truck would have a "Just Married" sign on the rear and possibly even a few tin cans trailing behind. This always brought smiles to the attendees as well as to the passersby.

When I said earlier that our members and their families did not spend much time socializing together, I meant all the members as a group. There were many individual members who did, in fact, frequently socialize. At one point, four of our firefighters shared an apartment. Three of the four were between wives. I often felt sorry for their neighbors, not only because of the various fire and police radios that blared constantly from their apartment but also for the strange hours that they kept and the wild, almost constant parties that they held. Here was a situation in which volunteer firemen responded to emergency calls in, of all things, a car pool!

There was a group of our single or temporarily single members that participated in heavy partying, known as the "Friday Night Follies." This group, plus a few of the married members who could sneak away, traveled to four Super Bowls to support the Pittsburgh Steelers and occasionally attended out-of-town sports events (horse and dog races, primarily). I always breathed a sigh of relief when they "returned to service" from being out of town or otherwise indisposed. It was a relief to know that they were back safe without getting tossed in jail or having their skulls cracked. It was also a relief to have these men available for firefighting again. Although a bit rowdy at times, they were outstanding firemen.

This group and a few of the other members were practical jokers. Whenever one of the members got over-inebriated at some social occasion, there was always the possibility that one of the tow trucks would be used to move his car a block or so from its parked location, possibly to the top of a traffic island or to some other inaccessible place. You might also find your boots filled with water, with or without fish. Or you might hear an old fire call being rebroadcast via a hidden tape recorder just to see how fast and how high you might jump.

One rumor that I would like to dispel is that volunteer firemen are notorious home-wreckers. In all the years that I was associated with the fire department there were only two instances where I felt that unnecessary damage had been done. On the contrary, there were hundreds of examples where I saw boots removed before entering a house, hall runners laid to protect rugs, salvage covers placed to protect furniture, possessions moved to areas of safety, absolute minimum amounts of water used and various other actions taken, many at personal risk, to hold the degree of damage to the absolute minimum.

The first instance when this was not the case occurred early in my days as a fireman. A major fire burned the roof off a split-level home. In the process, several inches of water had accumulated on the floor of the sunken kitchen. Being concerned about the weight of the water on the floor, the chief ordered a hole placed in the floor to drain the water to the basement. I

promptly started to move the refrigerator away from the wall so that the hole might be placed in an inconspicuous place. Our gruff chief mumbled something under his breath, grabbed the pick-ax and proceeded to chop a hole in the dead center of the kitchen floor. What made the situation even worse was that the lady of the house walked in at that moment. Her eyes were tear-filled already from viewing the major fire damage to her home and possessions. Her painful query of "What are you doing?" was answered by our chief with his customary gruffness. "We're chopping a hole in the damn floor, lady." I was never convinced that this action and his thoughtlessness were either necessary or called for.

The second example of damage caused by the fire department occurred when a couch was on fire in the living room of a ranch house. The order was given to "get the couch outside and ventilate." One of our men, with the physique of an ox, picked up the couch and tossed it straight through the unbroken plate-glass picture window. Instead of criticism, he thought he should be praised for carrying out the entire order in one step, single-handedly. His argument was that less total damage resulted than if we had attempted to get the couch out through several doors and rooms. Possibly he was right, but to the spectators out front it sure looked like a questionable action.

Sometimes the public apprehension of volunteer firefighters is needlessly enhanced by the firefighters themselves. Take the case where a resident called and reported a fire in her home. Almost immediately several pickup trucks arrived, two of which were pulling U-Haul type trailers. Accompanying the vehicles were several shoddily dressed, burly individuals, a few of whom dashed into the residence. My heavens! The resident and the large crowd of neighbors attracted by the smoke and the commotion must have thought that a massive rip-off was in progress.

Fortunately the "characters" rapidly brought the fire under control using a garden hose (at about the time that the first fire engine pulled up). The resident was elated that her home had been saved – and by an exceptionally proficient group of township firefighters at that. They had been in the general area helping to move a brother fireman when the alarm was received on their pagers. A few dashed to the firehouse for the trucks as required while the remainder responded directly to the scene in their "moving vans."

One fringe benefit of being a fireman was that it gave you a place to go: to watch TV; to play pool, ping pong or pin-ball (to which several members and members' wives were addicted); to wash, wax or work on your car; or to borrow tools and equipment.

Having members at the normally unmanned stations was encouraged because the trucks would be able to respond faster to emergencies. Of course when you have privileges you also have abuses, like using department gas and oil for private automobiles, using the lounge for entertaining members of the opposite sex, storing personal property (such as boats, snow plows, car parts, etc.) on fire department property and keeping borrowed equipment for excessively long periods and returning it broken or in poor condition. Of course this didn't happen often, but when it did, appropriate action was taken.

At one point a three-gallon can of gasoline kept showing up empty. This can was carried on one of our vehicles to fuel portable pumps and generators. With the aid of the police, a trap was set. The full can was wiped clean and placed on the truck. Each night and each morning the can was checked and wiped again. Sure enough, one morning the can was dry. With great fanfare, it was taken to the police lab to lift fingerprints for comparison with those of our members. While there were indeed prints on the can, it was not possible to get a readable set. While the culprit was not caught, he was at least scared off and gasoline ceased to "evaporate" after that. It might seem strange that the department would have on file the fingerprints of its members. This was a requirement of the by-laws. It was not done in an attempt to catch the members, but to be able to prove they were *not* involved when break-ins occurred at the firehall or when things were amiss at the scene of an emergency.

Football is big in our town. Since it's a suburb of Pittsburgh, almost everyone is a Steeler fan. During the football season there was an unwritten rule that no fire department activities could be scheduled during game-time. We also frowned upon emergency calls during game-time. Often members would attend games, and usually there would be a pool or two, but there would always be a group at the firehouse glued to the TV set who would not only post-motion every play but would have recommendations on each subsequent play.

While the weekly games were of importance, it was the Super Bowl that was the real thing. When the Steelers were playing, you could be sure that about one-quarter of the fire department would attend. The stories that would come back could fill an entire chapter, if not a complete book. Some members completely missed one game because of the wild parties going on at the same time. Prior to another Super Bowl, at a pre-game party in a distant city, a Pittsburgh sportscaster was being given a very rough time by some of the fans of the other team. Several of our firemen came to his rescue and for weeks thereafter he sang the praises of the Upper St. Clair Fire Department in print, on radio and on television.

My favorite football story concerns Superbowl XIV: Pittsburgh Steelers 31, LA Rams 19. For this game, some of our members developed a get-rich-quick scheme. They convinced a sponsor to put up money that would, they assured him, at least double in a week. Twenty-five thousand T-shirts were printed with a slogan about the Super Steelers and air-freighted to Pasadena for the big day. Five firemen were also flown out to hustle the shirts outside the stadium. It was even suggested that some of the hustling be done from wheel chairs (borrowed from the closest airport).

The only problem with this grandiose scheme was that a vendor's license was mandatory –with no exception. Alleged attempts at bribery and intimidation, threats of lawsuits against both the city of Pasadena and the football league did not produce a license. The net result was that the most cases of T-shirts were returned to Pittsburgh. Some were sold at local department stores at below cost. A contingency plan to sell the excess shirts in subsequent years was tied to the success of the Steelers, who unfortunately went down in defeat.

Many cases of T-shirts still sit in storage waiting for a good offer – or any offer for that matter. Someone even suggested awarding a case of shirts to each buyer of this book, or else buy a case of shirts and get a case of books free. Neither approach seemed reasonable, so I guess

the best that can be expected is that there will be a steady supply of rags to clean the firetrucks – for the lifetime of the trucks, if not of the department.

One of the favorite competitive pastimes of firefighters (other than playing poker) is the "Battle of the Barrel" (see accompanying photos). In this activity, a long cable is strung about twelve feet from the ground. Suspended from the cable on a pulley is an empty barrel (a beer keg is ideal). This keg is free to travel the entire length of the cable. Two teams, made up of three to five firefighters, face each other under the cable. One member of each team has a nozzle while another backs him up. The remaining team members keep the hose line in the proper position behind the first two as needed (that is, they back it up if the team is losing or move it forward if it is winning). Water is turned on in both lines at the same time. A safety man is stationed at the control valves, ready to turn the water off, if for example, a team lost control of its hose (or if a team decided to spray the spectators). High pressure to the hose lines must be avoided. It can be extremely dangerous: high pressure can peel the bark off of a tree at fifty feet or so and can knock people down. I recall that during one competition, a fireman was struck in the face by a hose stream at a relatively short distance. He received a painful eye injury that required prolonged medical treatment. The object of the competition is to aim your hose line so as to move the keg to the far end of the cable. Your opponents of course are trying to prevent this and to move the keg to your end of the cable. It really sounds easy. All you have to do is to keep your hose stream hitting the keg. Unfortunately it's not quite that simple. The darn keg takes quite a beating, rotating and bouncing on the cable. Plus, it's very difficult to see the keg because of the heavy water spray. The sound of the stream hitting the keg gives you a clue if you are on target.

We sometimes held these competitions on hot summer nights. This was far more enjoyable than training drills, in which you repeatedly laid out and then repacked all of the hose on a pumper, or repeatedly raised/climbed/descended/lowered a heavy ladder. In the process, all participants usually got soaking wet. It was not unusual for a few of the throng of spectators (who frequently gathered to watch) to get a little damp as well. While most of these competitions were held within our own department, we occasionally "battled" several of the other departments in the area. Actually, there was some training benefit to be derived from the battle of the barrel. The crews acquired experience in hose handling and in working as a member of a team. All things considered, I guess you can say that it was "good clean fun."

In the pursuit of knowledge and perfection, our members would attend any fire school that offered anything that sounded reasonable. Over the years our members attended the National Fire Academy at Emmitsburg, Maryland, the Ohio Fire Academy, the Pennsylvania Fire Academy, the local community college, and various national, state, county and local schools, seminars, meetings and workshops. While at the National Fire Academy, one of our members got together with other academy students and decided to visit nearby Camp David. They disregarded all signs to keep out and were promptly challenged by a very fierce security force made up of Secret Service Agents and US Marines. They told a convincing story and beat a hasty retreat. The outcome might have been far different, however. The course the students were taking at the academy dealt with arson. Many of the students, including two on the Camp David excursion, were policemen –carrying firearms. Can you imagine if one of them had happened to reach toward his gun, or if it had been visible, or if the group had been searched?

When I first joined the department, massive sirens located at strategic places in the township alerted members of fire calls. I don't know how many times I dashed off to the fire hall when the sirens false-tripped (airplanes flying overhead, for example) or when I thought I heard a siren or heard one in the neighboring community. One occasion my wife will never forget. We were watching *The Guns of Navarone* in a drive-in movie about ten miles from home. We left at the-most exciting part when a fire siren (obviously in our town, I thought) started to wail in the distance. We never did determine whose siren was blowing or how the movie ended.

A few years later each of our members had a "fire radio" in his home provided by the department. These devices would alert you to the call and give its type and location. As technology progressed, radios got better and cheaper. Many members then bought radio receivers or scanners for their cars, which would receive our fire frequencies. Knowing that the fire was out or "going good" while responding was a great help in determining the urgency of the call.

I was lucky never to be involved in a serious automobile accident involving my car. Other members were not so fortunate, however. There were several accidents involving private cars responding to fire calls during my tenure – most of them occurred right in front of the fire hall. Rear end collisions were the most prevalent, but a few sideswipes also occurred.

Considering the speed, excitement and traffic confusions in front of the fire hall, it's amazing that there were not more accidents, and that they weren't even more serious.

There was always considerable anticipation when enroute Code 3 (sirens and red lights) to an emergency, and this increased a thousand times when there was a simultaneous request for police to respond to a vehicle accident, involving a fellow firefighter. Fortunately, most of these accidents were not very serious.

There was one, however, that was. In this particular accident it was my sad duty as both a friend and as the fire chief to inform the three children of one of our firemen that that their mother and dad were in the hospital as the result of a tragic automobile accident – which occurred while responding to a fire call. While the fireman recovered, his vivacious wife succumbed from her injuries – an absolutely devastating blow to her family certainly, and to each and every member of the fire department as well.

Another accident took place at our substation during an emergency call on a cold winter evening. This station is at the bottom of a small hill, covered this particular night with a sheet of ice. The car of the first member to arrive spun on the ice and slid into a snow bank. It was then sequentially struck by the cars of two other responding firemen. Even the salt truck that responded to our request for assistance managed to strike the pileup with its snowplow. Fortunately no one was injured, but the insurance companies are still trying to resolve the legal issues involved.

The rules for firemen responding in their personal cars are quite clear:

- Do not exceed the speed limit.
- Do not go through red lights or stop signs.
- Do not cross the centerline.
- Do not deviate in *any* manner from the motor vehicle code!

However, in the excitement, these rules were frequently violated. I found myself going faster than I should, especially when as a hoseman I turned on my volunteer's "blue light," which according to the motor vehicle code was a courtesy deal only and permitted no exceptions to the normal driving rules. Enroute to emergency calls I frequently repeated to myself out loud, "Slow down. Be careful." This worked quite well for calls to field and trash fires, but when responding to calls for people trapped in burning cars or house fires, it was very difficult to hold back.

In responding to a fire call one evening, one of our hot-rodders, with blue light flashing, passed an unmarked police car like a bullet. Unfortunately for the volunteer, the police car was responding to the same call doing fifty-five in a forty-five mile-an-hour zone. After the emergency, the member was suspended for two months and his blue light privileges lifted for six months.

We received numerous complaints about those darn blue lights, which some members felt were license to pass on the right and to go through gas stations, drive over lawns, or force cars off the road. One of the more common mis-uses of the blue light was to race through several different communities in succession enroute to some minor emergency in one's home community. Our police took a dim view of "out-of-towners" speeding through our area with blue lights flashing, and it is little wonder that other police departments felt the same. As chief I tried to discourage their use. I used to caution that even if a volunteer was stopped at a red traffic light, with his blue light on, if a drunk hit him from behind, the dumb fireman "racing to a fire" would immediately be assumed to be at fault. These arguments were never successful. The members always voted to retain them as they were one of the "status symbols" of being a volunteer.

One serious accident occurred when a member's car was parked at the side of the road, its four-way flashers on and a blue light revolving on the roof. We were at the scene of an accident, and flares had been placed all along the road. With an ear-shattering crash, a drunken driver plowed into the car, totally demolishing it.

Drunk drivers were a very serious threat to our volunteers. While attempting to extract the victims in the middle of the night from one wreck involving a drunk driver or two, you had to be on guard for other drunks running into you. One night, a car weaved past a police officer who was attempting to stop the car because a major wreck blocked the road ahead. When the car roared past, almost knocking the officer down, he threw his five-cell flashlight at the car in anger. It was only then that the car stopped to see what came flying through its shattered rear window. Needless to say, he was politely escorted to the jailhouse – while merrily singing, "Onward Christian Soldiers."

Very few accidents involved our trucks. I always worried that one of our fifteen or twenty-five ton trucks would race through a red traffic light, siren screaming, and wipe out a compact car. Thank goodness this never happened. The closest we ever came to this was one Sunday afternoon. The radio I was monitoring blared out,

"Truck Five to base -- There has been a serious accident on McLaughlin Run Road.

Please send the police and the fire chief."

"Base to Truck Five -- Were you involved?"

"Truck Five to base -- That's affirmative."

Needless to say, I was out the door in a flash. Approaching the scene I could see one of our newest pumpers laying on its side in the middle of the road. Fortunately no one was hurt. Two men had taken the pumper out for driver training. The right front wheel went off the berm and hit a culvert. The steering wheel was wrenched out of the driver's hands, and the truck, which was barely moving by then, started up an embankment until it gently rolled over. The driver (one of our lightest men) was buried under his instructor (one of our heavyweights). Neither was physically hurt, but they were certainly embarrassed, to say the least, and became the subject of jokes and comments for years. The truck suffered major damage and had to be replaced. Believe me, it's a sad sight to see one of your fire trucks laying on its side with its load of hose dangling like spaghetti out of the hose bed, five hundred gallons of water splashing from the water tank and oil, gas and other fluids seeping from various fill pipes.

A somewhat similar accident occurred years earlier as we respond to a fire call. The right front wheel left the berm and the truck started to roll over. Another volunteer and I, riding the rear tailboard, looked at each other. Without speaking, our looks asked, "Jump or hang on?" We hung on. The side of the truck hit the steep embankment along the road, righted itself and finally came to a stop. For the next ten minutes the several riders calmed each other down, consoled the driver (who shook for hours), had a cigarette or two and proceeded to a minor fire which was in the process of being mopped up by our other men and equipment. The ladder and other equipment on the right side of the truck was either damaged or sheared off, but otherwise no major damage took place.

Over the years, the fire department was composed of several different factions or cliques. There was the gas station gang (which held extemporaneous meetings in the office of a local garage), the bar room gang (which participated in the "Friday Night Follies"), the good guys, the bad guys, and so on. Frequently more of the fire department's business was discussed at these gas stations, bars and barber shops than was discussed in the formal, monthly department business meetings. This was pretty obvious at some of the business meetings, when a block of the members had been well-primed on specific issues in advance and knew exactly how to vote. It was also apparent that within each such group there were a few mavericks that would vote the way they wanted regardless of the wishes of their clique leader. Because of this, it wasn't really possible for any faction to ramrod items through the business meetings. The existence of these groups and subgroups did, however, lead to frequent heated debates – a shining example of democracy at work.

I guess that having such factions and such politicking is a fact of life, occurring within all groups of individuals whether they are business, social, religious or firefighters.

As you can probably tell by now, our members were a mixed bag. They did, however, share one basic trait: the desire and willingness to respond to anyone's call for help or assistance. Being a volunteer for years has given me the opportunity to meet scores of such men, some truly great ones and many who have become personal and long-lasting friends.

An age-old problem in volunteer fire departments relates to the older members. At what age do you push such old "fire horses" out to pasture? At some point this situation must be faced for members with thirty, forty, fifty or even more years of active service. If they leave of their own accord, fine -- but what if they don't? Do you let them continue on indefinitely, even though they may well be a hazard to themselves (and to others), not only on the fire ground but around the fire house as well? Do you sever all of their associations? Do you limit their activities to only the social aspects of the department?

Some people argue that it's better to have the old timers respond during working hours than to have no one respond when all younger members may not be available. I maintain that this is really misleading the public. If several such members always respond, the number of volunteers per daytime emergency might be very comforting. However, in a real emergency, many of these members might be of zero – or negative – value. If this is the case, I maintain that the department is just not able to muster a sufficient number of able-bodied firefighters, and a paid or partially paid daytime force should be considered. On the fire ground, old timers might really be a menace. At several major fires, I have spent valuable time worrying about the well-being of certain of our older members who had obviously overextended themselves (doing relatively little) and who appeared to be on the verge of collapse.

Another potential problem concerns members who have served their time and are then retired from active service and become social members (with full voting privileges). After a while, the department may well consist of more "retirees" than active firefighters. Should this develop, the election of the fire chief and other line officers might be controlled by members who have not participated in an emergency call in years. In addition, votes to spend funds for social purposes may well pass easily, while votes for critically needed emergency gear may go down in defeat.

This problem came to a head for us when it became almost impossible to procure insurance coverage for our older members. At that point, a senior member category was created. At sixty years of age, members with less than fifteen years with the department were automatically out (we had none). Those with fifteen or more years of service became "senior members." This meant that they could not respond to alarms, hold line offices, or vote for line officers. They could, however, hold administrative offices and participate in all social events.

When this change first went into effect, it caused considerable hard feelings. For example, one seventy-year-old member in reasonably good health was quite bitter. He readily agreed, however, a younger member (in his sixties) in questionable health should clearly be retired. However, after the rule change was in place and members knew exactly what to expect

as they aged, there were few problems. Our error was that such a rule had not been included into the department's by-laws before any member reached the age of fifty or so, rather than after several members had attained their seventies.

Before I am accused of encouraging age discrimination, I should hasten to point out that our by-laws did not require periodic physical examinations for members. In some respects this was probably good as several of the guys could probably not pass a stiff physical (a few, because of being overweight). Such exams were only needed by the new, incoming recruits.

Because there was no way to assess the physical condition of our members without physical exams, we established a well-defined age (of sixty) at which involvement in the very demanding and hazardous job of active firefighting must end.

In a similar vein, there should also be a certain minimum age for active firefighters. In our department this age was twenty-one for years and then reduced to eighteen when the national voting age was reduced. While there was a lack of maturity noted in many of the younger members, it never really created a serious problem.

During my days in the department, I would estimate that we had a turnover of at least five men per year, on the average. In twenty-three years that means that about 115 men came and went. Almost all joined with the intent of helping the community; and that they did – some a little and some a lot. But in total their efforts provided the township with exceptional fire protection – even if most of the community did not fully appreciate it or recognize it – until, of course, they were in need of it.

10 The Public

In my years as a volunteer, I had numerous opportunities to observe many people interacting with the fire department in one-way or another. My basic conclusion is that most people are not at all understanding of firemen or sympathetic toward their own fire department. The department is taken for granted. It is assumed that it will respond, in force, to any call for assistance (no matter how ridiculous) under any conditions and that the men will do a superhuman job. If it does anything less, there will be very vocal screams of criticism.

It has also been my observation that most people are not particularly afraid of fire. Oh, they do recognize that it can cause major damage, but they are not truly fearful of it. (Occasionally some people are more afraid of damage that might be caused by volunteer firemen rather than fire damage per se.) On the other hand, many people are deathly afraid of electricity, lightning and radiation (e.g. from the minute radioactive source contained within certain types of smoke detectors). One of our continuing crusades was to try to get our residents to recognize the dangers of fires and, in particular, the dangers of deadly fire gases.

Even after major fire disasters at the Las Vegas Hilton, the Las Vegas MGM Grand, the Beverly Hills Supper Club and the Stouffer's Inn in upstate New York, many people retain the belief that in the event of a fire they could just walk to the nearest exit and leave. They find it inconceivable that their vision might be impaired, as well as their ability to breathe. This is one area that I feel far more and far better education of the public is essential.

Most people directly involved with an emergency fall all over themselves thanking you at the time. A rare few would even take the time and effort to write a letter of thanks. These letters, which were always read at our business meetings, provided a great deal of satisfaction and are one of the few rewards of being a volunteer. One of my favorite letters, even though it was not associated with an emergency, was the following:

"In what is an annual event here, our volunteer fire department drove Santa Claus through the streets of Upper St. Clair last Saturday. As the siren announces Santa's arrival, the children run to the curb to await his words of encouragement and the goodies he hands out to them.

Unaware of this tradition, my 5-year old daughter and 3-year old son, still donned in pajamas, were enjoying a lazy day of holiday baking.

The siren called us to our door where we were amazed to see Santa waving to us from a fire engine. We ran to our front porch as Santa motioned for the children to come out for the goodies that he held up in his hands. When he realized they were not properly attired for the trip through the snow in their bare feet and pajamas, Santa made an "above and beyond the call of duty" gesture and left the truck, came up the steps and into our home with their treats. While he talked with Chrissy and Brian in the foyer, I raced for our camera. Santa posed for a quick shot and was on his way.

I'm sure he has no idea of the thrill he brought to these true believers at such a vulnerable time in their young lives. They will grow too soon and stop believing in Santa Claus, but the day he came into their home will always be a special memory to them.

My sincere thanks go to these special people whose caring and thoughtfulness touched the lives of two people who are very special to me."

Extracts of a few other such letters are included in one of our fund drive letters contained in the Appendix B.

Every once in a while, a grateful resident would even send a check to thank us for our services. Such checks were always greatly appreciated, even though they might be for a few dollars after we had sent over half a million dollars in equipment and spent over a hundred man-hours of effort on a major house fire.

Then there is the sarcasm that people direct at the fire departments (primarily the volunteer departments). Some examples were noted in the introduction. Other examples include the following:

- "Congratulations guys, I see you confined the fire to the neighborhood of origin."
- "Looks like you guys had fun at that last fire – a real water festival."
- "Super job, guys. You saved the mineral rights on that one."
- "You guys did a fine job. With your help it took four hours for that building to burn down. Without any help at all it would have taken only thirty minutes."

Occasionally some critic of the department would argue that a good fire department wasn't necessary. All the township really needed was enough men and equipment to get the people out of a building during a fire and then to let the place burn down.

Our response was that such an action would be irresponsible and would most likely result in damage suits and judgments against the fire department, the firemen and the township. We cited the example of the city of Pittsburgh, which paid \$823,725 in damages as a result of allegedly fighting a fire "in a negligent manner," not because they failed to fight the fire.

On many, many occasions, the general public interfered with the operation of the fire department in emergency situations. Examples of such interference include the following:

- Driving over the fire hose, even though it was in violation of the motor vehicle code and could endanger the lives of firemen if the hose were to break.

- Following too closely to fire trucks responding to emergencies, even though this was in violation of the motor vehicle code and could endanger the life of any fireman who might fall from the truck.
- Blocking in the trucks at emergency scenes.
- Parking in front of hydrants, emergency exits and in fire lanes.
- Crowding in on rescues at accident scenes and occasionally smoking, even though the areas were saturated with spilled gasoline. (Under such conditions one of our senior officers had been known to turn the hoses – always placed into stand by – on the crowd. This was one of the fastest and best methods of crowd control that we had.)
- Being completely unpredictable when their vehicle was overtaken by a fire truck with siren blaring. (Many people would pull over to the right and stop as required by law. Others, however, would pay no attention whatsoever, speed up, stop short, pull to the left, or take various other types of unpredictable and dangerous actions.)

One action of the public which never ceased to amaze me was passing fire trucks. There was a four-lane main highway that ran through our township. The posted speed limit was forty-five miles per hour. In responding to emergencies, a truck might be doing fifty-five miles per hour down this highway with its red light glaring and its siren blaring. Occasionally a passenger car would pass a truck, going the same direction, either on the left or the right. Even though this had happened many times, it never ceased to be aggravating.

Some of the complaints that we received from the general public included:

- The location of our alerting sirens (people agreed they were needed but did not want them in their neighborhood - rather twenty miles out of town, I guess).
- The location of our stations (too noisy, did not match the decor of the neighborhood, etc.)
- Allowing the engines of the trucks to run at emergency scenes and thus wasting fuel (during the gasoline shortage) even though the engines powered the generators to run the lights, radios, tools, etc.
- Driving Santas around the township at Christmas time passing out candy to the children and making excessive noise and wasting fuel.
- Causing minor damage to lawns at the sides of very narrow roads while maneuvering the massive trucks.
- Causing minor water damage to property from hose leaks at a major fire.

The most vocal and numerous complaints we received were associated with our "auto junk yard." In order to become proficient in our new rescue equipment (jaws, air bags, saws,

jacks, etc.), we sponsored the most intense rescue-training program ever conducted in our area. Nationally known experts in the rescue field conducted nine days of instruction on vehicle rescue, emergency care of accident victims, off-road vehicle rescue, rescue from heights and trench rescue. In attendance were fire, rescue, police, ambulance, medical and other public safety personnel from throughout the United States and Canada. During the various training sessions, which emphasized the latest in rescue tools and techniques, forty-five vehicles were "disassembled" in simulated rescue incidents.

For about one month, our parking lot (across from a church) was filled with junk vehicles. I can still hear the threats, abuse, insults, demands and hostility we received over these junks. Even after explaining their purpose and that they would soon be gone, the response was generally, "The training's probably okay, but DO IT SOMEPLACE ELSE!"

One of the true friends of the volunteer fire service in our area is the Salvation Army. They have several mobile canteens (called "sally wagons"), which will respond (with red lights and siren) to the scene of any emergency. All it takes is a call from the fire chief. Generally, such a request was made only for a major conflagration (in below-zero weather and in the wee hours of the morning). The canteen sets up along the fire line and dispenses such comforts as hot coffee, soup and donuts free of charge to all emergency service personnel, as well as to the victims of the emergency. When you are wet, frozen, and totally exhausted, this cheerfully provided service is really appreciated. One of these canteens was on the scene of both my first and last major fires. There were many, many times in the twenty-three years in between when a sally wagon dispensed kindness and refreshments to our firefighters. Based on this firsthand experience, I have been, and always will be, a staunch supporter of the Salvation Army.

At one particularly bad fire at a large shopping center in a nearby community (again in below-zero weather), we took advantage of another great American institution – McDonalds. A branch was located directly across the road from the fire scene. After the fire was brought under control, all emergency personnel were invited to be the restaurant's guests for whatever we wanted, in any quantity.

While I enjoyed the Big Mac as much as ever, and the five cups of steamy coffee, it was the protection from the bitter cold that was most appreciated. I really felt sorry for the staff though, because they had to mop up the small flood of water formed by the melting ice on helmets, gloves, boots, jackets and even the mustaches of the many firefighters who took advantage of the hospitality.

At the scene of a major emergency, most neighbors try to be helpful. Although few volunteer to physically help, many will bring out coffee, beer or drinking water. This is truly appreciated and it's amazing how few people think of it. They will also let you use their phone or go in and get warm, even though you might mess up their rugs and houses. And then there were occasionally some neighbors who would not come out at all but only peek out through the curtains.

On one occasion, a toolbox full of very expensive socket wrenches and various other tools flew off a fire truck as it rounded a corner while responding to a call. The trucks following

behind saw several cars stop at the roadside and pick up the tools and the box. We naturally assumed that the finders would return the items to the fire department. Unfortunately we never saw them again, even though the toolbox was clearly labeled, "Property of Upper St. Clair Fire Dept." and each tool was engraved with "USCVFD."

In a similar vein, we required at least one man to stay with each truck every time it was out of the firehouse. One of his duties was to keep an eye on all the equipment. Why? Because over the years axes, extinguishers, helmets, couplings and other equipment was stolen; not lost, but physically removed, maybe by kids, possibly by envious firemen from other companies, or possibly by some of the kooks who roam the night.

The night was always a dangerous time. We often assisted with bad accidents late at night – frequently involving drunk drivers. One of our major concerns was that some of the many other drunks on the road would plow into the wreckage, and into us. This was particularly bad on Friday and Saturday nights (actually Saturday and Sunday mornings). New Year's Eve was the worst, not only for the drunks on the road but for those who set off false alarms or started actual fires, either deliberately or accidentally while under the influence.

We were often called out to search for people. When kids were involved, we were lucky in that they usually showed up before we spent more than an hour or two. We did, however, spend several hours late one night searching the woods for a girl who had been heard to scream, "Rape, Rape!" No trace of anything or anyone was ever found. On another occasion, an eighty-two-year-old man was reported missing from his bed at one o'clock in the morning. We spent all night searching the area within a mile of his home. When daylight came, he was found face down in a puddle over two miles away. We kept at another search for several days. This case involved a missing, senile patient from the state mental hospital that adjoined our township. I'll never forget locating the body, not with my eyes, but with my nostrils.

The general public seems to have the impression that it is the responsibility and duty of the fire department to pump out flooded, wet, or merely damp basements. In my first few years as a volunteer we frequently did this, which was pure stupidity as far as I was concerned. Standing in the rain all night pumping out a basement that would only refill as soon as the pump was shut down was not my idea of a fire department emergency. In later years we referred people to the Public Works Department. I'm sure they didn't like the cold, wet nights any more than we did, but at least they were paid – double time – for their efforts.

There were many swimming pools in our township, and their owners assumed that the fire department would fill their pools from the closest fire plug as a free community service. When we explained that this was absolutely prohibited by the water company, their next remarks were either "drop dead on your next fund drive," or "let us borrow some hose and a plug wrench."

Some people also apparently have the impression that if they don't contribute to the fire department, it will not respond to an emergency of theirs. This is like assuming that if you don't buy tickets to the policemen's ball you will probably be arrested. In our department, only one or two members ever saw our fund drive records or knew who gave what and who didn't. In no

case did we ever not respond for any reason to an emergency call. I have to admit, however, that I would respond somewhat faster to a call from a true friend than to a call from an antagonist of the department.

I mentioned earlier that we were fortunate to have an adequate supply of fire plugs. This doesn't mean that problems were not encountered when trying to use such plugs. At one fire, the plug had been installed but not yet connected to the water main. Also, if the caps were not put on real tight, kids would remove them and put rocks, bottles, cans and garbage in the barrel and then replace the cap. This junk would, at a minimum, restrict the flow of water and in some cases actually damage the fire pump. I can remember a strike one winter by employees of the water company, when someone turned on many of the plugs in our general area. Since the caps were on, water filled the plugs to the top and then froze solid (they were normally drained to well below ground level), rendering the plugs useless. Many were permanently damaged as a result. Yet another time, we responded to a fire in an area of new construction to find the plug wrapped with cables placed there temporarily by the electric company. When these things happened, we had to move on to the next plug, causing delays in fighting the fire. Additional hose would have to be laid and subsequently picked up and repacked.

We also had difficulty with residents deliberately trying to hide or camouflage the plugs. It would seem highly desirable to me (and to the insurance companies) to have a bright yellow fire plug directly in front of your home. However, plugs were frequently found surrounded by shrubs or painted to match the surroundings (usually green). One plug was actually used as the support for a mailbox.

In addition, many people would never dream of shoveling snow from around the plug in front of their property. On the contrary, in the process of clearing a driveway, the snow would sometimes be piled over and around the plug so that it was virtually invisible.

While we strongly advocated the use of smoke detectors, they sure caused problems, like the frequent calls in the middle of the night when the detectors started to chirp due to low batteries, or calls from frightened, misled residents who would not touch a detector because it contained "nuclear radiation."

Even worse were the detectors wired to automatic fire alarm systems. False alarms from these systems were persistently received. If someone was at home, it was relatively easy to verify if an alarm was false. On the other hand, if a house was locked and no one appeared to be home, then what? You could leave and let the alarm ring, inconveniencing the neighbors if the system had an audible outside alarm. There was always the possibility of a real fire going undetected, thereby creating the possibility of a law suit, or the possibility that a victim was in the building passed out from smoke or gas inhalation. On the other hand, if you break in and there's no problem, you are then faced with how to reset the alarm (most systems are well hidden and securely locked), or the major concern of leaving the building unsecured since a subsequent burglary could leave you vulnerable to a lawsuit. In short, you're damned if you do and damned if you don't.

One example of this took place at a major department store. At 4 a.m. we received a water flow alarm, indicating that either the sprinkler system was activated someplace within the store or that a fluctuation in the water pressure had triggered the alarm. When we arrived at the completely locked store, the outside alarm was not ringing. If it had been, this would have positively indicated that the sprinkler system was in operation. So it was either a false trip or a defective alarm bell. To assure that all was okay within the store, the fire department and the local police attempted to enter. Through the glass doors we were faced by an interior security guard with a very large gun. His orders were to let no one into the store throughout the night – and that meant *no one*. We also failed in our attempts (made by shouting through the windows) to have him check the entire store for evidence of a sprinkler flow. Since that wasn't his job, he felt it was more important to watch us and make sure that we didn't attempt entry. Over an hour later, store management personnel and a supervisor of the security agency arrived and convinced the guard to open up. We found the sprinkler system still in operation in a massive storeroom. While it did its job in extinguishing a small fire, the continuing water flow caused thousands of dollars worth of damage. As a result of that incident, the alarm bell was repaired post-haste. I'm not sure but I suspect that the guard was soon unemployed. I always wondered, "What if the outside bell had been ringing?" Would we have broken in regardless of the guard and his big gun or would we have waited for his boss? Knowing our members, I'm sure that if there was any real evidence of fire or actual water flow, we would have gotten in – guard or no guard.

I frequently made requests and recommendations to this store and others in the area aimed at improving their fire protection. Most of these were made in writing. Not only were they never acted upon, but I often never received a response. This proved to me that the basic philosophy of most companies (and people) is: Don't spend a dime on public safety unless it is mandatory by law.

In one memorable experience at a local department store the underground transformer vault was flooded. Rather than hire a contractor to pump the vault out, the store manager asked to borrow the fire department pumps and personnel to do the job. Since this was clearly not an emergency situation, we told him okay, but we'd appreciate a donation. We did the pumping (which took about eight hours) and never heard a word about the donation. We contacted the store manager on several occasions – still nothing. Finally the fire department mailed the store a sizable (but reasonable) bill for the pump time, the manpower time and for services rendered. The bill was promptly paid in full, no questions asked. Apparently any unit of a large corporation can pay their *bills* without a problem, but to make a *donation* for any reason requires the approval of several vice presidents.

Every once in a while someone or something would really get to me. When this happened, I would pick up my pen and start writing. Blasts were sent to:

- The president of the leading fire truck manufacturing company when attempts to resolve problems with our trucks failed.
- The members of the local school board when the number of false fire alarms at the high school got out of hand and the school's staff was unresponsive to the problem.

- The individual township commissioners and the press when it appeared that concessions were going to be made to the local developers to relax our existing, stringent sprinkler code requirements. As this was shortly after major fire tragedies in the news, my arguments were quite persuasive and the code was enhanced rather than degraded.
- A resident cautioning him that we could not cross his private bridge (which had a capacity of about three tons) with our twelve ton pumpers until the bridge was repaired and certified to be capable of supporting our vehicles.
- The National Fire Academy with a suggestion to add a short course to the curriculum that would, in my estimation, truly benefit the training program and the chief officers of volunteer fire departments (which was answered with a polite "no thanks!").
- A major shopping mall when the lack of enforcement of parking regulations made it impossible for emergency vehicles to get within two blocks of the building.

How would I conclude this chapter? Well, I guess my observations over the years indicate that the general public (like most volunteer fire departments) is made up of some really great individuals and a few rotten ones, with the vast majority falling somewhere in between.

11 The Pros and Cons of Being a Volunteer

Over the years, many people have asked me why anyone would want to be a volunteer fireman. The answer to that question evolved into part of a talk I used to give to prospective members. First, I would give them the many reasons for *not* becoming a volunteer. Being a volunteer firefighter is not all fun and-games, and I wanted to get such an idea out of these prospective members' heads as soon as possible.

There is a great amount of time involved. On the average, each man in our department put in between six and seven hours per week. That's on the average and only officially recorded times at that. Some put in far less, while others, like the senior line and administrative officers, put in far, far more. There's also a lot of just plain hard work, like repacking wet, heavy, frozen hose when you yourself are wet, frozen and tired. And then there's the responsibility, such as driving massive fire trucks through heavy traffic on an emergency call, or administering first aid, oxygen or CPR to a very seriously injured victim.

Another aspect of being a volunteer is the uncertainty. You never know what to expect: what you will encounter, how long you will be gone – even if you'll come back at all, which always crosses your mind when responding to calls such as "Propane tanker involved in wreck," or "Building exploded – people trapped." Sometimes the imagined hazards became all too real. Although our residential fires were far less dangerous than the big city or industrial fires, we still sent one or two men to the hospital each year and many more to their own doctors or to our first aid kit.

Perhaps the worst fire that I was involved in was a mutual aid call to a major shopping center a few miles from Upper St. Clair. Ironically, the fire chiefs' group I belonged to had visited the center four days before the fire. This group mapped out and planned how fires in major complexes would be fought and inspected these areas (both inside and out) on group visits. This particular complex consisted of approximately fifty un-sprinklered stores. Our major concern was how we would get our large trucks, hoses and equipment close to the area during a daytime fire when the inadequate parking areas would be jammed with cars. A few days later, the call came in at four o'clock in the morning – a very stubborn, smoky fire. Parked cars were not the problem: the lots were completely empty. But it was ten degrees below zero. Several firemen were hurt, and two of our men required hospitalization – I lost two toenails from frostbite. Eight fire companies responded, and together we saved about two-thirds of the shopping center. Unfortunately, one-third was lost, and damages were in the millions.

And then there is the very definite possibility of getting hurt. Over the years I've had a few injuries, but there were many far more serious ones to other members of our department. Our training officer was trapped in a room in a training building when the fuel he was lighting flashed. He dove head first out of a boarded-up window and sustained painful burns on his hands and face. Another time we were fighting a very stubborn fire in a large, ancient farmhouse. A very excited fireman reported that one of our members was in the basement. Since there was fire to be fought there as well as in other locations, I saw no real problem. Only when it was pointed out that he fell to the basement from the second floor did I become

equally alarmed. Both of these occasions – and many others – involved hospital stays and long recovery periods.

I can recall broken bones, back problems, a case of pneumonia, a metal fragment lodged in a hand and the automobile accidents while responding to calls which I mentioned earlier. All of these required days or weeks of disability and/or hospitalization. This doesn't even consider the "routine" eye injuries, nail punctures in hands and feet, minor vehicle accidents, severe cuts and abrasions, burns and smoke inhalation – the list is endless. All in all, the department has been very, very lucky. Many times serious injuries have narrowly been avoided: a rolled-over fire truck, bricks falling on a firefighter's helmet, the whipping around of ruptured hose lines, and firemen slipping off roofs, blown off ladders, falling from the back of moving fire trucks, trapped in burning buildings and inhaling toxic fumes. Fortunately none of our members was ever killed in the line of duty. The possibility was always there, however, and we were often reminded of it. Early in my tour of duty as a fireman, a truck from a neighboring community joining us in responding to an out-of-town fire overturned on a curve. Three of the firemen on it were killed. Several years later, the chief from a neighboring community was killed when he was thrown from a truck enroute to an alarm. Several firemen from a neighboring community were severely burned when a gasoline tank exploded while they fought a routine automobile fire.

Then there are the injuries to the public – the really bad calls. During the more than twenty years I was a volunteer, I personally responded to over two thousand emergency calls – not very many compared to the very busy firehouses in New York City, but still amazing if you consider that I had a full-time job – typically ten hours a day – that involved frequent overtime and travel. By far the worst type of emergency call for me was the automobile accidents. Most auto accidents could be handled by the police without assistance from the fire department. However, the bad ones frequently required our heavy rescue tools and manpower. Every time such an emergency call came in, a chill would go through me. I never really wanted to go, but always felt I had to. The sight of blood or of the dead wasn't what got to me. It was the sights and sounds of the victims, particularly children, hurt and suffering.

Sometimes I couldn't sleep or sleep well for several nights after a bad accident. I'll never forget the three generations; grandmother, mother, and baby daughter, plus their neighbor, all killed (and three more injured) in a two-car accident. It took well over an hour to extricate all victims from the wreckage. I also remember a father and three of his children who were all killed and his two other children seriously injured (plus one other fatality) in a two-car accident. The refusal of a neighboring community to provide additional ambulances meant that several of the victims had to be transported to the hospital in our fire trucks. This was back in the days when the ambulance in most of the local communities consisted of a cot in the rear of a station-wagon-type police cruiser. Typically, only one or possibly two cruisers were in service in the middle of the night. Sending assistance to a neighboring community had the effect of removing most, if not all, police and ambulance protection from the community. Even so, this situation created considerable ill will, to say the least, and several people caught a lot of flack because of it. That was the only instance that I can recall in which complete cooperation was not the norm among all neighboring communities. In yet another episode, a fourteen-year-old boy who climbed to the top of a seventy-five-foot power tower was electrocuted by the high

voltage lines. His badly charred body was stuck to the tower until the power could be turned off and his remains removed via our aerial ladder.

During my years as a fireman, I have seen scores of fatalities associated with accidents. Only two fatalities, however, were associated with fires. One case involved an elderly recluse who lived alone in a junk-filled, dilapidated "fire trap." When we received the alarm of a major fire at her home, we knew almost immediately what to expect. Her completely charred body could be seen on the floor a few feet from the door, in the roaring inferno, beyond all possible help. I'll never forget the odor. The second case involved an elderly man who got too close to a gas stove. His clothing caught on fire. When we arrived, after receiving a call reporting smoke showing at this dwelling, we found a relatively small fire in the kitchen. Lying in the middle of the floor was the man, with most of his clothing and hair burned off and his skin badly charred. The fire was quickly extinguished, but there was nothing we could do for the victim. These were the types of calls I dreaded the most.

Some of the lesser "cons" about being a volunteer firefighter have to do with just plain aggravation. Not all of your efforts will be rewarded with thanks and praise. Occasionally you will be chastised for not doing more, for not doing better, and for not doing it faster. And then there are the disagreements or arguments that continually occur within the department. The varied backgrounds of the members of any department will surely cause frequent differences of opinion. Volunteers frequently encounter uncompensated expense – in damaged clothing, automotive needs, personal training books and fire magazines, personal fire radios and scanners, and the like. While most protective equipment is generally provided, and compensation might be received for certain incurred expenses, the expenditures will normally far exceed any compensation. All firefighters experience frequent disturbances to their home lives, such as the missed meals and the inconvenience, annoyance and worry to their families. And if nothing else, there's always the inconvenience of getting out of a warm bed in the middle of a cold night for some unknown problem, which sometimes requires your presence, but more often than not is just a waste of your time and effort.

If the potential recruits hadn't left yet, I'd proceed with the many reasons *for* being a volunteer. I felt and still feel that everyone needs some outside interests, whether it's through the church, politics, a fraternal group or whatever. It gives you a place to go, a chance to "get away from it all." As long as it's not overdone, this can be a tremendous morale booster to both you and your family. It's a way to keep busy. The trucks frequently need washing, for example. And you have ample opportunities to make new and long-lasting friends and to attend parties and other social occasions.

For example, some of the parties and events that I frequently attended included: a yearly stag picnic; a yearly family Christmas party (complete with Santa riding up on a fire truck, naturally, and presenting nice gifts to the wife and children of each fireman); and the periodic bachelor parties, wedding receptions, christenings, and awards banquets. Of course this did not include the many, many events that I attended while chief – several of which were required. It also did not include the "Friday Night Follies" or the frequent extemporaneous parties that I avoided like the plague.

Belonging to any group has many advantages. For example, it was quite moving to me to see a lovely spray of flowers from my fire department at the out-of-state funeral of my father, and a fruit basket for my wife when she was hospitalized. On the practical side, belonging to the department provides insurance coverage that you might not have been able to afford on your own.

Many members are attracted by the tremendous degree of excitement – when the siren starts to blow and your adrenaline really starts to flow – or by being "in" on local events: fire, police, political or merely gossip-oriented. Most of our members spent their own money to purchase a radio scanner in order to listen in on activities in neighboring communities as well as in their own area. Some members are drawn by the "glamour" of being a fireman. To the kids in your neighborhood, you're a real hero. (Of course, their parents may think you're a real nut.) For some, there is a tremendous "turn-on" – the sirens, the excitement or even the actual fires.

Other drawing cards are the opportunity to learn about the members, the victims, the equipment, the procedures and the community. It's one of the best ways to help your community and to provide an essential service. There's definitely a challenge involved with dealing with the people and with the responsibility. And finally, it's a vent. After eight or so hours on your regular job, with all its frustrations, the firehouse is a nice change of pace. For the professional or office worker, it's the opportunity to get his hands dirty. For the technician or laborer, maybe it's the chance to take on some of the fire department's many administrative jobs.

All of these positive reasons were important to me; however, the primary reason that I have devoted over twenty years to being a volunteer fireman is the personal satisfaction of knowing that I have done what I could to help those in trouble who have had to call for help. When you go to the aid of someone in real trouble, you quickly realize how lucky you actually are. Put into perspective, your personal problems appear quite small when compared to those of individuals who are faced with the tragic reality of a major fire or a serious accident. This appreciation of my own good fortune and the knowledge that I in some way had aided someone less fortunate made it all worthwhile for me.

Of course, each individual is different. He must weigh all of the pros and cons of being a volunteer. If the pluses outweigh the minuses, he will join. After a period of time, many of the negative aspects may outweigh the positive. When this happens, the member will become less interested and less active until he eventually resigns or fails to meet the minimum requirements of membership and is dropped from the rolls. For the true fireman, however, the pros far exceed the cons and he participates to the hilt, often to the detriment of job, family or even health. Such dedicated men have formed the backbone of our department, and I'm sure, most fire departments throughout the world.

Conclusion

By now I'm sure that you will agree with me that the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department has been faced with both "*flames*" and "*follies*." It has taken a delicate balance of each to operate an efficient volunteer department.

Had there been too many flames, an all-volunteer department may not have been able to handle the load. On the other hand, if there had been too many follies, the public would probably not have wanted *any* volunteers.

Had there been too few of either, or both, it may not have been possible to keep a devoted and dedicated staff of volunteers.

With a reasonable mix of both, it has been possible to provide the township of Upper St. Clair with absolutely superb fire protection at almost negligible cost to the residents. I'm sure the same can be said of many, if not most, of the 22,905 all-volunteer fire departments in this country – I certainly hope so.

What can be said for the future? Who knows? My future is quite clear, unless I get shot for some of the things I've said so far. I've hung up my turn-out gear and answered my last alarm. This does not mean that I won't continue to listen to fire calls on my several scanners or look for the action when the trucks roar by or possibly even go watch a "big one" or two. I, like so many others before me, have at least a little fireman's blood in me, and hopefully always will.

Regarding the future of Upper St. Clair and its fire department, I expect that both will continue to grow. The township should grow until every parcel of available land is fully utilized. I also expect that upward expansion will occur, in the form of more and more multi-story buildings and apartments.

The fire department should also grow, not necessarily in the number of stations, trucks or men, but in its professionalism. Someday, paid career firefighters will surely be used to either supplement or replace the volunteers. These professionals will eventually become essential, at least during working hours, to guarantee that the department will, in fact, respond with sufficient personnel with the expertise to be able to handle any and all emergency calls. Someday, competitive examinations will be used in connection with the appointment of the chief and all line officers. In addition, formal certification and periodic recertification may well be required for all members. It's not inconceivable that at some point, the fire department and the local ambulance service might be combined into one unified emergency service (fire/rescue/ambulance).

Regardless of what changes are made in the future, I sincerely hope that career firefighters do not entirely replace the volunteers. This would be a tragedy, for it would deprive amateurs like myself of the tremendous experience of being firefighters.

APPENDIX A - SAMPLE FUND DRIVE LETTER

UPPER ST. CLAIR TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

2001 WASHINGTON ROAD

UPPER ST. CLAIR, PA. 15241



May 1972

"Cave-in, man buried - bring shovels."
"Main gas line ruptured at the high school-emergency."
"Three young tots lost-organize search."
"Bethel needs assistance-Pioneer Inn engulfed."
"Young girl missing-search woods."
"Policeman being assaulted-send immediate assistance."
"Westminster Church just struck by lightning."
"Basements flooded-send your salvage pumps."
"Auto wreck, bring tools to extract victims."
"Furnace exploded-basement totally involved."
"Police need assistance-send all available men."
"Panicky lady reports house on fire-no address given."

What are the above?

Actual calls for assistance received by this department. (Note that fires are only a part of such emergency calls.)

How many such calls?

In 1971 there were 147 emergency calls, or, on the average, this department answered approximately 3 such emergency calls per week.

Who responds to such calls?

As many of the 27 members of this department who are available, irrespective of the time, the weather, the inconvenience, or the frequent risks to their own personal safety.

How is this service possible?

Only by the dedication of our staff of unpaid volunteers, by means of a small appropriation received yearly from the township, and by the voluntary financial support of the residents of the township.

How can you help?

By supporting your fire department-either actively by joining or financially by sending in a generous tax-deductible contribution.

What, when, and where will our next call be?

It could be from you! Won't you answer our call for assistance now in order to help assure that we will be ready to answer yours?

APPENDIX B - FUND DRIVE LETTER EXTRACTS

Dear Neighbor:

(1976)

UPPER ST. CLAIR TOWNSHIP has many individuals and groups who volunteer their time, efforts and skills everyday so that the residents can share in a number of services at a considerable savings. The Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department is one such service.

AT THE PRESENT TIME, 27 men make up the Township's Volunteer Fire Department. During 1975 we responded to 168 emergencies including house and car fires, auto accidents, lost children, fallen wires and rescues. In addition, countless hours were spent in training, maintaining equipment and attending fire schools.

IN ORDER TO PROVIDE YOU with the best in fire protection, it became necessary to renovate the existing fire hall last year. A new aerial ladder truck, to be delivered this spring, can now be housed. Also, we can more professionally conduct training sessions and regular business with the addition of the spacious meeting room. A part of the cost of this renovation was offset through our efforts in successfully managing two Las Vegas Nights, a Super Raffle and a program of selling smoke detectors.

WE REALIZE OUR RESPONSIBILITY to provide adequate fire protection to a rapidly growing community and have undertaken the task of building a fire substation to be erected near the intersection of Hastings Mill and Old Morton Roads, which will reduce travel time and equally space the equipment within the Township. With building costs what they are these days, we are hopeful that profits from a week long Bicentennial Celebration to be held the last week in May, through the joint efforts of the Township's Bicentennial Committee and the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department, will be enough to secure a mortgage for the substation.

Dear Neighbor:

(1978)

On November 29, 1939, the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department was formed to provide fire protection for our township. Twelve men started out with one pumper to serve the needs of a small community. Since then, our community has grown considerably and your Volunteer Fire Department has grown with it. Today, thirty-five men, operating out of two modern facilities with over a half million dollars worth of firefighting equipment are here to serve your ever growing fire protection needs.

Last year was the busiest year in our history. We answered 231 emergency calls ranging from minor smoke problems, accidents, to major fires. In every case, no matter what the emergency, it was answered promptly by trained volunteers operating the latest in firefighting equipment.

To maintain a high level of competency (over 10 thousand man hours last year) requires many hours of work and training by our unpaid volunteers. It was also very expensive. With five fully equipped trucks and two buildings to maintain, we need a lot of money. This is where you can help. We depend very heavily on your donations each year for our operating revenue.

Dear Neighbor:

(1984)

The officers and men of the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department are proud to announce the addition of a Rescue-Disaster Management truck to our present fleet of emergency vehicles. This vehicle is the most comprehensive unit of its kind in this part of the United States. It features an on-board computer, which lists all hazardous materials and tells how to handle them in case of an emergency. This computer also stores a Township disaster plan that covers a wide range of emergencies and tells each department how they should react to such an emergency. You will find enclosed with this letter a picture essay showing some of the many functions of this vehicle.

You might ask why we need a unit such as this in our Township. Well, believe it or not, the potential DOES exist for any number of emergencies that could be classified a disaster. We believe that we owe it to you to be prepared to meet these emergencies.

Needless to say, this vehicle was very expensive, and the funds to pay for it are coming primarily from your donations. In the past, most of you have been very generous, but now more than ever, we need the financial support of all of our neighbors.

We are very proud of our community. Our commitment, to provide you with the best possible fire and rescue services, is our number one priority. We not only have first class equipment, but we also train very hard to maintain our skills on the use of this equipment. Last year each man in this Department averaged 144 hours in training alone.

Dear Neighbor,

(1979)

Every year at this time we send you an appeal letter asking for a contribution to our fund drive. We think that many of you must wonder just what we do throughout the year to warrant this appeal. Well, this year we decided to share with you the enclosed list of our emergency calls for 1978, and we also included a few comments from the many letters we received from grateful residents.

A letter from Mrs. Stepp reads in part, "Not only did you execute procedures with great expertise, but you also were considerate in regards to our personal belongings and took time to express concern about our well being. Your actions make me feel extremely safe to know that we have people like you when we need them."

Mrs. Hall writes, "...many contractors who gave us estimates commented on how well the fire department did their job, since there was hardly any water damage. In addition, my kitchen was even cleaned up by the firemen before they left."

Mr. Smee comments in his letter, "...there is little doubt that your swift and professional attack on the smoldering fire in a wall behind our fireplace saved our home from destruction. We are sorry that our problem took volunteer firemen away from their homes on Christmas day."

The professionalism mentioned in the above letters didn't come by accident but rather by many hours of training. In fact, last year, of the 6 weekly hours spent on fire activities by each of our non-paid volunteers, much of this time was used to train so we could be prepared to handle any emergency you might have.

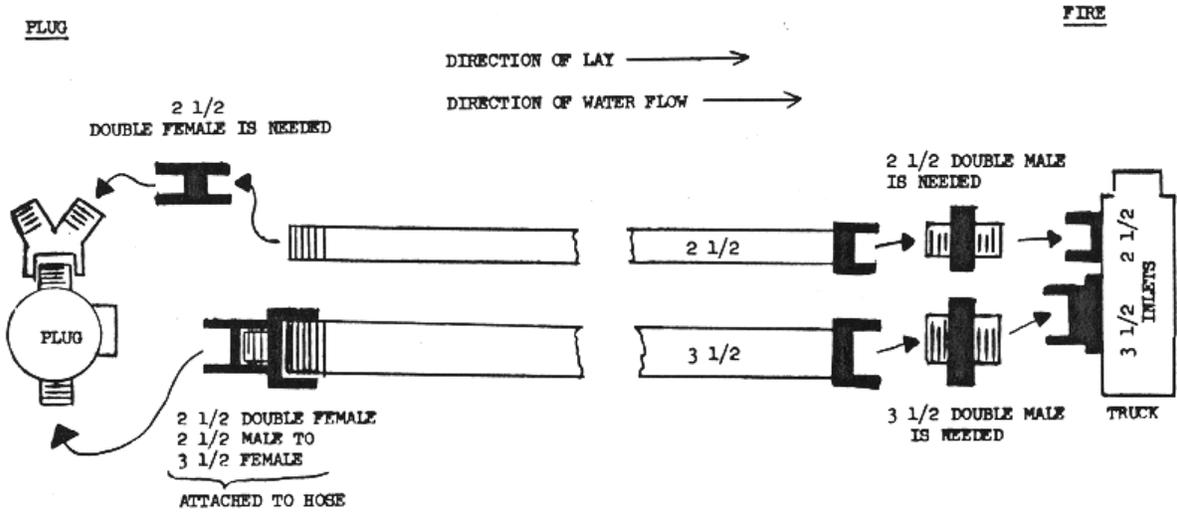
Maintaining this level of efficiency requires the facilities to train in and also the equipment to train with. Well, we have some of the finest facilities and equipment in this area. As you might expect, the maintenance on these facilities costs an enormous amount each year, and that is why we ask for your financial support.

If you detect a bit of pride in this letter, you are absolutely right. We are proud of our community and of our accomplishments in helping to make Upper St. Clair an ideal place to live.

APPENDIX C HOSE LAYS

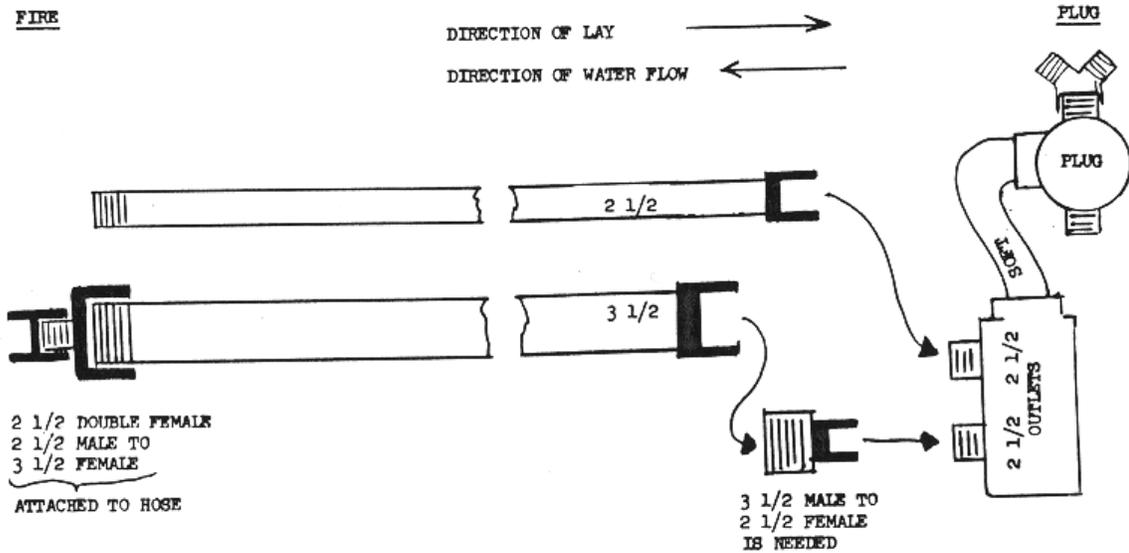
STRAIGHT LAY
(PLUG TO FIRE)

SINGLE - ONE 3 1/2 ONLY
DOUBLE - ONE 3 1/2 AND ONE 2 1/2

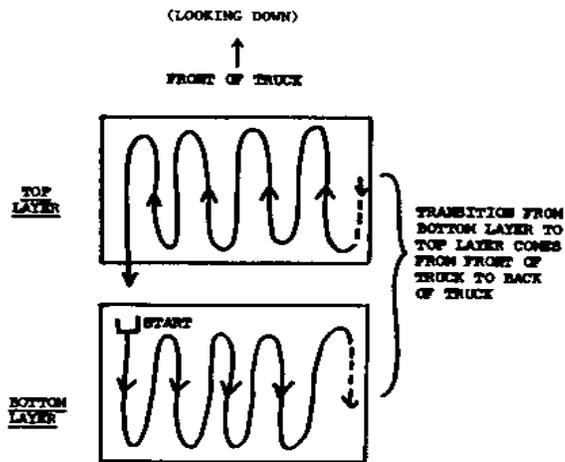
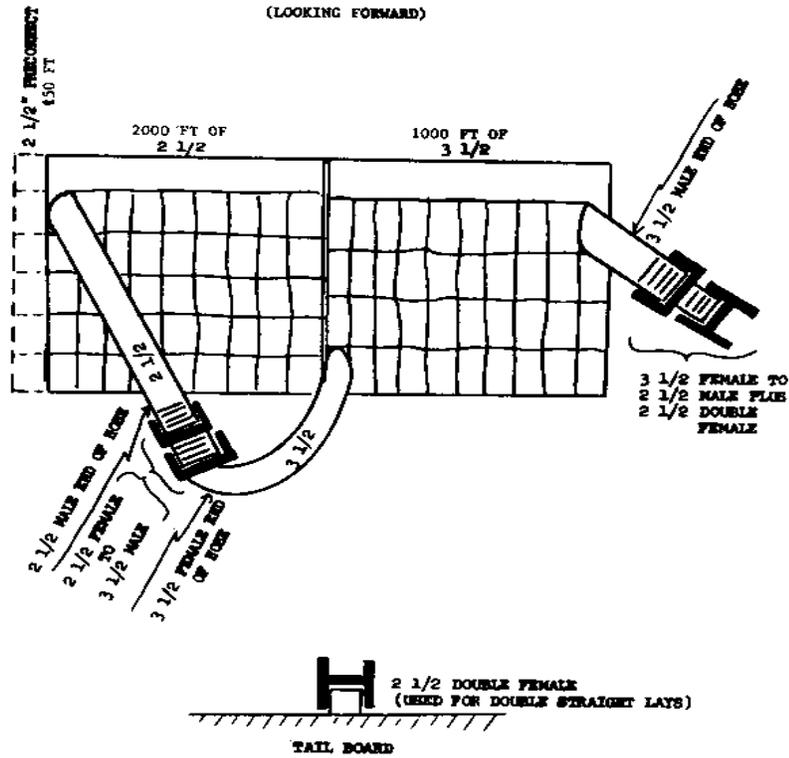


REVERSE LAY
(FIRE TO PLUG)

SINGLE - ONE 3 1/2 ONLY
DOUBLE - ONE 3 1/2 AND ONE 2 1/2



APPENDIX D HOSE PACKING



APPENDIX E TERMINOLOGY

(AS USED AT THE USCVFD)

ADAPTOR - a coupling device for connecting hose to hose, or hose to appliances, with or without the same size or type of threads (i.e. 2 - 1/2" male to 1-1/2" female)

ADVANCING - moving hose line forward

AIR CASCADE - an array of large steel bottles containing compressed air used to fill small SCBA bottles

AIR CHISEL - a hand held cutting tool normally operated from a SCBA air tank

APPLIANCE - a device such as a water curtain or deluge that is used in applying water

APPLICATOR - a long, lightweight tube which, when connected to a nozzle, will apply water spray (or foam) to a fire from a distance

ARSON - setting fires for fraud or for other illegal or malicious reasons

BACK DRAFT - explosion resulting from the introduction of air into an oxygen-deficient fire area

BACK PACK - 100 ft. of 1- 1/2" hose with nozzle, spanner, and adapter for connecting to a hi-rise standpipe

BLEVE - the violent failure of a liquid containing tank or container (Boiling Liquid-Expanding Vapor Explosion)

BLISS ADAPTOR - a thread-less, 4-1/2 inch connector on suction hose and also on the center port of hydrants

BOOSTER LINE - a pre-connected, 1 inch, hard rubber hose carried on a reel. Will provide very low flow rates (normally supplied from pumpers tank)

BREAK-AWAY NOZZLE - a nozzle where the tip can be detached leaving the shut-off and male threads

BREATHING APPARATUS - (see SCBA)

CELLAR NOZZLE - a multi outlet nozzle, which delivers water in all directions by rotating when charged-lowered into burning basement via small hole (also called Bressnan Distributor)

CHARGE LINE - to provide water to a hose line

CHEMOX - an older type SCBA that uses a chemical canister rather than a compressed air bottle

CHEMTREC - Chemical Transportation Emergency Center (800-424-9300) For technical advice or assistance in hazardous material emergencies

CLAPPER - a hinged valve in an appliance, which allows water to flow in only one direction

CLASSES OF FIRE:

- A -ordinary combustibles (paper, wood, rubbish, etc.)
- B -flammable liquids (gasoline, oil, paints, propane, etc.)
- C -electrical equipment
- D -combustible metals (magnesium, sodium, potassium, etc.)

COMBUSTIBLE - material, which will burn under normal fire conditions

COMBUSTIBLE LIQUID - a liquid with a flash point of greater than 100 degrees F

CONDUCTION - the flow of heat along or through a solid material (such as a metal)

CONFINEMENT - preventing the spread of fire to other areas

CONFLAGRATION - a major fire generally involving many blocks

CONVECTION - the transfer of heat by air currents

COUPLING - a male or female threaded device used for joining hose, pipes, or appliances together

C.P.R. - (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) the procedure used to revive a non-breathing victim with no pulse

DELUGE - an appliance capable of providing a large volume of water, can be operated by one firefighters and fed by two or more hose lines

DIRECT ATTACK - use of water (or an extinguisher) directly on a fire

DONUT ROLL - a section of hose rolled in a specific way

DOUBLE FEMALE - a coupling with female threads on each end

DOUBLE MALE - a coupling with male threads on each end

DRAFTING - the process of elevating water from a source (such as a pond) into a pumper where it is expelled at a desired pressure

DUTCHMAN - a short, extra fold made in packing hose to avoid problems in packing or in subsequently laying

DYNAMOTE - a device capable of providing 115 volt A.C. when connected to a 12 volt D.C. vehicle supply

EXPLOSIMETER - an instrument that tests air for the concentration of flammable gases and vapors

EXPOSURE-property that is endangered by a fire nearby

EXTINGUISHERS (and primary use):

CARBON DIOXIDE (CO-2)	Class C or B fires
DRY CHEMICAL	Class B or C fires
DRY POWDER	Class D fires
FOAM	Class B fires
PRESSURIZED WATER	Class A fires only

FIRE PHASES (normal combustibles):

- FIRST - incipient phase, relatively low temperatures, with oxygen level near normal (21%)
- SECOND - free burning, extremely hot, flame producing period with oxygen level from 21% to 15%
- THIRD - dangerous, smoldering period with oxygen level depleted below 15%, when a backdraft is possible.

FIRE STREAMS - the pattern of water after leaving the nozzle-varies from a narrow, solid (STRAIGHT) stream to a wide, dispersed (FOG) stream

FIRE TRIANGLE - three components (heat, fuel, and oxygen-or air), each of which is necessary for fire, the removal of any one of which will extinguish the fire. Some firefighters argue that there is another component (the Chief) whose removal will also cause a fire to go out!

FLAMMABLE/EXPLOSIVE RANGE - the vapor-to-air percentage that can burn or explode (i.e. gasoline range is 1.4% to 7.6%)

FLAMMABLE LIQUID - A liquid whose vapors will burn under certain conditions (Flash Point less than 100 degrees F)

FLASHBACK - jump of fire from source of ignition to a container of flammable liquid. Also re-flash of a flammable liquid fire that has been extinguished

FLASHOVER - the rapid sweep of flames over an entire room or area

FLASHPOINT - the lowest temperature at which the vapors given off by a liquid will burn when combined with air (i.e. gasoline is minus 50 degrees F, Kerosene is a minimum of 100 degrees F, etc.)

FOG PATTERN - a wide and broken water stream with relatively little force or distance (in contrast to a straight stream)

FORCIBLE ENTRY - gaining entry to locked areas using special tools

FOUR-WAY VALVE - a valve attached to a hydrant which permits direct use of water and later redirects water to pumper without shutting hydrant down (Humet valve as an example)

FRICTION LOSS - the reduction in water pressure as it flows through a hose or appliance. It becomes larger as the hose diameter decreases or as the flow rate (GPM) increases

GATE - a valve used to control the flow of water

GPM (Gallons Per Minute) - the volume of water delivered each minute-from 50 or less for small, hand-held lines to 1000 or more from deluge sets

HALL RUNNER - a long, narrow roll of canvas laid down to protect rugs and floors

HAZARDOUS MATERIAL - a substance that has an unreasonable risk to health and safety

HIGH RISE - a building of several stories

HIT A HYDRANT - connect hose from rear of pumper to hydrant in process of laying the line

HOSE BRIDGE - a portable device used to cover a charged line so that vehicles can drive over the line

HOSE CLAMP - a portable device that squeezes a hose to stop the water flow

HOSE JACKET - a device which clamps around a leaking hose to permit its continued use at a fire (can also be used to join two hose couplings with bad or different threads)-also the outer covering on hose

HYDRANT - a connection to a water main for fire department use with various types and sizes of capped openings (also called a PLUG)

HYDRANT WRENCH - A tool to open/close the hydrant valve and to loosen/tighten the hydrant caps

HUX BAR - a type of pry bar with one pointed end and one pronged end

INDIAN TANK - a backpack water tank with a hand pump used for brush fires

INDIRECT ATTACK - directing water from outside into a highly heated area to create steam which will help suppress the fire

INFLAMMABLE - a confusing term that implies that a material will not burn but actually means that it will

IN-LINE - something inserted into the water or hose line (i.e. a valve)

KELLY TOOL - a type of pry bar with flat, dull blades on each end

K-12 - a gasoline powered, hand-held saw with a rotary, disk blade used in ventilation and rescue work

LADDER PIPE - a high volume nozzle on an aerial ladder which is supplied via hose or telescoping waterways and which can be operated remotely

LADDER TERMS:

AERIAL	-	hydraulically operated ladder
BANGOR	-	long extension ladder with tormentor poles
BEAM	-	sides holding the rungs
BUTT	-	ground end, base, bottom, or heel
DOG	-	locks (or pawls) that, when engaged, keep the fly from descending
FLY	-	the movable portion(s) of an extension or aerial ladder
GROUND	-	hand raised ladders
HALYARD	-	extension ladder rope used to raise/lower the fly
HEEL	-	ground end, base, or butt
HEELING	-	taking a position at the base of a ladder while it is being raised, lowered or climbed
PLATFORM	-	hydraulically operated booms which elevate a platform or basket
RAISE	-	standard ways of lifting, carrying, and putting a ladder into position
STICK	-	the aerial ladder
STOPS	-	limits that keep fly from going too far in either direction
TIP	-	upper end
TORMENTOR	-	poles on sides of 40 and 50 foot ground ladders used for support and to aid in lowering and raising

LAY - the process of stretching out (or laying in) hose (see straight and reverse)

LIGHT WATER - a liquid additive that enables water to float on (and to blanket) liquids lighter than water (i.e. gasoline)

LINE - a length of hose or rope

MASTER STREAM - a heavy stream with water flow in excess of 350 gpm

MATTYDALE - a pre-connected hose (or hose compartment) running crosswise on a pumper, over the pump

NONFLAMMABLE - materials that will not normally burn

NOZZLE - an appliance that forms the water leaving a hose into the desired type of stream

OVERHAUL - searching for and extinguishing hidden fires and embers

PACKO - a portable oxygen-acetylene cutting unit (torch)

PIKE POLE - a pole with a hook at one end for pulling ceilings, etc.

PARTITION TIP - a nozzle with pointed tip that can be driven into a wall to direct water between the partitions

PORTA-POWER - hydraulically operated rams and wedges that can be used in rescue work to push, pull or spread

PLUG - another name for hydrant

PRE-CONNECT - a hose line ready for use (with nozzle and connected to pump outlet). Sometimes called a leader line

PRE-PLAN - information developed in advance of use about fighting a fire in a specific target (may include floor plans; water requirements and supplies; manpower, equipment and mutual aid needs and assignments)

PRIMING - the process of creating a pressure lower than atmospheric within a pump that will enable atmospheric pressure to push water up into the pump

PROPORTIONER - a device that will mix a liquid concentrate (such as foam or light water) with water in the right proportions (also called an EDUCTOR)

RADIANT HEAT - heat transferred by waves (rather than by conduction or convection)

RESUSCITATOR - a device that can breathe automatically for a non-breathing patient. Can also provide oxygen to a self-breathing patient (inhalation) or clear (aspirate) a nose, mouth or throat

REVERSE LAY - a hose laid from the fire scene to the water supply (opposite of straight lay)

ROCKWOOD - a nozzle that can connect to a partition tip or to an applicator pipe (also called a Navy Nozzle)

SALVAGE COVER - a tarpaulin used to protect furniture from water damage

SCBA - Self Contained Breathing Apparatus operated from compressed air (or oxygen)

 DEMAND TYPE - only delivers air to face piece when user inhales

 PRESSURE DEMAND - delivers air to face piece at all times when in operation

SIAMESE - an adapter used to combine two or more water flows into one (inlets have gates or clapper valves)

SMOKE EJECTOR - a portable, electrically operated fan capable of moving large quantities of smoke filled air

SPANNER - a wrench type device used for tightening/loosening couplings

SPRINKLER STOP - a wood or metal device used to stop water flow from an open sprinkler head

STANDPIPE - a vertical pipe in a building to provide water to upper floors for fire department use.

STRAIGHT LAY - hose laid from water supply to fire scene (opposite of reverse lay)

STRAIGHT STREAM - a narrow, solid, powerful, far-reaching stream (as opposed to a fog pattern)

STRAIGHT TIP - a nozzle that produces a straight stream

SUCTION HOSE - used to connect a pumper inlet to a water source (sometimes called a sleeve):

 HARD SUCTION - reinforced to prevent collapse when drafting

 SOFT SUCTION - used when connecting to a positive pressure water supply (i.e. a hydrant or another pumper)

TURN-OUT GEAR - Protective clothing (coat, boots, helmet, bunker pants, hood and gloves)

UNIVERSAL THREAD ADAPTER (UTA) - an adapter that can be connected to a hose (Or hydrant) with damaged or non-standard male threads

VENTILATION - the process of opening a burning building to vent smoke and heat

WATER CURTAIN - an appliance that produces a wall of water to protect exposures

WATER THIEF - an appliance with one 2-1/2" inlet and three outlets (one 2-1/2" two, gated 1-1/2" 's)

WATER WAY - telescoping pipes on an aerial that supplies water to a nozzle on the ladder fly

WET WATER - liquid concentrate, which when added to water, increases its ability to penetrate

WHEAT LIGHT - a flashlight that operates from a rechargeable, wet battery

WORKER - a major fire (a "good one", or a fire that is "going good")

WYE - an adaptor used to split one line into two (has one female inlet and two, gated male outlets)

APPENDIX F
FIREFIGHTERS/FIRE DEPARTMENTS

Number of Firefighters in the United States

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Career (Paid)	226,600	20.4
Volunteer	884,600	79.6
	-----	-----
TOTALS	1,111,200	100.0

Number of Fire Departments in the United States

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Fully Paid	1,365	4.8
Mostly Paid	860	3.0
Mostly Volunteer	3,130	11.1
All Volunteer	22,905	81.1
	-----	-----
TOTALS	28,260	100.0

Source-"Fire Command," July 1985

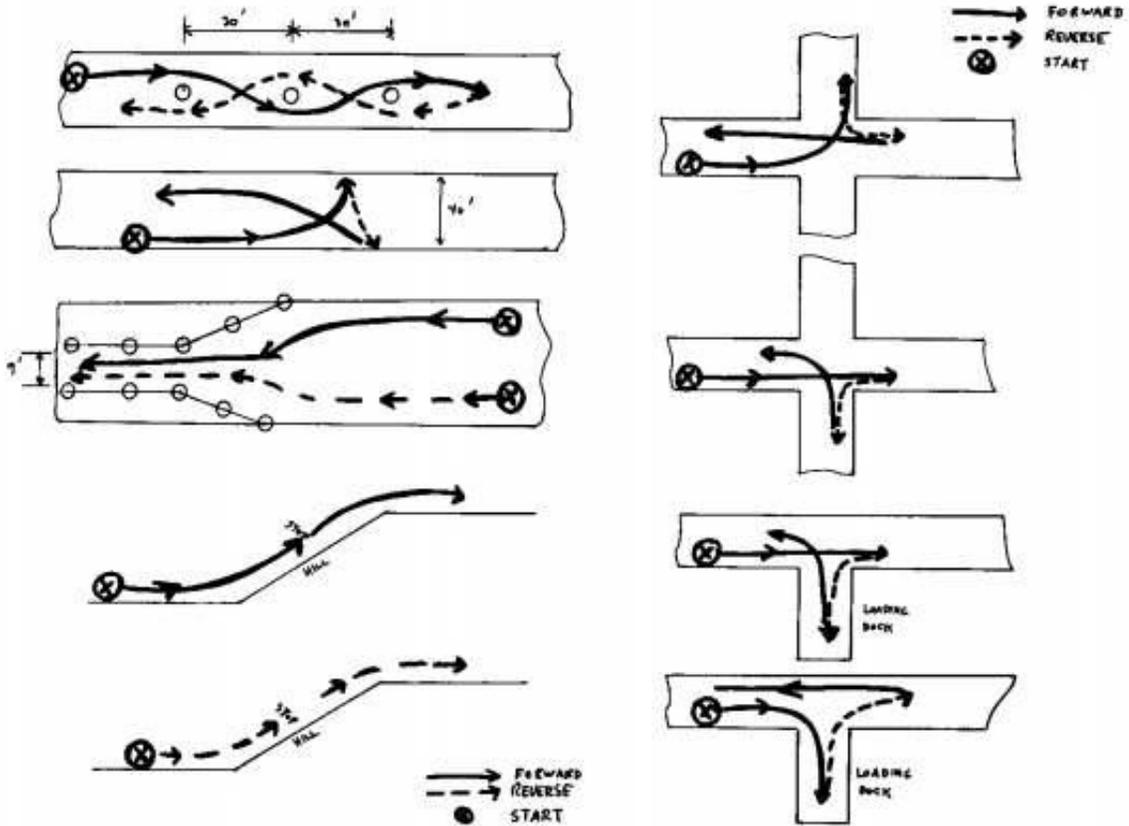
APPENDIX G
VEHICLE QUALIFICATION/REQUALIFICATION

USCVFD

I. Driver's Qualification

- A. For qualification on any vehicle the individual must be able to:
1. Explain what the Motor Vehicle Code says about the operation of emergency vehicles.
 2. Explain when each truck rolls (type of calls, sequence, etc.).
 3. Explain the rules for wearing protective equipment on the vehicles during emergencies and non-emergencies.
 4. Explain specifically what the driver is responsible for before, during, and after each call.
 5. Have a valid Pennsylvania driver's license (Class 1, 2 or 3).
 6. Explain the policy/procedure for tire chains.
 7. Have a USCVFD Certification card signed by the chief which shows each vehicle the individual is qualified on.
- B. For each vehicle qualified on the individual must be able to:
1. Explain or demonstrate how to perform all of the after-use/weekly/monthly checks.
 2. Explain specifically what and how much equipment is carried (i.e., how many pike poles, etc.).
 3. Explain the operation and use of the radios, siren, red lights and all in-cab gauges/controls.
 4. Explain when and how to fuel the vehicles.
 5. Quote the vehicles approximate height and weight and list the restrictions for all area bridges.

6. Drive the vehicle with confidence. This shall include proficiency in basic driving habits, shifting, braking, cornering, and defensive driving. This should include not only normal driving in traffic on main side roads but those maneuvers shown below.



C. Special requirements in addition to those in I. A and I. B.

1. Truck 62 - Use the cascade to fill at least two mask bottles-explaining the procedure, precautions and the refilling of the cascade.
2. Trucks 66/67/68 (Drivers qualification only-see Section II. A. for Pump Operators)
 - (a) Explain how much water is carried and how long it can be expected to last
 - (b) Be able to set up to operate from the booster tank explaining the entire procedure and all precautions. This should include pump operation, priming, pressure settings, booster cooling, etc.
 - (c) Explain how much hose is carried and the procedure and precautions in laying.

3. Truck 65 (Drivers qualification only-see Section II. B. for Ladder Operators)
 - (a) Explain how much hose is carried and the procedure/precautions in laying.
 - (b) Explain the considerations involved in placing the truck for subsequent ladder operation (outriggers, distance from building, ground slope, relationship to the emergency, etc.).
 - (c) Be able to set the vehicle up for subsequent ladder operation (braking, PTO, chocking wheels, etc.).

II. Special Qualifications

A. Trucks 66/67/68, Pump Operator

1. Be qualified to drive.
2. Be able to set up for each of the following and explain the procedure and precautions associated with each operation.
 - (a) Straight lays (single & double)
 - (b) Reverse lays (single & double)
 - (c) Soft/Hard suction use
 - (d) Governor operation
 - (e) Drafting
 - (f) Relay operations
3. Be able to explain:
 - (a) All gauges/controls on the pump panel
 - (b) Piping of water system
 - (c) How to check for and correct problems
 - (d) Truck pumping capabilities
 - (e) Friction loss calculations and how to set pump pressure

(f) All hazards, precautions, and limitations associated with the operation of the pump

B. Truck 65, Ladder Operator

1. Be qualified to drive.
2. Be able to explain:
 - (a) All hazards, precautions, and limitations associated with the operation of the ladder (with and without water flowing)
 - (b) All rules and restrictions for ladder operation, water tower operation and combined operation
 - (c) Pressure requirements for water tower operation
 - (d) Equipment required for climbing
3. Be able to perform and to explain the procedures and precautions associated with each of the following:
 - (a) Setting outriggers
 - (b) Raising/Rotating/Extending ladder
 - (c) Locking ladder
 - (d) Climbing ladder
 - (e) Operating as water tower
 - (f) Removing from operation

III. Requalifications

- A. Requalification will be required at least each 3 years.
- B. The line officers will review the individual's prior history and record including:
 1. Frequency of prior operations (from truck logs)
 2. Personal observations of line officers
 3. Complaints/comments received from members and non-members

4. Prior qualification/requalification records

5. Apparent physical condition

6. Other considerations having a bearing

C. Based on the above review at least 3 of the line officers (one being the chief) should conclude either:

1. The individual can be requalified.

2. The individual can be requalified only after the satisfactory spot checking of certain specific items.

3. The individual should not be requalified (full initial qualification required).

IV. Forms/Records

- A. A copy of the Emergency Vehicle Qualification form shall be completed for all initial qualifications.
- B. Certification cards will be issued by the chief showing all current qualifications.
- C. Records of all qualifications and requalifications shall be maintained by the chief.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Certification of Authorization
To Operate Fire Department Vehicles
The following is issued pursuant to the Act of February 15, 1980, No. 8, amending Title 75 (Vehicle) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes:
This Certifies That

IS QUALIFIED AND AUTHORIZED TO OPERATE THOSE VEHICLES OF THE UPPER ST. CLAIR FIRE DEPARTMENT AS SPECIFICALLY LISTED ON THIS CARD.

Signature of Chief _____ Date _____
VOID THREE YEARS AFTER ABOVE DATE OR WHEN REVOKED.

Front

UPPER ST. CLAIR FIRE DEPARTMENT
OPERATORS VEHICLE AUTHORIZATION

VEHICLE	SIGNATURE OF CHIEF
Truck 62, 1979 Ford Van	_____
Truck 65, 1976 A. LaFrance Ladder	_____
Truck 66, 1972 A. LaFrance Pumper	_____
Truck 67, 1974 A. LaFrance Pumper	_____
Truck 68, 1978 A. LaFrance Pumper	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Rear

EMERGENCY VEHICLE QUALIFICATION

Name _____ Truck No. _____

Operators License No. _____ Class _____

Restrictions _____

- A. Oral quiz satisfactorily completed on knowledge of all switches, gages, controls, etc. (inside and out).

Date _____ Officers signature _____

- B. Oral quiz satisfactorily completed on knowledge of maintenance requirements/responsibilities and on how to perform weekly/ monthly maintenance checks.

Date _____ Officers signature _____

- C. Oral quiz satisfactorily completed on names/location of all equipment on truck.

Date _____ Officers signature _____

- D. Oral quiz satisfactorily completed on company/state rules/laws for operating emergency vehicles.

Date _____ Officers signature _____

- E. Satisfactorily completion of an appropriate number of practice driving sessions with a qualified driver/instructor.

<u>Session</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Times</u>	<u>Instructors Signature</u>	<u>Remarks*</u>
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

(Record additional sessions on the reverse side)

- F. Satisfactorily completion of a formal road test, an oral quiz, and a demonstration of the operation of all special features of the vehicle (to be given by a chief officer).

Date _____ Officers Signature _____

*Include comments on driving ability and additional experience needed.

APPENDIX H
TRUCK CHECK FORMS

<u>UPPER ST. CLAIR VOL. FIRE DEPT. - WEEKLY TRUCK CHECK LIST</u>					
Truck No. _____		Month of _____ 19 __			
Officer in Charge of Truck Name: _____	Period:	1-7	8-15	16-23	24-30
	Name:				
<u>ITEM</u>	<u>Date/Initials</u>	<u>Date/Initials</u>	<u>Date/Initials</u>	<u>Date/Initials</u>	<u>Date/Initials</u>
Check Oil (if low add and mark amount)					
Check Fuel (add if below 3/4l)					
Check Radiator (if low, add and mark amount)					
Check Horn, Siren, and All Lights					
Check Battery Level and Charge					
Check Pump (run to 150 gpm)					
Check Booster Tank (if low, add and mark amount)					
Open/Close Each Suction/Discharge Gate Three or More Times					
Check Position All Switches, Controls, Valves					
Check Tires/Tire Pressure					
Check Auto. Trans. Fluid (62/65/68)					
Check All Equipment Present					
Add Problems to Truck/Equipment Problem Sheet					

UPPER ST. CLAIR VOL. FIRE DEPT. - MONTHLY TRUCK CHECK LIST

Truck No. _____

Month of _____ 19__

Officer in Charge: _____ Truck Crew: _____

<u>Items to be Checked</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Checked By/Date</u>
Power Steering Reservoir		
Windshield Wipers/Washer		
Brake Fluid (62) Air Guard (65, 66, 67)		
Pump Governor on Pumpers Air Cascade on 62		
Power Generator and/or Inverters		
Primer Level on Pumpers Grease Fittings on 65		
Check for Fuel/Oil/Water Leaks		
Breaks (Foot, Hand, Maxi)		
All Air Masks - also Check All Air Bottles (Masks, Spare, Cascade, and Air Chisel)		
Check, Run, Clean all Equipment		
Wheat Lights - Check Water		
Check/Charge Portable Radio		
Wipe or Wash		

Add Problems to Truck/Equipment Problem Sheet

Mileage: _____

Engine Hours: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX I
TRUCK 68 MAINTENANCE / CHECKS

A. After Each Use (Driver is responsible)

1. Check oil level - about 15 minutes after shutdown - use 30 or 40 weight oil from drum.
2. Check fuel level - fill with diesel fuel if below 3/4.
3. Check all equipment present and in proper condition.
4. Check, and if required, fill booster tank.
5. Sign log.
6. Grease pump (2 shots) if used for more than two minutes (use low pressure hand gun). (Lubriplate).
7. Check automatic transmission fluid with engine hot, at idle, and in neutral - use Dextron II.

B. Weekly (Truck officer responsible)

1. Perform checks A.1, 2, 3, 4 and 7.
2. Check radiator level - add water if low.
3. Check lights, horn, and siren.
4. Check pressure (100 psi front, 90 psi rear) and condition of all tires.
5. Check battery level and charge.
6. Run pump to 150 psi. (See cold weather operations in winter).
7. Check all switches and controls in proper position.
8. Open and close all inlet and outlet gates.

C. Monthly (Truck officer responsible) (3rd Wednesday)

1. Check primer level (add 30 or 40 weight oil from drum).
2. Check for oil, water, or fuel leaks.
3. Check power steering level (Dextron II).
4. Check windshield wipers and washers.
5. Check pump governor.
6. Check power generator operation.
7. Check portable radio (charge the battery).
8. Check all brakes and air pressure.
9. Check all air masks and spare bottles.
10. Check all Wheat lights (water level and charger operation).
11. Check all gauges, alarm lights, and buzzers.
12. Lubricate governor control (use low pressure hand gun). (Lubriplate).

D. Six Months (Maintenance officer responsible)

1. State inspection.
2. Grease (chassis and steering).
3. Change oil if required; yearly otherwise.
4. Check differential.
5. Check all belts.
6. Check steering.
7. Check emergency shutdown.
8. Grease pump.
9. Test brakes and air pressure.
10. Check air reservoirs for moisture.
11. Wash and wax.
12. Check pump transmission's oil level.
13. Oil primer motor.
14. Lubricate shutter arms and pivots with SAE 30 oil.
15. Clean battery terminals.

E. Yearly (Maintenance officer responsible)

1. Change (or clean) oil filter.
2. Tune-up/check engine.
3. Drain/flush/refill booster.
4. Check pump packing
5. Check automatic transmission.
6. Check exhaust system.
7. Check starter.
8. Check springs, wheels, tires, and studs.
9. Drain and refill pump transmission oil.
10. Add Prestone to radiator.

F. Other

1. Wash as required.
2. Drain and refill radiator every two years.

APPENDIX J EMERGENCY REPORT

EMERGENCY REPORT		UPPER ST. CLAIR VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT	
CALL NUMBER _____		DATE _____ DAY OF WEEK _____	
LOCATION _____		TYPE _____	
TRUCK RESPONSE _____		WEATHER _____ ROAD CONDITION _____	
CALLED BY _____		CALL RECEIVED BY _____	
TIMES: CALLED _____		IN SERVICE _____ ON SCENE _____ RETURNED _____	
OCCUPANTS OR OWNER _____			
OWNER ADDRESS _____			
TOTAL LOSS: _____ BLDG. _____ CONTENTS _____			
SUSPECTED CAUSE _____			
EQUIPMENT USED:		OTHER:	
MASKS _____	_____	HOSE: _____	_____
EXTINGUISHERS _____	_____	_____	_____
HAND LIGHTS _____	_____	_____	_____
LADDERS _____	_____	_____	_____
MEMBERS PRESENT		TRUCK OPERATORS	
1. _____	10. _____	1. _____ (62)	1. _____ (51)
2. _____	11. _____	2. _____ (65)	2. _____ (51A)
3. _____	12. _____	3. _____ (66)	3. _____ (52A)
4. _____	13. _____	4. _____ (67)	4. _____ (51C)
5. _____	14. _____	5. _____ (68)	5. _____ (52C)
6. _____	15. _____		6. _____ (53C)
7. _____	16. _____		
8. _____	17. _____		
9. _____	18. _____		
		TOTAL PERSONNEL PRESENT _____	
HYDRANT(S) USED AT _____	Water Co. Notified by _____		
OTHER AGENCIES PRESENT or NOTIFIED _____	RESPONSE TIMES		
EQUIPMENT OR TRUCK PROBLEMS OR DAMAGE _____	Call/in Service: _____		
	Call/on Scene: _____		
	Total Time Out: _____		
DETAILS OF EMERGENCY AND ACTIONS TAKEN:			
FOLLOW UP ACTIONS REQUIRED (All subsequent information recorded on back of original copy)			

APPENDIX K
LINE CLASSIFICATIONS/REQUIREMENTS
USCVFD

Firefighter I (Each new member should reach this classification by the end of his probationary period.)

Knowledge/Abilities

Requirements

A. Air Masks

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Understand the following:

a. the hazards of fire gasses.
b. the basic principles of operation
c. the limitations and precautions of using | 1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz |
| 2. With protective gear on be able to:

a. don properly in 25 seconds or less
b. buddy breath
c. emergency breathe
d. crawl under obstacles
e. perform end-of-use maintenance | 2. Demonstrate to authorized instructor.

3. Use mask in a dense smoke/heat environment |

B. Ground Ladders (except 40 foot)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Understand:

a. ladder terminology
b. how to carry, place, climb, and lock in
c. hazards and precautions of using
d. rescue techniques | 1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz |
| 2. Be able to properly carry/raise/lower roof and attic ladders. | 2. Demonstrate to authorized instructor |
| 3. As part of a 2-man team, properly carry/raise/lower a 24-foot extension ladder. | 3. Demonstrate to authorized instructor |
| 4. As part of a 3-man team, properly carry/raise/lower a 35-foot extension ladder. | 4. Demonstrate to authorized instructor. |

5. Be able to properly climb/lock-in/descend a raised ladder.

5. Demonstrate to authorized instructor.

C. Hose Lays

1. Understand:

- a. Hydrant operation
- b. Hydrant hook-ups
- c. Hose couplings and adapters
- d. Single/double and straight/reverse lays (2 1/2" & 3 1/2")

1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz

2. As the hydrant man, be able to hook up for each of the following:

- a. double straight lay
- b. double reverse lay

2. Demonstrate to authorized instructor

D. Hose Operation

1. Understand nozzle operation, hazards of firefighting, and the basic principles of fire suppression.

1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz

2. As part of a two-man team advance, operate and repack a 1 1/2 " pre-connect. This shall include advancing dry hose up a ladder and into a window, plus advancing a changed line on the ground and operating a changed line from a ladder.

2. Demonstrate to authorized instructor

3. Serve as nozzle man using 1 1/2 " hose and air mask in practice fire building.

3. Satisfactorily complete assignment.

E. Basic Equipment

1. Know the name, location and approximate amount of all USC equipment.

1. Self study and written quiz

2. Know how to properly use axes, pike poles, extinguishers, smoke ejectors, and electric cables, hose clamps, hose straps, etc.

2. Attend training sessions and pass quiz

F. Company Operations

1. Know fire terms, street lists, maps, company rules and guidelines, use of radios, vehicle code, forms used, electrical safety, etc.

1. Self-study and written quiz on Training Manual items.

G. Truck Maintenance (All trucks)

1. Understand checks required forms used, how to perform checks, battery charging, truck fueling, tire chains, and inventory/log sheets.

1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz

H. Air Cascade

1. Understand principles of operation, hazards and precautions involved.
2. Be able to properly fill mask bottles from floor and truck cascade.

1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz.

1. Demonstrate to authorized instructor.

I. Truck 62 Operation

1. Qualify to operate Truck 62 (unless ineligible).

1. Satisfy qualification requirements

Firefighter II (Requirements as for a Firefighter I plus the following.)

Knowledge/Abilities

Requirements

A. Ground Ladders (40 foot)

1. As part of a 6-man team, be able to carry/raise/lower as each of the following:
 - a. A pole man
 - b. A top man
 - c. A heel man

1. Demonstrate to authorized instructor.

B. Special Equipment

1. Know how to properly operate each of the following and know the hazards and precautions associated therewith:

- a. Electric Generators
- b. Portable Pumps
- c. Steam Jenny

1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz.

C. CPR

1. Complete formal training qualification course and yearly requalification.

D. Special Evolutions

1. Understand the basics of flammable liquid fires/fire suppression and the hazards/precautions associated therewith. Also understand the purpose and use of light water.

1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz

2. Understand when and how to hook up soft and he hazards/precautions associated therewith.

2. Attend training sessions and pass quiz.

E. Company Operations

1. Be knowledgeable of all USC pre-plans, cold weather operations, and bridge limits.

1. Self-study followed by written quiz.

2. Be knowledgeable of:

- a. basic knots used in the fire service
- b. use and re-packing of back packs
- c. use of salvage covers and hall runners

2. Attend training sessions and pass quiz.

F. Pumper Operation

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Have basic knowledge of pumper piping, governors, priming system, controls, pumping hazards/precautions, and basic pressure settings. Also know how much hose of each size is carried on each truck. | 1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz. |
| 2. Be qualified to drive/operate all pumpers (unless ineligible). | 1. Satisfy qualification requirements. |

G. Hose Operations

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Be able to hook pumper up and feed each of the following:

a. double straight lay
b. double reverse lay
c. sprinkler systems/ standpipes | 1. Demonstrate to authorized instructor. |
| 2. As part of a team advance a charged 2 1/2" on the ground and operate it both on the ground and from a ladder. | 1. Demonstrate to authorized instructor. |

H. First Aid

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Complete a basic course. | 1. Satisfactorily complete formal course. |
|-----------------------------|---|

Firefighter III (Requirements as for a Firefighter II plus the following.)

Knowledge/Abilities

Requirements

A. Pumping Principles

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Understand friction loss, truck capabilities, pump pressure determinations, and parallel line operations. | 1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz |
| 2. Be able to determine pump pressure for various lengths/sizes of hose lays which feed ladder pipe, deluge, and/or hand lines under various specified situations. | 1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz. |

B. Master Streams

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand water requirements pump pressure and hazards/precautions associated with:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Ladder pipeb. Deluge set | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz. |
|---|--|

C. Rescue Equipment

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand the use of the following including fuels used and hazards/precautions:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. PACKOb. K-12c. Air chiseld. Chain sawe. Saws-all2. Be able to properly operate each of the above | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz.2. Demonstrate to authorized instructor. |
|--|---|

D. Truck 65

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand the operation of the truck and the ladder. This includes:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Instruments and controlsb. Placing and setup of truckc. Operation of ladder for rescue and water tower operationd. Hazards and precautions2. Be qualified to drive truck (unless ineligible).3. Be qualified to operate ladder. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz.2. Satisfy qualification requirements.3. Satisfy qualification requirements. |
|--|--|

E. Company Operations

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand all out-of-town pre-plans; ventilation/salvage/forcible entry principles; sprinkler system operation; procedures for chimney fires/ lightning strikes/auto fires/Class A, B, C, and D fires, etc. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz. |
|---|--|

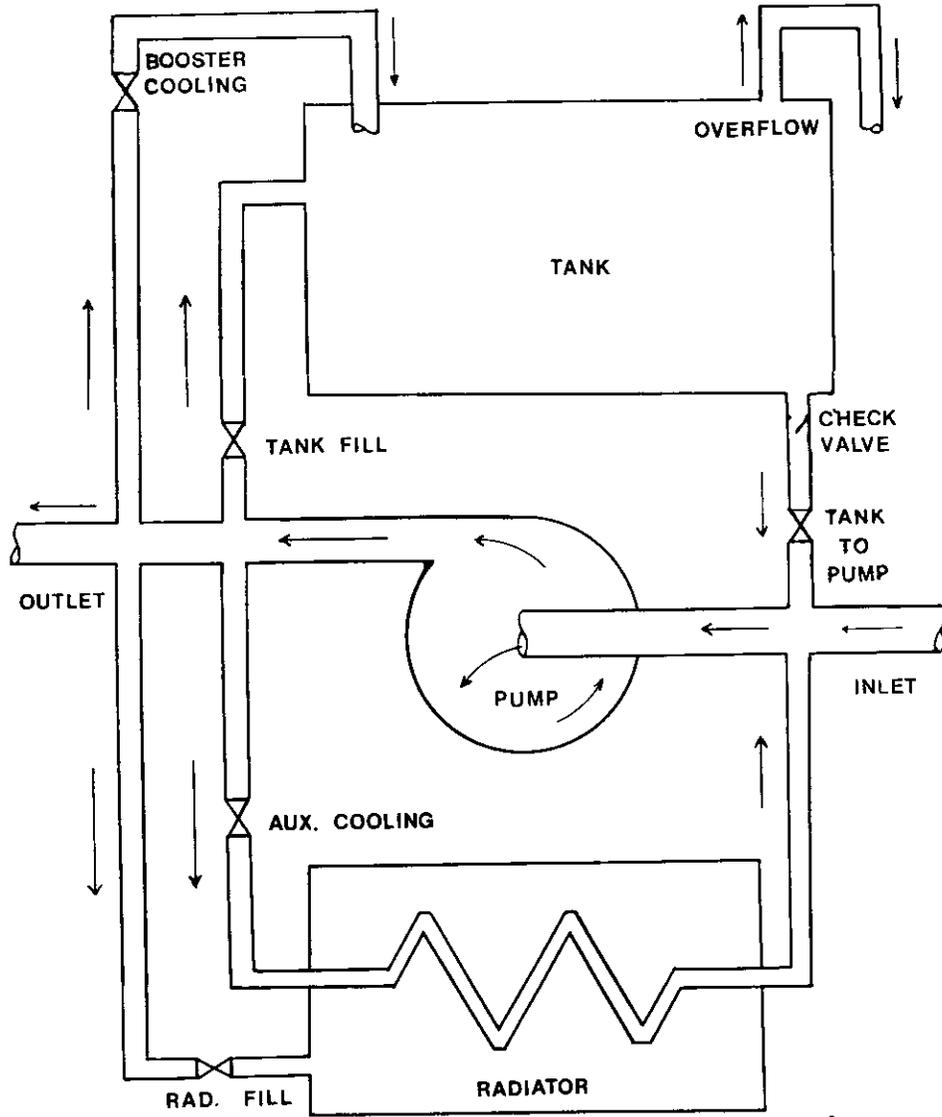
F. Special Equipment

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand the principles of operation, use, hazards with each of the following:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Resuscitatorb. Porta Powerc. Air Compressord. CO Metere. Explosimeter2. Be able to properly operate each of the above. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Attend training sessions and pass quiz.2. Demonstrate to authorized instructor. |
|---|---|

G. Special Training (Training in these areas is desired but not required for a Firefighter III.)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Receive special training in each of the following areas:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Hazardous Materialsb. Arson Detectionc. Disaster Planningd. Line Budgetse. Relay Pumping/Tandem Pumpingf. Sprinkler Systems
(Types/Operation/Testing)g. BOCA Codeh. Pumping from Drafti. Flow Testingj. Stokes basket/slingk. Clem-Ox masksl. Alarm/detection devices/systemsm. Mutual aid capabilities/procedures | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Complete appropriate training training and pass associated exams. |
|--|--|

APPENDIX L
PIPING OF PUMPER



R. Thomson
Aug 1977

APPENDIX M CALL SUMMARY EXTRACTS

1983 EMERGENCY CALLS

81.	7/04	2407 Willowbrook	Lightning
82.	7/04	Route 19, Peters	Rescue
83.	7/06	Route 19, Macks	Rescue
84.	7/06	1570 Hollowtree	Alarm
85.	7/08	Boyce Plaza	Alarm
86.	7/09	South Hills Village	Alarm
87.	7/09	Painters Run	Vehicle
88.	7/10	1809 Taper	Propane Leak
89.	7/11	McMurray Road	Wash Down
90.	7/12	Peters Township	Stand By
91.	7/14	Johnston & Fife	Vehicle
92.	7/15	123 Bartley Road	Electrical
93.	7/20	Peters Township	Stand By
94.	7/21	1570 Hollowtree	Alarm
95.	7/21	Peters Township	Stand By
96.	7/21	South Hills Village	Electrical
97.	7/21	Morrow Road	Accident
98.	7/21	Morrow Road	Accident
99.	7/21	Township	Storm Stand By
100.	7/23	Best Oil Co.	Gas Spill
101.	7/23	Summerfield Com.	Alarm
102.	7/23	Lesnett-Pinehurst	Tree
103.	7/23	Summerfield Com.	Alarm
104.	7/29	Bower Hill Road	Rescue
105.	8/02	Milwood & Boyce	Wash Down
106.	8/03	Outlook Drive	Wash Down
107.	8/06	Boyce Road	Airplane Crash
108.	8/07	Consol Coal	Alarm
109.	8/07	Consol Coal	Smoke
110.	8/11	2059 Hycroft	Alarm
111.	8/14	1551 Hollowtree	Alarm
112.	8/17	131 Seeger	Smoke
113.	8/20	Consol Coal	Alarm
114.	8/21	123 Orr Road	Alarm
115.	8/22	1749 Hathaway	Electrical
116.	8/22	Consol Coal	Alarm
117.	8/23	Painters Plaza	Structure
118.	8/24	3325 Ponoka	Structure
119.	8/25	McMurray Road	Brush
120.	9/01	Streams School	Alarm
121.	9/02	1322 Lesnett Road	Electrical
122.	9/10	Stop-N-Go	Trash
123.	9/12	Consol Coal	Alarm

1983 FIRE CALL SUMMARY

I. Total Calls	184
II Total Damage	\$71,420
III. Total Man Hours	7,342

a) Man hours fire fighting	1,402
b) Man hours training	2,828
c) Man hours Community Service	374
d) Man hours meetings	290
e) Man hours work details	998
f) Man hours Administration	1,450

Not involved in the above are the hundreds of un-recorded hours spent in informal training, committee work, truck repairs and line officers meetings'

IV. Types of Calls:

Structure	50 calls	27.2%
Alarms	47 calls	25.4%
Brush/trash	22 calls	12.0%
Vehicles	17 calls	9.2%
Accident-Rescue	8 calls	4.3%
Accident-Other	5 calls	2.7%
Miscellaneous	13 calls	7.1%
Out-of-Town	22 calls	12.0%

V. Breakdown of Calls by Day of Week:

Sunday	22 calls	12.0%
Monday	30 calls	16.3%
Tuesday	20 calls	10.9%
Wednesday	23 calls	12.5%
Thursday	30 calls	16.3%
Friday	24 calls	13.0%
Saturday	35 calls	19.0%

VI. Breakdown of Calls by Time of Day:

Midnight to 4 a.m	17 calls	9.2%
4 a.m. to 8 a.m	16 calls	8.7%
8 a.m. to Noon	33 calls	17.9%
Noon to 4 p.m	38 calls	20.7%
4 p.m. to 8 p.m	50 calls	27.2%
8 p.m. to Midnight	30 calls	16.3%

APPENDIX N
NEW RESIDENT LETTER

UPPER ST. CLAIR TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

2001 WASHINGTON ROAD



UPPER ST. CLAIR, PA 15241

The officers and men of your volunteer fire department welcome you to Upper St. Clair Township.

If you were to have a fire or similar emergency it should be reported immediately by dialing 835-0925 and stating the exact location, the nature of the emergency and your name and phone number. This call would be received at the police desk in the township building and transferred immediately to the fire department alerting system. This system would alert our staff that consists of your neighbors who serve entirely without pay.

Upon receipt of such an emergency call the necessary equipment would be dispatched from our station which is located on Route 19 directly across from Orr Road. Our major equipment consists of the following fully equipped, radio controlled units: (1) a 1965 GMC emergency panel truck, (2) a 1964 Seegrave pumper, (3) a 1957 American LaFrance pumper, and (4) a 1945 Pirsch 85-foot ariel ladder truck.

We have enclosed two stickers that list the Fire/Police emergency phone number which we suggest be attached to or near your phone(s). We have also enclosed an outline of the burning ordinance of this township for your information.

This department has available Invalid Markers to identify your home, if required, as one in which an invalid, bedridden person, cripple, etc. must have quick and special attention to be evacuated in case of fire.

Should you be interested in becoming an active fireman with this department (age requirement 21 to 45 years), require Invalid Markers, or have any questions regarding this department, its operation and equipment, or fire protection in general contact any of our members or stop at the fire station on any Wednesday evening.

Again may we welcome you to this township and express our hope that you will never require the emergency services of this department during your residence in this township.

(1967)

APPENDIX O - APPRAISAL FORM

UPPER ST. CLAIR TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

2001 WASHINGTON ROAD



UPPER ST. CLAIR, PA 15241

FIRE DEPARTMENT APPRAISAL

In order that this department might benefit from any observations concerning our operation and performance during your recent emergency, it is requested that the following questions be answered and returned in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Since this is not a request for thanks, praise, or funds your answers should be as frank and as objective as possible._

Type of Emergency:

Date:

Name:

Address:

Reporting:

Did you have any difficulty finding the proper phone number to call or in placing the call?

Was the call answered promptly by the police desk?

Did the police operator handle your call efficiently and courteously?

Do you have any other comments regarding the reporting of your emergency?

Response:

Did the police arrive promptly?

Considering that the fire station is not manned constantly, do you feel that the trucks responded promptly?

Was there an adequate number of men and equipment to handle your emergency?

Do you have any other comments regarding the response to your emergency?

(Page 1)

ASSISTANCE:

If your emergency was a fire, was it promptly contained from spreading?

Was there any unnecessary damage (by water, to lawn, to rugs and contents, to windows and building, etc.) ?

Do you consider that the emergency was handled in an efficient manner?

In retrospect, how might the emergency have been better handled?

Was there sufficient assistance in the clean-up and advice concerning the recovery from your emergency?

Would you have like more assistance from the fire department than actually received?

Do you have any other comments regarding the assistance provided?

OVERALL:

Under the circumstances, do you feel that the men were polite and courteous?

Were there any who were not? (Please describe individual or circumstances).

All things considered, how do you feel your emergency was handled?

What was your general opinion of this department prior to your emergency?

What is your present opinion of this department?

Do you have any other comments or suggestions? (Use additional sheets if necessary).



R. R. Thomson was a member of the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department for twenty-three years, six of which were spent as Fire Chief. He has contributed numerous articles to such magazines as *Fire Engineering*, *Fire Command*, *Fire Service Today* and *Firehouse*. A nuclear physicist by profession, Thomson has worked for the Westinghouse Electric Corporation since 1954. He and his wife, Willie, live in suburban Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, while their three daughters live in Chicago, Denver and Los Angeles.

ISBN 0-9611268-8-4

\$ 17.95

Rear of Dust Jacket

FIRE CHIEF®

VOLUME 31/NUMBER 2/WHOLE NUMBER 358
FEBRUARY 1987

Flames and Follies, by R.R. Thomson (1986). Quinlan Press, 131 Beverly Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02114. Phone: 800-551-2500. Hard cover, 6 x 9 inches, 235 pages. Price: 17.95 plus postage.

This book was written by a retired fire chief of a suburban volunteer fire department. It chronicles how he became interested in the fire service and describes life in the volunteer fire service family. The book includes over 70 photographs of the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department and numerous stories of fire and personnel.

Thomson recounts his twenty years in the fire service in a pretty typical manner. What is unusual about this book is that it describes the inner workings of a volunteer department's lifestyle opposite career departments. Thomson includes not only stories of wars on fire, but the endless battle to raise funds for the department. One point that surfaced in this book was the flexibility that smaller departments have to try new methods. The small departments have the ability to be innovative quickly and with little hassle from procedure and protocol that many larger departments get caught up in. This book is geared for everyone, according to the publisher, but most certainly for volunteers and fire buffs.

Between Alarms

By Robert Burns, Firehouse Magazine, September 1987

Professional Volunteer

Flames and Follies. By R. R. Thomson. 1986. 235 pp. Quinlan Press, Inc., 131 Beverly Street, Boston, MA 02114. Hardcover, \$17.95 plus \$1.50 postage and handling. MA residents add five percent sales tax.

The Township of Upper St. Clair is located approximately 12 miles south of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and covers approximately 10 square miles. The area has changed rapidly in the past quarter of a century from what was mostly farmland to many up-scale single-family dwellings. With a population of 20,000, the township now serves as a "bedroom community" for many large corporations that have moved into the area.

R. R. Thomson, a nuclear physicist, was a member of the Upper St. Clair Volunteer Fire Department (USCVFD) for more than 23 years, the last six of which were spent as chief of the department.

During his time in office, he did much to improve the deficiencies inherent in a volunteer organization. He created a training manual, upgraded the apparatus and provided programs to help turn his small suburban fire department into a professional group.

In *Flames and Follies* Thomson relates how he became interested in firefighting, and the effect his second "fulltime job" had on his primary full-time job and family.

Thomson tells of the many unusual calls he responded to over the years. Some of his stories are very funny, including one about the woman who politely introduces the firefighters to her assembled guests while a fire burns away in her home. Some are discouraging, such as the lack of financial support by half of the citizens of the town, and the great deal of time and effort the department had to put into fund drives.

In a series of appendices, Thomson gives sample letters for fund drives; instructions for hose lays and hose packing; a glossary of terminology used by the USCVFD; vehicle driver qualifications; truck check forms; samples of emergency reports and truck maintenance lists; classification requirements for members of the USCVFD, etc.

Mr. Thomson, a volunteer firefighter and chief for almost a quarter of a century, has "been there" and is one of that special breed of firefighter who does something for nothing for the benefit of his community.

Flames and Follies is good reading for both those who are interested in firefighting, and those whose lives and property are protected by volunteer fire departments.

Robert Burns is a Firehouse correspondent and a retired battalion chief with the Philadelphia Fire Department.

PENNSYLVANIA FIREMAN

August 1986

NEW PUBLICATIONS

FLAMES AND FOLLIES

By R.R. Thomson

A Unique, Inside Look at a Volunteer Fire Department

The author R.R. Thomson was a member of the Upper St. Clair (PA) Volunteer Fire Department for over twenty years and its chief for six years. During that time, he did much to improve the deficiencies inherent in a volunteer organization, from creating training manuals and programs to providing his small, suburban Pennsylvania township with a nearly professional committed group of firefighters.

He has contributed numerous articles to such magazines as *Fire Engineering*, *Fire Command*, *Fire Service Today* and *Firehouse*. A nuclear physicist by profession, Thomson has worked for the Westinghouse Electric Corporation since 1954.

235 pages of true stories about the emergency calls, the fire trucks, the training and qualification programs, the cause of fires, the department operations and, most importantly, about the various people involved.

Touching on such areas as the parades, the fund drives, the injuries, the accidents, the politics, the aged members and much, much more.

By the author who has been there as hoseman, officer and fire chief. Eleven informative chapters and conclusion. Over 70 photographs of the fire department equipment, fund-raising carnivals, training, accidents, and fires! Including many appendices of operational information with diagrams and sample letters.

Flames and Follies tells you about the fun and frustrations, the highs and the lows, and the advantages and the disadvantages of being firefighters. An ideal book for: Active volunteer firefighters (to compare notes); Former volunteer firefighters (to relive the past); Potential volunteer firefighters (to see what's involved); Professional firefighters (to obtain insight about the volunteers); Fire buffs (to share the excitement and the stories); The loved ones of all of the above (to see your competition); Municipal officials (to help to understand your fire department); Friends and neighbors of VFD members (to aid in understanding those strange firefighters); and the general public (to see what a true bargain the volunteer fire service actually is).