

SMOKE
AND
MIRRORS

A FIRE DEPARTMENT
ODYSSEY

Portland, Oregon 1949 - 1975

By

KEN CARTER

ODYSSEY: An extended adventurous wandering.

“SMOKE and MIRRORS,” a collection of:
tales, happenings, events and recollections from
my twenty five years in the Portland Fire
Department.

The men, fires, excitement and frustration.

The times - the good times.

Events I witnessed, stories I heard and
experiences I encountered.

They are all part of my memories, part of my
life, part of me.

Ken Carter.

The boys, noses pressed against the window, would be waiting for me to come home from my shift at the Fire Station. when they saw the car come up the hill, out the door they'd run. George the dog, barking and the kids yelling and crowding around. "Dad, Dad, did you have a fire?"

I'd tell them we would have to wait until I fed the pigs and milked the cow. Waiting let their anticipation grow and gave me a few minutes to think up a story to tell.

Lora would fix breakfast, and over coffee and hot chocolate I'd tell about my day. I tried to have a story for them something that had happened. I would wave my arms, shout and make sound effects to liven up the tales. Usually there was something funny or exciting to tell about. The jokes played, the heroism, or stories I had heard.

There had been a fire, a pretty good one, I told the boys how I had been working the fire for quite awhile. The flames had been knocked down. Thick smoke blanked everything out, it was getting hard to breath. I shut my nozzle down and started working my way back out. I was down on my hands and knees crawling along. I couldn't see much. I sensed the truck crews moving around, they had filter masks that reduced the irritation of the smoke. Truckmen were responsible for ventilating, opening, or breaking out the windows and setting up fans to clear the smoke. Then they would spread tarps over the furniture, and start mopping up the water and shoveling ashes and broken plaster into tubs. Other fire fighters checked the smoke filled rooms for fire victims. The smoke was beginning to thin-out. I could see someone crawling towards me. I felt better. I asked, "Which way is out?" He just looked at me. I yelled, "God Damn it! How do I get out of here?"

Still no answer. Then I realized it was me. I was looking at a mirror. I panicked. If this wasn't the way out, what was? I touched the mirror. It swung out of the way. A closet door had been opened closing off the hallway.

I could see firemen walking around. The smoke was thinning out. Fresh air was coming in the front door. I stood up, breathed a sigh of relief and went out onto the sidewalk.

I'll admit, I helped the truth out a little, but mostly the stories were true. And they were good stories, stories that should be saved. They are my history, and some of the men and events became Fire Department legends. Stories passed from man to man and engine house to engine house. The acts of heroism, stupidity, the jokes that were played, ironic humor, the believable and the bizarre. A history I hope to pass on.

It seems, whenever there is a fire, somebody will be shouting, "There are children in there!" or in this case, "My babies are in there!" The woman was hysterical. We got her calmed down some. "What room were they in, how old are the children?" "Not kids, my cats," she said. One of the firemen, on the sidewalk, went to an open window and asked the men inside. "You guys see any cats in there?" The man inside replied, "Yeah here's one," Picked a dead cat up off the floor and tossed it out the window. It bounced once at the woman's feet, she screamed and fainted.

The grandchildren still like to hear the stories and try to get me started. When the stories get too wild they ask, "Grandma, was that really true?" She'd say, "If grandpa says so, it must be."

The bell hit. The crews ran for the rigs. The watchman gave each officer a slip of paper with the address of the fire.

As soon as the men were on board, out the door they went. The Engine went first, the truck right behind them. Sirens squalling, lights flashing, and the officer jerking on the rope to the bell on the front fender. They turned left against the traffic, went a half block and turned on hall. Bert and I were riding on

the Compressor, a two man special equipment rig. We dropped in behind the truck. Lieutenant Henry was pumping the siren. The engine was leading the way, busting stop signs and forcing the cross traffic to stop.

The traffic signal was green for the cars on Broadway. The Captain on the engine rapped the bell a coupla times and pulled into the intersection forcing the cross traffic to stop. The engine made it across okay. The tuck followed. A car coming down Broadway served around the cars, that had stopped, and hit the truck broadside.

The car door on the passenger side popped open and a woman fell out landing in a heap in the street.

Bert and I, following in the compressor, skidded to a stop. The Captain said, "Carter, you've got it", and drove off leaving me standing in the rain with an injured woman on my hands. We grabbed the first aid kit. I told Bert, "Hold a compress to the cut on her head, and don't leave her."

I radioed for help: First Aid Car, and a Chief. I wanted cover. In the crowd that gathered, a woman stepped forward, she said she was a nurse. There wasn't anything we could do. I wanted to get the injured woman out of the street, but I didn't dare move her. The crow was insisting we move the woman. The nurse told them it was better to wait for the ambulance. I could hear the First Aid Car was coming.

It had been a false-alarm. The city would be sued, the Captain, and the Lieutenant of Truck #2 would receive a reprimand.

The woman hadn't been seriously injured.

The Court decided, "Sirens and flashing lights don't give fire engines, or for that matter ambulances, the Right of Way."

`Starting immediately, "Fire Engines must obey all traffic laws. That means: "Stopping at Stop signs, Red Lights and waiting for the Green Light."

We sure felt silly, roaring down the street, lights flashing, sirens squalling, then skidding to a stop and waiting for the traffic signal to change. Then we would go another block, stop and wait again, block after block.

It took the Legislature six months, or more, to come up with an Emergency Statute: allowing Fire Engines and Ambulances,

to proceed with caution, through stop signs and red lights. So nothing really changed. Lights and sirens are only a warning. The cross traffic has the Right of Way.

Another woman, another fire. She was screaming, "I've got to get into my room, my life savings are in there." We couldn't quiet her down. We turned her over to the Chief. He listened to her story, and decided she did live in the building. A hoseman was assigned to take the woman to her apartment, and help her locate her valuables. She went right to the closet, opened a suitcase, took out two bottles of whiskey, and went merrily on her way.

The Fire houses, in Portland, had a ticker tape system. When a street box was pulled, or when a telephone call came in to the Alarm Office, a coded series of numbers were transmitted to the engine houses indicating the closest street pull box to the fire address. The corresponding card, in the engine houses, listed the companies assigned to respond and designated who would fill in if one of the First-in companies were out of service. The Operator would give the address of the fire (if known.) The houses assigned as first-in companies would be Tapped Out. The lights would drop (A master switch would turn an all the lights in the engine house). The automatic door opener would be activated and electric hammer would beat on a big brass gong!

This not only got our attention, but our eyes bugged out and our hearts pounded as we ran for the rig. (No wonder heart attacks are a major cause of disability.)

We would put our heavy canvas pants, with water proof felt liner, (Turn-outs) by our beds. These were slid over knee length rubber boots. We could step into our boots, pull up our pants, slip suspenders over our shoulders, pull on a sweat shirt and be dressed and on our way in seconds.

Most of the fire houses had the dormitories on the second floor. A brass pole was the fasted way down. You wrapped your arm around the pole and dropped the fifteen or twenty to the apparatus floor. If you were awake, pressure on your arm slowed the speed. If not, a rubber mat softened the landing. Well, not always; a fireman at Truck 2 took the pole, wasn't fully awake, dropped and broke both of his ankles. He never returned to work.

Tom, a crewman on Truck 2, was cooking Thanksgiving Dinner: turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy, sweet potatoes, olives, and all the fixings. Nobody screwed around with the cook. He shopped, he planned, we helped, but nobody made suggestions, or asked questions. The Maestro was in full control. All morning the smells drifted through the engine house. Dinner would be at 2 p.m. The turkey was golden brown. AH! hot pads, lift it out of the oven, OOPS! It tipped, it slipped, Tom ran to retrieve it, skidded in the grease and kicked the turkey across the kitchen floor. NO ONE SAID A WORD. It was good, Damn Good!

There was another time. We had been working an apartment fire on the lower East side. It was a smoky son of a bitch, a room fire. From the smell of the smoke, I'd say it was a bed fore. The fire crews had knocked the fire down, and the truckmen were tossing smoldering debris out the windows.

Fans had been set up in the halls, and men were checking rooms to see that everybody was out. An unconscious, naked woman was found in a bedroom closet. One of the truckmen carried her out of the building and laid her on the sidewalk. A Chief saw her, and shouted, "Get a coat for that woman." One of the firefighters took of his turnout coat and placed it on the side walk. The Truckman picked up the woman and laid her gently on the coat.

I joined the Fire Department November, 1949. Engine 19 was a two story wood frame building, on the corner of S.E. 61st. and Stark. I had no idea what to expect.

I had a set of turn outs and my house uniform. I reported for duty. The men working my shift were really old. I'll bet they were 55, 60 years old, maybe more. They loaned me a helmet, and showed me where my bunk would be.

We didn't have an officer on duty. We were a "Traveling house" A different officer was assigned each day.

Engine 19 was a trip into the past. A two burner gas plate in the basement served as a kitchen. Each man had his cup, dish, bowl, knife, fork, spoon, coffee, and coffee pot. They warmed up leftovers, or fried some spuds. This is how it had always been.

When they started, firefighters worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with 1 1/2 to 2 hours a day off for lunch and supper. The firemen had to live close to the engine house, so they could go home for meals, or their wife could bring them something.

They reminded me of convicts, No life, no interests. Boil some coffee, read the paper, listen to the radio- each man had his own radio.

They did their house work, made beds, swept the floors, polished the fire engine and wipe up the oil.

They never talked to one another. Maybe they were pissed, or bored. They did bitch about the world in general, and the new firefighters in particular. They puttered in the yard, trimmed and weeded the roses

No cards, No TV, the house did subscribe to a couple a magazines, I could read them - after the Old Timers had finished.

Mostly they sat, out front in the sun and watched the cars go by, listened to their radio, or just sat.

Mac wasn't too bad, he could carry on a conversation. We started taking turns cooking, and he told about his plans. He

was going to retire in a few months, build a cabin on some acreage he had up by Sandy and grow Easter lilies.

This was 1949, but the Old Timers could see no reason to buy a refrigerator, a shelf in a basement window would keep leftovers for a day. Them chip in to buy a TV? You've got to be kidding. One of the new kids on the other shift suggested we buy one but the old- timers voted it down.

I don't remember too much about those times. 19's had been built at the turn of the century. The first floor was a horse barn. Cold and drafty, the stables had been in the rear of the apparatus floor. The horses were led out and positioned under the harness that hung from the ceiling. A trip rope dropped the harness over the horses. they could be snapped together and attached to a hose wagon. The horses quivering with excitement could be out the door in seconds. The Old Timers swore the horses could count the thuds as the punch poked holes in the tape when the alarms came in, and knew where they were supposed to go.

1950 was a cold year, cotton blankets, saw-dust for fuel, 20 degrees. When the saw-dust in the hopper was burned up, the fire would back draft into the hopper and fill the engine house with smoke. If there was any saw dust hung up in the hopper, she would burn back through and singe the rafters.

The guys tell the story about Engine 13. It was an old house.

The floor was rotten. Planks had been put down over the apparatus floor. It was the same old story, somebody didn't put the lid on the hopper. The fire burned down. The dust hung up. The fire burned through, set the rafters on fire and filled the fire house with smoke.

It was time for action. The watchman tapped out, fired up the engine, drove to the closest hydrant, hooked up and laid a line back to the engine house. 13's Officer got on the back phone, called a nearby engine house, asked for the Officer and said, "This is, NO SHIT! Get over here we need help."

It was 2:30 in the morning.

“Put us out of service,” he told the Operator, “We’re going on drill.”

“What the Hell are you talking about?”

“Cover us. I’ll explain later.”

“Okay.”

The crew of Engine 13 hit the floor, the fire engine was gone, and the house was full of smoke, About then, the rig pulled up in front. The Officer yelled, “Take a 1 1/2 inch line into the basement, We’re ON FIRE.”

They went to work.

The floor was, “Damn near burned through.”

The crew rounded up some planks and heavy beams, then spent the next couple days repairing the floor and covering up the damage.

The Operators erased the phone call from the recorder, and forgot to log anything in the Shift Journal.

As far as the department knew, nothing happened.

Next inspection, The Chief walked down in the basement.

“Looks like the rafters are kinda singed.”

Then he smiled, but just a little.

Every six weeks Engine 19’s Captain would have to work an extra 24 hour shift: that put him on our shift.

Old Cap was 74 years old, slow, but not about to admit it.

He had been in the fire department for over fifty years. He would have to retire as soon as the five year grace period passed.

The bell hit. My first fire. I slid into my turnouts and ran for the rig. I waited, and WAITED.” Cap walked down the stairs. The driver helped him on with his turn-out coat and steadied him as he climbed aboard. Off we went.

Cap spotted a hydrant, “There’s a hydrant, stop here.”

He stepped off. The driver tried to explain to him, “We’re going alone, we have to go to the fire.”

“No!” Cap exclaimed, “That’s our assigned hydrant. The Chief says we’re supposed to stand by and wait for orders.”

We drove off . Left him standing there. The driver went to the address. After the Re-call, (fire out signal) we picked Cap up and went back to the engine house.

Compulsory retirement before age 65, probably was a good idea; as I found out, “Fire-fighting is a young man’s job.”

We didn’t have a lot of fires, but I was only there a few months. The Old Timers would move to a quiet house to finish out their time. 19’s was in a residential neighborhood and most of the calls were smoke scares or false alarms. We could figure on a false alarm long about 2:30 in the afternoon when the kids were going home from school.

I wanted to fight fires. This was boring. I looked forward to my extra shift at Engine 7. Something was always going on. It was a double house with: engine, Truck, Chief and his driver. Thirteen men. When they had alarms, stuff happened. Bell ringing. doors going up. Guys running to rigs. engines starting. Then out the door, sirens squalling. Hanging on with one arm while you put on your turn-out coat, bracing against the turns. You’d feel the power, and hear the roar of the engine as the drivers shifted gears. It was fun. We could hear the Chief’s siren up ahead leading the way

The officers of Engine 7 and Truck 4 yanking on the bell rope and pumping their sirens.

We could see the column of smoke and the sky lit up. Then sniff the air. Tar paper, a warehouse. Wood shingles, a house fire. Lumber yards had a smell all their own.

At night you can hear the rigs moving up. The sound of the sirens drift over the city. They’re moving in St. Johns and Sellwood. This is a burner. The sirens squalling on Front Avenue. You can feel the excitement in the air.

We roll up, “LAY IN.” Everybody has a job. Somehow they all get done.

The truck crews open up. Bust in doors. Break out windows. Throw up ladders.

We're right behind them. Stretch hose, kick in doors. We have enough men. Bring up a 2 1/2 fog nozzle. Sweep the fire. Lay into your hose belt. The pressure from an open nozzle can knock you down. There are more guys coming. A Truckman or Hoseman will kneel on the hose, press it down on the floor, that will compensate for the back thrust from the nozzle.

We have thirteen guys. We can handle anything. Don't worry about it! Someone will cover us. Just go in, "Knock that Sucker down."

It was great! This was The Fire Department I wanted.

BOAT 1

In the spring of 1950 I was transferred to Boat 1, and was assigned to drive the Turret Wagon.

Boat 1's house was on S.E. Front St. a block and a half North of the old Morrison bridge. The boat was tied up to a float in the river, and a ramp led from the back porch down to the float. The fire house was a one story cement building housing a dormitory, shower room, watch room and a kitchen on the main floor.

Portland had three boats providing coverage for the miles of warehouses and docks along the river. A four inch water cannon, (Turret) mounted Mid-ship could send a stream of water several hundred feet to wet down large fires. The Pilot was trained to balance the power of the engines against the back thrust of the stream from the nozzle. The boat sitting off shore could hang stationary in the current, a hard left or right rudder caused the boat to drift sideways, allowing the stream from the turret to sweep large areas of fire. A very effective way to fight shoreline grass and brush fires. Fuel storage tanks and the creosote covered piling under docks.

The boat also served as a portable pumping station able supply 10,000 gallons of water per minute, equal to the output of 7 or 8 fire engines.

Five men were assigned to Boat 1: A Pilot who steered the boat, an Engineer who maintained the engines, and a fire crew of 2, an officer, and a hoseman who doubled as a deck hand.

The fifth man, (Me) drove the turret wagon, a truck with a mounted turret and 2,000 feet of 4 inch hose that could be connected to the pumps onboard one of the boats to provide water for a large stream from the turret wagon or supply water for several land companies.

The Turret Wagon would go on all the fire calls the boat responded to, driving over-land to get as close to the river bank as possible. It also went on all Greater Alarms - fires that required lots of men and equipment. I could be sent anywhere in the city. I'd putt along; top speed was 25 miles per hour. It would take a half hour or more to get to St. Johns or Sellwood. I didn't have a radio, so I'd have to all the way. Even if there was no need for the Turret.

I remember one fire we had. Oaks Park had been built near the site of a saw mill. Much of the land was covered with sawdust. Some of the sawdust was 25 to 30 feet thick. It was some 50 years old and had been slowly decomposing, building up heat. During the past hot dry summer these land fills, there were several around town, built up enough heat to start to smolder. We could wet them down and cool them off so that no smoke or flames could be seen, but we never really put them out.

Some of these saw dust fills burned under ground for 50 years or more. They were hot, dirty, frustrating fires. But when they flared up, they were a threat to the neighboring property. And we had to contain them.

It was late summer. The sawdust had burned through and started grass and brush fires. The first hose companies to arrive saw there were several acres of brush on fire, grass fires threatening residential property and hot spots of glowing, burning sawdust sending sparks hundreds of feet in the air. A Second Alarm was called for.

Boat 1 headed for the fire. I drove the Turret Wagon and met the boat on the old ferry slip at the foot of Spokane St. The boat nosed into the shallow water and the deckhand threw a line ashore.

The fire had attracted a crowd. I pulled some hose out of the turret wagon and tied the rope to it.

Some teen-agers asked, "Can we help?"

I said, "Sure, pull this hose down to the boat."

15 or 20 kids grabbed that hose, took off at a run and nearly dumped me on my ass. They fed the hose out over the water as the boat crew pulled. They did in seconds what would of taken me 15 minutes, probably more.

I used the stream from the turret to wet down several acres of brush, then moved in close to drill a stream of water down into the hot spots of burning sawdust. This meant shutting down, dragging hose through the brush, re-connecting and hitting another hot spot.

The boat crew stayed most of the night. The land companies were on duty around the clock for 3 or 4 days, They never really put the fires out; it flared up every 2 or 3 years in the summer time.

The crews on the boats were split between the Old Timers and the young men appointed after WW 11.

Web Eldridge, a bachelor and deckhand on C shift, would come in the night before his on-duty day, or stay around the next morning if anybody needed to come to work late. He had a bed, and a locker where he kept a change of clothes.

He had rinsed out some socks and underwear, strung a clothes line on the back porch and was hanging them up when the front phone rang, The big Chief (Chief Grenfell) had an apartment on the third floor of the Central Station, almost directly across the river from boat #1. "Get that clothes line down," he shouted. "It looks like a God damn Chinese laundry."

George Miljus had worked at Boat #1 for several months. Web Eldridge was an older man, up in his sixties, and had worked in the fire department most of his life.

As a joke, George asked Web, “Didn’t I see you at the Four Square Gospel meeting the other night?”

Not missing a beat Web answered, “Yes, I preach a couple of nights a week. There’s good money in it.” Then added, “I can get you in on it, if you want. You are young, good looking: Those old ladies are easy pick’ins. You could make \$75 to \$100 a night real easy.”

Now the tables were turned. George was being conned. Curious he asked, “No kidding, you make that kind of money?”

With a straight face, Eldridge answered, “Yes, but if I didn’t feel sorry for the sons a bitches, I wouldn’t even bother.”

The crew burst out laughing. George found, he was no match for the Old Timers.

they’ve had thirty years perfecting the art of story telling, witticism, sarcasm and practical jokes, and with a straight face. We had a lot to learn.

Most of the boat crew were firemen with 20 - 30 or more years service. They had their way of doing things, and thought we, the new young men, should follow their advice.

Henry, a fireman with over thirty years service, was turret driver on “C” shift, and Bob and I drove on the other two shifts. Although Henry did little cleaning or maintenance, he was quick to point any short comings on our part.

Bob noticed a long morning glory vine next to the engine house, he pulled it under the apparatus door and wound it around the broom, so that it appeared to have climbed up the broom handle. When Henry saw that, he ran to the Captain saying, “There’s a morning glory vine growing up the broom handle, those guys haven’t swept the floor for weeks.”

The Captain asked, “Henry, how long has it been since the last time you swept the floor.”

Henry sputtered, “Damn young guys. No respect for anybody or anything.”

Old Malcom was quite a guy, well not really old, 35, 40 something like that. But I looked up to firemen like him. Not only how they acted at a fire, but talking to them, finding out

how they felt about things. I hoped to pattern my life after some of them. To do as they did and think as they thought.

Malcom was an outdoors man. I listened to his stories. His way of thinking suited me just fine. He took me fishing. Showed me his tackle and how to read a stream, where the fish would lay, and coached me to drape the line over my little finger so I could feel the bites.

“Watch the tip of your pole,” He insisted, “Sometimes you can’t feel the hits.” I still fish that way.

Gail Jensen, Walt Kurath, Malcom and I went fishing damn near every week. We’d bring a big bag of sandwiches, share the cost of the gas.

We’d head up on Sandy, Trask, Salmon river, Nestuck or Wilson River. We had some great trips.

He tell the story of a duck hunting trip. Seems there was a cabin near a duck lake where the hunters could come in, get warm and have a cup of coffee. I can picture it now. The guys stomping in, shedding rain gear, bragging about the shots they had made and the ducks they damn near hit.

There were pegs on the wall where they could hang up the shotguns. Not paying attention, one of them pushed his gun up and over, sliding the trigger guard onto the peg. The barrel swung down, the weight set off the trigger, the gun fired, it was an automatic, she bucked, fired again and spinning like a forth of July pin wheel unloaded the magazine blasting holes in the floor, wall and ceiling. While six men tried to run through the door at the same time.

Malcom was in a tavern one night. A man came in, waved a pistol around, and robbed the bartender. The hold-up man was a “Smart Ass” or maybe not so smart. Showing off, he ordered a beer and proceeded to stand at the bar and drink it. Feeling cocky, he put the pistol in back pocket. Malcom slapped him along side the head with a shuffle board puck knocking him up against the bar: then whacked him with a quick left and right, rolled him over and picked the gun out of his pocket while the bartender call the police.

A lot of the firemen were tough, but they would do anything for ya.

The new pension plan had been enacted in 1948. One of the provisions was that firemen had to retire before their 64th birthday. A 5 year grace period allowed the old timers to work until 1952. That year a large influx of new men were appointed in the Fire Department.

The new Engineer on "B" shift, had been a Chief in the Navy. He had no experience in the Fire Department, or on Fire Boats. Also he tended to act with out thinking. A real loaded gun waiting to go off.

Bob, who worked the same shift as the Engineer, told us, "If he picks up a pike pole, drop to the deck and hang on to something."

He was like a god damn teen-ager, run, slam doors, bust ass. He couldn't walk into a room without slapping the door jamb. We'd hear CRASHES and BANGS, doors busting open, him running down to the boat.

When asked, "What the hell is going on?"

He'd say, "Oh nothing, I just (whatever)."

And eat, we all ate lots, but he was a real chow hound. We told him, "You can't have thirds, until everyone else has had seconds." There never was any food left over.

He was the only fireman, I ever saw fall out of a Captain's Chair. They have wooden backs and arm, but he leaned over so far reaching for some thing that he tipped the chair over.

But the crowning touch - (as the story goes) The first big fire he went on; He was working as a deck hand. Boat 1 arrived at the fire scene and was nosed into the river bank to receive the hose from the Turret Wagon. The boat has a manifold down each side. A large pipe from the main pump, with capped hose connections. These caps weren't used very often and were hard to break loose. It would take a good solid rap to get the caps off. He picked up an axe. On the up-swing he hit the Pilot in the head knocking him unconscious. On the down swing he chopped the hose in two.

As the youngest man, I had to do whatever nobody else wanted to do. So when anybody was off sick, at the store, running errands, or indisposed, I had to fill in. Cook, engineer, Officer and even Pilot.

Engineering was easy, check the oil level and temperature every few minutes of running time. I couldn't fix anything, so if something went wrong we'd just shut one of the two engines down.

Acting Officer? Hell! the men knew more about firefighting than I did. I wasn't about to try to tell them what to do. Or how to do it. When we got back to the boat house, I'd report, "Back in service" and do the paper work.

But Pilot, that was something else! I'd have to drive that bitch. Start the engines, give the orders to cast off, and pull out into the God Damn river.

The Pilot had let me steer a couple of times on drill. He said, "When you go through the bridge, head right for the center piling, then at the last minute swerve to one side or the other and go through the opening."

The Lieutenant was off sick. A detail, a firemen sent from district head quarters, was assigned to drive the turret and I got to be Acting Officer.

Everything went fine until evening. The Old Timers sent the kid out for some beer, and he called up a couple of girls. They came down to the boat and the men sat around drinking beer and bullshitting the girls.

Long about mid-night, after I had gone to bed, the girls wanted to go home and the Pilot offered to give them a ride.

Before he got back, an alarm came in. We were down one man, no officer. When I got down to the boat, Hank told me the Pilot had taken the girls home, and I'd have to be Pilot. "Okay."

We pulled out into the current and I headed for the center piling. The Old Morrison Bridge could open. The span powered by big electric motors rotated to open two slots. I guess the openings were 75, maybe 100 feet wide. A Bridge Tender stood watch in a glassed-in shed over the center of the span. Ships would signal him with their horns and he would answer with a blast on his whistle. I had signaled for the bridge to open and he tooted, "Okay."

I'm heading dead on at the center piling. He gave five toots. "Danger!" I didn't change course. five more toots. I kept coming. The river was running high and fast. I had to keep the speed up to maintain steerage. I was bearing down. The bridge tender had given up on toots, and held the whistle on one solid blast.

The steering wheel activated motors that swung the rudder. There was a time lag both in moving the rudder, and before the boat would slowly change direction. If I swung too soon, The river current would catch the bow and turn us cross-wise in the opening.

We were coming full speed. the whistle was one steady blast. I held the throttle steady. I turned the wheel hard right. Nothing happened. Then slowly the bow turned and we rubbed our full length along the bridge piling. I looked up as we passed through the opening The Bridge Tender was out on the walkway shaking his fist and screaming.

That was the only time I ever drove (Piloted) the boat on a fire call. Thank God, the Pilot was at the fire station when we got back. He could answer the questions, if we got reported. Nothing ever came of it. The old timers thought it was hilarious. I can see the humor now.

Someone was always calling the Fire Department and bitching about something. If people called the Alarm Office, the Operators would transfer the call to the engine house and we could usually talk them out of what ever they were bitching about. And the call wouldn't go down town.

Top speed for the fire boat was twenty five miles per hour. But going against a current of 8 to 10 miles per hour, It took twenty minutes to a half an hour to reach the house-boat Marinas up by Oaks Park. They would bitch if it took too long to respond to a fire call. Then bitch if we were going too fast by the house boats and might cause damage. there was a speed limit on the river - 5 mph. They would call the Central Station and bitch, no matter what we did. Then, down town would dump on us.

Land companies get the “Cat in tree” calls. Boats get the “Jumper calls.” The Morrison Bridge was the lowest. The St. Johns bridge got the serious jumpers. We got the ones that weren’t quite sure. Mostly drunks and rejected lovers. They never seemed to jump in the summertime when the river was low, warm, and slow moving.

In the spring or fall, with the river running 10 or 12 miles per hour, it was a dirty dangerous job. We couldn’t hold in the current. We’d tow a fireman in an eight foot Aluminum skiff, expect him to maneuver alongside and load 250 lbs. of body and wet clothing on board without tipping over.

This jumper had gone off the Morrison Bridge. Tom Fuller rode the pickup skiff, and got him on the first pass, 100 yds. below the bridge. We had him on the float at Boat 1, in minutes.

He was dead.

Before the police or the First Aid Car arrived, a crowd gathered. A woman held her three year old child up so he could see the body.

“Makes you wonder. No! I guess not”

This jumper had \$80,000 sewed in the lining of his overcoat.

Firemen chip in every payday, money for the phone bill, newspaper and our food. We bought the refrigerators, dishes silverware pots and pans, TV’s and davenports.

Some Engine houses have a full time, volunteer firefighter cook. The first coupla years I was stationed at Boat 1 Hank was the regular cook. He’d make up a grocery list and send me out to shop. The list would include a half gallon of wine and a coupla bottles of beer for Tom. The Captain looked the other way. I figured it was his place to set limits. But when the Captain asked me to pick him up a pint of whiskey, I refused. He asked, “How come you’ll buy beer and wine for Hank and Tom, but wont get anything for me?”

I answered, “Beer and wine is one thing, whiskey is another.”

Hank had cooked for several years. But now and then he made some God Awful dishes. One was iced coffee, that didn’t

go over. Then Rice Day, Hank thought “Rice would be different.” Meat balls and gravy, with a salad, that sounded pretty good. Two cups of dry rice per man should be about right. Six men, twelve cups plus two or three more just to be on the safe side. Hank put a big pot on and started it boiling. It grew. So he moved the rice to a bigger pot. It continued to swell up. He dug out the big pot. Well, rice swell three or four times. Twelve or fifteen cups meant twelve to fifteen quarts of cooked rice - three or four gallons. We had pots - big pots on every burner. You never saw so much God Damn rice in your life.

After Walt Kurath was appointed Captain, Boat 1’s crew took turns cooking. Guess who’s turn it was to cook Thanksgiving Dinner? You bet!

Lora coached me, baked pies and provided the dressing. I mostly worried, stuffed the turkey and hoped for the best. I figured, “Let them sweat a little.” I put the turkey in the oven with orders, “No one is to look in the oven,” and took a nap. It was 350 degrees for six hours. Lora brought the kids down to the Engine house long about 3 pm. She made the gravy. I got the credit, but they knew she was the brains behind this dinner.

Cooks would be on the phone getting instructions. But you know, if you can read, or call your wife, you can cook. - if you have to.

When the river is high, like during spring run-off, it takes some planning and a knowledge of the river to really be a Pilot. The river was well above flood stage. The water was high and swift.

The sea wall on the West bank had been re-enforced with sand bags to keep the water out of the lower west side. The area around Boat 1 wasn’t protected by a sea wall, and the water flooded in around the fire house. For a couple of weeks we kept the aluminum skiff up on Second Street and ferried the crew men back and forth from dry land to Boat 1’s house.

The water boiled through town. It was real spooky pulling out into the current. We’d snub a line to the dock, rev up the

engines and take a flying start. If we didn't come out under power, the current would catch us broadside and sweep the boat into the piling down stream.

Coming back was the real problem. The Pilot would swing down stream and come up against the current. The river would be running oh, 18 - 20 miles per hour. Our top speed was maybe 25, but if the wind was down river we'd just barley make headway. the Pilot would have to judge the time lag, swing the wheel left and try to rub the piling at the end of the float. A crewman was assigned to jump onto the float with a line, throw it over a cleat and grab hold of something. When the line snubbed tight, the float jerked and bucked.

Then the Pilot would throw the engines into reverse, hoping the line was secure and we'd stop before we ran out of slip and piled into the bank.

A fire had been burning in the hills North and West of Portland. The City thought it was in the County, Washington County thought the fire was inside The Forest Service's District. And The Forest service hadn't been activated, informed, whatever.

The fire burned for two weeks before anyone was sent to investigate.

Forest Park is a strip of protected timber land inside the Portland City limits. An area some six or seven miles wide and nearly twenty miles long, a primitive forest with few access roads.

Finally, someone called Washington County to check on the fire's progress, and were informed: the fire was on city land, and it was threatening residential property West of Forest Park.

A massive Mobilization was ordered. The Portland fire Department sent crews and equipment. The Park Bureau unlocked gates and sent trucks and bulldozers with crews. Washington County and the Forest service sent crews and equipment. Unfortunately, no one was in charge, or knew the size and exact condition of the fire. There was no central command post.

The bulldozers cut fire stops, and various crews built fire trails. I was on a crew that had been ordered to build a fire trail,

YEAH! Right into the face of an oncoming ground fire. The flames split and chased us back off of the mountain. After that we didn't bust our asses digging fire stops.

We were on duty 24 hours a day, grabbing a snooze and sandwiches when we got the chance. By the second day, bulldozers had taken over trail building and we walked fire breaks with pump cans - shoulder packs that held 5 gallons of water with a pump that could deliver a stream fifteen or twenty feet.

I teamed up with Walt Kurath from Boat 1. It was easy duty, the sun was warm, and mostly we were hiding out.

Walt and I stopped at a farm house and asked for a drink of water. The woman invited us in and gave us iced drinks and a slice of the biggest chocolate cake I have ever seen, it was a foot thick. It was good, but what we really wanted was a COLD BEER.

On our way back to our command post - a place where: sandwiches, water, disposable paper sleeping bags, and relief crews were deposited - we found a small spot fire. Sparks had drifted over the road and ignited a small patch of brush one hundred yards off the road. We ran the half mile to where a tank truck was filling pump cans for the fire patrols.

"She's jumped the road!" we yelled.

The Chief, an obnoxious bastard, said, "We'll go as soon as we finish filling the pump cans."

"But if we don't get it while it's small, we'll never stop it." I insisted.

"We'll go when the pump cans are filled!"

After four or five minutes delay, we went back down the road. The fire that had been fifteen or twenty feet in diameter was now a roaring inferno. A brush fire, two hundred yards across was racing up the draw. We ran back to the tank wagon and yelled "We'd better get out."

"Old smart ass, Know it all," started to say something. Then he saw the wall of flames.

We loaded up. 27 men hanging on the sides, piled on top, riding where ever we could. The fire was CRESTING - skipping over the ground, igniting the tops of trees and bushes.

The tanker had a load of water, and with the added weight of the men, couldn't get out of second gear. We were topping out at 15 to 20 miles per hour, and the fire was staying even with us. We had a mile to go before the road crossed the head of the canyon. We were hitting bumps. The guys were hanging on for dear life. Slowly we pulled ahead. the flames were racing along the side of the road. We were covering up. The paint was scorching. It was one "Hot Son of a Bitch!" The road turned, the flames rolled overhead.

We drove under and through the ball of fire as the flames passed over the road and on up the canyon. We held our breath, and covered our faces as we roared through at a spine-jarring twenty miles per hour.

After two days and a night on the line, I got relieved. A truck took us down town, it was dark, midnight, maybe one o'clock. I was dumped off at an engine house somewhere. I found an empty bed and flopped. I'd straighten it out in the morning.

This fire burned a week or ten days until it rained. We couldn't put that sucker out.

I got \$1.25 per hour for 56 hours. that's more than I'd expected.

All this CRAP was fun. The fire Department was like ONE BIG FOOTBALL GAME. The excitement, BUST ASS, go as hard as you could, as long as you could; then someone else would take your place.

The bell would hit, every body would run for the rig, engine roaring, lights flashing, siren wailing, the Captain yanking on the bell rope. Or in the case of the boat, the whistle blasting, to signal the bridge to open. God! it was a KICK IN THE ASS.

When you cleared the engine house, you'd look up, check the sky line. If it was a big fire, you could see the glow in the sky, and hear the sirens from the first-in companies. But if in the background, you could hear the move-up companies rolling. You knew it would be a BIG ONE!

When you had only been asleep for a short time, sometimes you only woke up part way. You didn't know where you were, or WHAT THE HELL was going on.

One night I woke up in the middle of the Morrison bridge. The engine was roaring, I had the siren to the floor, and I didn't know where I was going. I had driven the Boat 1's turret wagon a quarter of a mile in my sleep. I knew it was a second alarm, and probably some where on the West side. I had no radio. I looked up at the skyline, there was a glow like the whole west side was on fire. It had to be a warehouse, or maybe a saw mill.

I'd head for the fire and try to find a place to get close to the riverbank. Then I'd borrow a radio and contact the boat.

God! the fires we had in the 50's! Saw mills that were running out of logs, docks and warehouses beyond repair and furniture stores that were going out of business, or wanting to expand, Seamed half of Portland burned during that 3 or 4 year span. These were, big, dirty, hard fires. Two o'clock in the morning, nobody around, windows covered, and burning from one end to the other. Some of those fires looked like "Sets."

There were the "Kid" brothers. The older "Kid," was something. I swear he could set a brick building on fire with nothing more than a pocket comb and a book of "Goffer matches." In a year and a half, he set, or was suspected of setting, 100 to 150 fires. He would walk across town, setting fires as he went. A trash bin here, an awning there, scoop up a pile of trash and light it, or toss a match into a dumpster. He didn't kill anybody. Mostly he hit commercial buildings at night.

The arson Squad caught him. I don't know the details. He did hard time. A convict killed him in prison. Then the younger "Kid" started setting fires. He wasn't as sharp as his brother. He only started a few fires, before the Arson Squad caught him.

During the fall run off, the river was up, but not like the spring. The water was circling around in a big eddy. The basement was flooded, the water was coming in the garage door and out through the furnace room. It was only a little over a foot

deep. A salmon, or maybe a steelhead was swimming slowly, around and around in the eddy, Into the basement and out into the eddy again. I watched that a coupla times, and figured “What the hell, I’ll see if I can catch it.” There was a doll crib left over from “Toy and Joy.” I sneaked up and slammed the crib over the fish. All hell broke loose! He busted that crib apart, out the door he went, We never saw that fish again.

It was always the young guys, and the old-timers. They were comfortable with the way things had always been.

We were trying to change things.

“We always do this.”

“You can’t do that.”

“Well why the hell not?”

It was hard for them. And we did things just to get their goat.

The fire house watch desks had a sheet of plate glass to protect the top and provide a smooth writing surface. I came to work. The glass had been broken. The Lieutenant wasn’t on duty today. Ken “Raw-Ass Recruit” Carter, was in charge. I called, the Building Superintendent to report, “We need a new watch desk glass.”

He asked, “Why is it broken?”

Of course it’s broken, why else would we need a new one?

With my most serious, official voice, I answered, “Yes, both sides.”

One of the deck hands snored. Not just snored, He really SNORED. He shook the windows. I regularly went to bed early. Oh, between 9:30 and 10 o’clock. Usually I would get to sleep before he started snoring. This night, I either got to bed later, or woke up after he went to bed. He was really going at it. I tried covering my head with the pillow, clearing my throat, calling his name, nothing worked. I rapped on the floor. He jumped out of bed, said, “Huh, what?” and ran to the front door of the engine house. After I finished laughing, I went to sleep.

I have never heard snoring like that. Well, yes I did. Hank Henry, Truck 2, he was the best-worst. I was sleeping downstairs. He was asleep on the second floor. He rolled on to

his back and uttered the most God awful series of gasps and snorts imaginable. He woke me up. I don't know how the crew slept through that. Thank God! I worked on the other shift.

I was working a second alarm at a lumber yard. I had laid in from a pumper and was hoping to wet down a section of roof that had burnt through. The big Chief (Chief Grenfell) came along and asked, "Can you reach the fire?"

I answered, "No, but I can almost reach the building."

He said, "Shut the son of a bitch down, go back to quarters."

In the early 50's the men with their time in, were retiring. Young men were being appointed and the Old Timers were looking around for a quiet house to finish out their time.

There was a lot of shuffling of Officers and crews.
I'd be going somewhere before long.

Engine 12

After a couple a years on the boat, I transferred to Engine 12 at N.E. 28th. and Davis. It was a bungalow house built in the early 30's. The dormitory and watchroom were on the main floor, kitchen in the basement. We only had a three man crew, The Captain, Smitty the driver, and me. The rig was small. It held 200 feet of 2 1/2 and a couple a hundred feet of 1 1/2 hose plus 150 gallons of water, a booster (a high pressure pump) 100 ft. of 1 inch rubber hose mounted on a reel, and a small fog nozzle for quick response.

Cap. was an old guy, or so it seamed to us, set in his ways with an exaggerated opinion of his importance. He didn't want anybody sleeping in his bed. So, of course, when he was off on sick leave we put the detail in his bed.

Firefighter Day, a new kid from engine 7, had a Great Dane that he brought to work with him. We told him to put his stuff in the officer's room, and put his sheets on Cap's bed.

"Sure, keep the dog in there too."

After lunch, Day and the dog lay down to take a little snooze.

After Cap picked up his pay check, (The District Chief would deliver the monthly pay checks to the engine houses) he went into his room, the blinds were down. It was dark. He flipped on the light.

Day half asleep raised up and asked, "What do you want?"

Cap exploded, "What are you doing in my bed?"

This woke up the dog who was sleeping in the Lieutenant's bed on the other side of the room. The dog stretched full length with a blanket over him, raised his head and uttered curious, "Woof?"

Cap backed out of the room sputtering, "Get that sub (a temporary firefighter) and that damn dog out of my room."

We gave Cap our best, "Gosh, we didn't know where else to put them," look.

The kitchen was in the basement. Smitty and I shared the cost and cooked together. One Friday we decided to get a crab. The garbage wouldn't be picked up until the following

Thursday. Those crab shells and guts sitting in the warm basement. WOW!

Monday, when we came to work, the garbage can had been moved as far away from the kitchen as possible. On Thursday - God it was ripe. We set the garbage can out on the sidewalk. the next morning the on-coming shift said, "You can have crab on Wednesdays, the day before garbage pickup but that's it."

Back in the 50's, every six weeks we had to put in an extra 24 hour shift (Kelly shift).

I put mine in at Engine 7. This gave me a chance to meet some other firemen and hear some new stories.

They had a cook - he was something else. He would put food coloring in things. There would be purple potatoes, green gravy, blue corn, and the green beans could be a bright red. It shouldn't make any difference, but some of it took a little getting use to.

Not only was he strange, but he was temperamental too. One day someone said something about his cooking. He rapped the offender behind the ear with a cup. That night, at supper time, in marched the crew with very serious looks on their faces. Silently they took their places. They didn't look left, or right. No one spoke. Each man was wearing his helmet.

We got a fire call, a small house. Engine 12 was first in. Smoke was rolling out. The fire appeared to be in the back. We skidded to a stop. I grabbed the booster and headed for the back of the house. Cap ran up the front steps. Smitty put the pump in gear and followed me around back. We kicked in the kitchen door and sprayed the flames with fog. It was a small fire and we knocked it down without any trouble.

We opened some windows and checked to be sure the fire hadn't spread beyond the kitchen. We drug the booster hose back out front, and radioed in the recall (fire out signal). Cap was still lunging at the front door. He was trying to break down a solid oak door. He broke three ribs.

Cap was off sick, Engine 12 got a call to an address in the Laurelhurst district. "House full of smoke."

No body was around. We opened the front door. Sure enough, she was full of smoke. We couldn't see a foot in front of us. We backed out, closed the door, and radioed for back up.

Engine 9 laid in, and stood by with 1 1/2 inch lines while the truck crew opened up. There was no fire anyplace. No hot spots that would indicate fire in the walls. We were stumped. Then someone found a furnace cover open and a trouble lamp hanging in the cold air return. The filter had ignited and smoldered, when the furnace kicked in the fan pumped smoke through the house.

People called the Fire Department when they are locked out, and to get cats out of trees. The tax payers seem to think, "The firemen probably weren't doing anything anyway."

They really think we should be happy to get their damn cats.

It was after supper, dark, when we got the call. The children were hysterical. A kitten had been up in the tree all day. Quite a crowd had gathered.

We turned on our spotlight. The Kitten whined, the children sighed, and the parents insisted we do something. The cat was thirty feet up a tree. Our ladder was only 22 ft.

I said, "I'm not climbing that tree for no damn cat."

Smitty said, "Aw hell, help me put the ladder up on the roof of the garage, and I'll see if I can get it down."

We put the ladder against the garage, Smitty went up, set the ladder on the roof, leaned it against the tree and climbed up. By now, the cat is 30 or 40 ft. in the air. It began to whimper. When Smitty got close, the cat climbed higher. So Smitty had to climb up into the tree. The cat stayed just out of reach. It hesitated. Smitty lunged and grabbed the cat with one hand.

Well a cat's hide is only connected at their butt and nose. I swear, they can turn completely around inside their skin. It let out a wowl, twisted in Smitty's hand, and buried the claws of all four paws into Smitty's arm. The cat squalled. Smitty gasped.

A little girl said, "Don't hurt the kitty."

Smitty yelled, "Fuck the kitty!" and threw that son of a bitch 50 ft. through the air. It hit the ground running. I doubt anyone ever saw that cat again.

There was one of those "Pregnant Silences."

Smitty climbed down the tree, down the ladder, moved the ladder to the side of the garage and climbed down. We put the ladder on the rig and drove away. Nobody said a word.

Alarms (fire calls) come in to a central Alarm Office. The Operators alert the nearest companies and tap them out, announcing the kind of alarm and the address. Smitty and I got it wrong. We went to 4432 S. E. Stark. there was nobody around.

I called on the radio, “This is engine 12, was that address 4432 S. E. Stark?”

The Operator answered, “Yes Engine 12, the address is 3244 S. E. Stark.”

We arrived late. The crews jabbed us, “What did you guys do, come on the Second Alarm?”

But we didn’t have to write a letter saying why, we went wrong.

Firemen look out for one another.

I hadn’t been at Engine 12 very long. An Alarm came in from a warehouse, store, something - A big cement building. Smitty and I went around back and put a ladder up to a window. I climbed in and dropped the 8 or 10 feet to the floor in thick smoke. I had a filter mask on, and he was feeding the booster line in through the window. The open window created a draft, pushing smoke and heat into his face. He couldn’t see. He couldn’t breath.

Smitty kept yelling, “Are you okay?”

I was fine. I was down on the floor. cool air was coming in. But he couldn’t hear me. The mask muffled my voice.

He came in. No mask, No hesitation. He thought I was in trouble.

If a fireman needs help, you go in.

I always wondered. “Would I ?”

I never was really faced with that decision.

Smitty was quite a guy. Not someone you would want for a Brother-in-law. He drank too much, didn’t “Give a Shit” what people thought. But two things were important, his kids. And The Fire Department ... well the fighting fire part.

You could count on Old Smitty. And that Son of a Bitch could eat smoke. He'd hang in there, stay in the smoke as long, or longer than anybody else.

He was funny. He tells about the time, he came home from work. His wife and her sister were waiting in the car. When Smitty pilled up in front, the girls took off.

He was used to that. He would be stuck baby-sitting his kids, and the sister-in-laws' two year old.

Well the little girl filled her diapers. Crap was running down both legs.

Smitty figured, "What the hell, no big deal."

His wife and her sister drove up to see and hear the girl screaming in the front yard, while he held her by the heels, and washed her off with a garden hose.

Smitty never had to baby-sit her kids again.

An alarm came in, a house just off Burnside on 70th. 27's took a 1 1/2 hose in the front door.

Neighbors were yelling, "There's a man up stairs."

Smitty took the booster around back and I followed with a ladder. We put the ladder to a second story window. Smitty climbed up. I followed, pulling hose as we went.

Smitty used the nozzle to break the glass in a small window. The open front door created a draft up the stairs and out the window. We couldn't get in. We could hear the man stumbling around in the smoke.

Smitty called to him, "Come to the window."

He never answered. the crews from below worked their way up the stairs and into the bedroom. We found his body a few minutes later.

Seams like there were only the two of us, Smitty and me. If Cap was there, he never was with us on the booster hose. We fought fire alone just the two of us.

We were coming back to the Engine House, Smitty was riding the front seat, that meant Cap wasn't on duty. I was driving. We pulled up in front.

Smitty went in tripped the door opener, and was on the phone checking in.

Engine was a small rig, two seats up front, no roof, just a windshield. To carry the weight of the hose and water tank, it had dual tires in the back. They stuck out a foot or so wider than the body of the fire engine.

I was watching the rear fender as I backed into the apparatus room.

The door had gone up failed to catch, and drifted down a foot or so. There was one Hell of a Crash. The door ripped out of it's track. A pair of 6 ft. coil springs tore loose, the door dropped and jammed.

The Operator asked, "what the hell was that?"

Smitty was laughing, "Carter just drove through the front door."

The Operator put us out of service. I expected to receive a Reprimand.

The Building Superintendent wanted to know , "What happened?"

I said, "It's an automatic door. It didn't work."

He bought it. - No letter to write, no reprimand.

We got a Second Alarm on the lower west side. A store front was going good, and there were apartments upstairs. We laid in. Hose Companies were inside and the Truck crews were checking the apartments.

We weren't doing a whole hell of a lot of good. A call come in over the radio, "Any companies, not fully committed, proceed to S. W. Fourth and Yamhill." - a street a few blocks away where a paint store was burning.

We broke our lines and headed for the fire, hose butts bouncing on the street behind us.

This Son of a Bitch was going through the roof when we pulled up. Buckets of paint were popping, smoke like you've never seen before. I don't know what the fumes held. The smoke was thick and black. We weren't going to stick our noses in this one. 12's had had a turret behind the driver's seat. We hooked and sprayed water over the burnt out shell of the building.

We couldn't put it out. There wasn't anything to save anyway.

I suspect both of these fires were kids' work (the arsonist).

Two fires this close together and taking off only minutes apart.

Flames shooting sky high are spectacular, but it was the smoldering room fires that were the killers.

35's was a three man house on S. E. 92 nd. near Foster. They got an Alarm. Single family residence, frame construction, fire in the basement.

When they arrived, people were screaming, "There are kids in the house!"

She was going good. Smoke was rolling out. This was going to be a Bitch. There were bedrooms in the basement, apparently the fire started there.

They Laid In, and took a line in the front door. The fire had been smoldering for some time. Smoke and flames met them when they tried to work their way down the basement stairs.

The next-in company was over a mile away. It would be 3 or 4 minutes before they arrived.

When the rigs pulled up, engine 35's driver was trying to pull firemen out of the house; they were unconscious or nearly so.

The in-coming Officer radioed for help, his crew lay the disabled firemen on the lawn and went into the fire to try and locate the children.

They went down.

Engine 9 and Truck 6 was coming from 32 nd. and Belmont, and an engine company from down on S.E. 25th. They found firemen in trouble. They got them out and radioed for more companies.

All in all, eleven firemen were taken to the hospital suffering from smoke inhalation.

They didn't get the kids out in time.

You go in, your eyes burn, nose runs, you can't see or breath. If you stand up the heat blasts in your face.

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Balls of hot gasses roll along the ceiling bursting into flame whenever fresh air is sucked upward. You can feel the heat on

your cheeks. The sound of bacon frying is your ears cooking - you can hear them sizzle. Stay low. Crawl in. You can feel the heat before you see the flames. You know you're heading in the right direction. Time and distance lose all meaning.

I was working a fire. I was in there alone. The smoke was thick. I can feel the heat, sense the glow. The fire is up ahead. grab a couple a breaths of air and wet that sucker down. The truck crew will be coming in. Give it one more blast then back out. I don't have a mask. Stay low, crawl. Fresh air will come in as soon as they open up - bust out some windows.

I can't see anything. I'm on my hands and knees. I straddle the hose - it will lead me out. Crawl! I'm not getting any more air. Something is wrong. Then I realize, there's a loop in the hose. I've been crawling around and around in a circle. A truckman leads me out. I sit on the curb, gag and cough. I'll catch my breath in a few minutes.

Another house fire, smoke was oozing out under the eaves, no flames showing. We went in. I was crawling down a hallway. The smoke was so thick, I couldn't see the floor - even on my hands and knees.

I heard a whimper up ahead. Didn't sound human. Then again it could be a child, maybe a baby. I crawled on, bumped into a toilet. I was in a bathroom. I couldn't see anything. I felt around the base of the toilet, behind it, even inside the bowl. Pulled the clothes out of the hamper, nothing. The old fashioned bath tub set up on short legs. There wasn't space enough for a baby to be under there.

I started to crawl out, another whimper, a muffled cry. It could be a baby. I crawled back. Again I checked behind the toilet, went through the clothes in the hamper, felt around the tub, in the tub, felt in the sink. I felt along the walls for doors that would indicate a clothes chute or closet: nothing.

I crawled a few feet. A moan, a whimper. It's a cat. Another muffled cry. Damn it! it's got to be a cat. But maybe not.

I've got to find that cat, or what ever it is. There's enough air coming in, I can breath. Recheck everywhere. What have I missed? I reach under the bath tub. Way back in the corner I feel something. It was a cat.

Engine 7 tells about this kid. He's from Oklahoma, Arkansas, some place. Anyway, the story has it. He's telling about hog calling.

“The farmers call the hogs.”

I guess the pigs - hogs are turned out in the swamps, brush, pasture, whatever and the hog owners call them back to the farm. The hogs can hear the call from a mile to a mile and a half away.

“Bullshit!”

“Yes they can.”

“Horse shit.”

“You go up the street, a half a mile to 21st. and stark. If we hear you from there, we'll believe you.”

Sides were chosen. Bets were placed. and, “The Hog Call Challenge” was under way.

He went up the street ten blocks and uttered the most “God Awful” scream, yell, howl, anyone West of the Old South has ever heard.

They heard him.

Fourteen people called The Fire Department to report, The Scream. The Police Department sent a squad car to investigate.

It's kinda traditional; firemen grab a snooze after lunch. You never know if you'll get a full nights sleep. Anyway, I'd take the afternoon watch, It'd be quiet time, and I'd hit the books.

I'd go over the stuff. Learning by rote, memorizing the facts and figures word for word. I knew the exam would be Multiple Choice.

Numbers, Names, rules and regulations; I memorized the exact words.

I built “flash cards.” Trick questions will be thrown out.

I knew I'd have to memorize “The words and the numbers.”

Training 2

I'd been in the Department for the 7 years required to take the Fire Lieutenant's examination that would be held in the fall

of 1956. I had been studying on my own, but when I heard the Fire Department was planning a training company for fire-fighters, I went to see the Personnel Officer and volunteered for one of the slots. the other two shifts were to be made up of new appointees. B shift would be made up of men already appointed and working in an Engine house. Usually the man with the least seniority in each district was sent. The other firemen couldn't believe I'd volunteered, but I figured, "Six months of school then take the examination, perfect timing.

I got to the main station with my turnouts about 7:30 in the morning. Roll call wouldn't be until 8: 00 am. The crews were coming in, putting their turnouts on the rigs. I put my turnouts on the floor behind Engine 2 and went in and got a cup of coffee. I didn't know who the other trainees were or which officer would be in charge of our shift.

Must of been twenty minutes to eight when the bell hit. There were fifty-some guys, some grabbing turn outs off the rigs others climbing onboard.

Someone asked, "Engine two?"

I said, "Yes."

"Get on the back."

Two firemen stepped off to make room for me and one other new man.

Turned out it was a factory building in St. Johns. It was a big cement building. The Chief called for a second Alarm, and we went to work. It was an hour more before all the new men showed up at the fire and the off Shift could be relieved.

We got back to the station for lunch and I had a chance to meet the other crew members. Zeke Steel, the Officer, and Matt Burns, the driver, had volunteered for the Training Company. The six trainees: Olander, Hlebechuck, Smith, Ryan, Stephens and myself were assigned on B shift. Training 2 had just been set up. We were the first group of re-treads. The other trainees on the other two shifts were newly appointed recruits.

We had an assignment of house work: making beds, cleaning toilets, sweeping and mopping floors, scrubbing down the kitchen, straightening up the day room and buffing the floors. Work that had to be completed before our 10am. classes began.

We studied rules, regulations and fire science. In the afternoon we drilled. We put up ladders, laid in, stretched lines, carried hose up stairs, fire escapes and ladders. We did it over and over until we got it right, then we did them some more, until we could do the drills fast.

It was fun. Zeke was a good officer. As Charlie Smith used to say, "Being a Fire Officer is like being a father; you must be firm, understanding, forgiving and just a little bit Chicken-shit."

Zeke had been Charlie's Corporal in the Army. They served together in the Philippines (Rainbow Division) just before and during World War 11. They both had stories to tell.

Charlie was okay. He'd been shot through the knee, but he never begged off. He did his job, both the drilling and at the fires. He wrapped his knee with an ace bandage during the day. And soaked it at night when it got to hurting. He worked and drilled right along with the rest of us.

Charlie was a jokester and story teller. He, Clark Stephens (Banjo) and I kept things stirred up. During knot drill, Charlie would entertain us with rope tricks, but he never seemed to be able to master the bowline, double bowline, square knot or any of the other required ties.

Zeke told of the time when they were in the Army. Charlie was trying to teach himself card tricks. He would practice by the hour, showing how he could palm the cards to anyone who would watch.

There are always dogs hanging around Army Bases. Charlie was walking across the drill field, practicing his slight of hand, when he came across a dog. Charlie hunkered down and showed the dog how he could palm cards. The dog tipped his head to one side and watched intently as the cards disappeared and reappeared. He seemed to like the trick. So Charlie did it again. The dog tipped his head to the other side, watched very closely, then when Charlie held out his hand to show how the card had disappeared. The dog bit him.

The kids used to beg, "Dad, tell us a Charlie Smith story."

One of their favorites, and mine was “The Ghost under the bed story.” The kids never tired of it.

Charlie went to bed at his usual time. He’d been laying awake for a few minutes. Suddenly! There was a horrible scream. Something had him. A tight band clamped around his chest squeezing his breath out. He reached up. He couldn’t feel anything. There was nothing on his chest, but he couldn’t move. Another SCREAM, followed by a series of growls and snarls that faded into fits of laughter.

Don Ferrell had lain under Charlie’s bed for twenty minutes or more, waiting until shallow breathing indicated Charlie was nearly asleep. Then Don struck. Reaching around the mattress, grabbing the blankets and uttering his wild “Banshee Scream.”

Engine 10 was a hot bed of jokes, tricks, and down right vicious pranks. Everybody entered in, And Smith was in the middle of it; usually one of the prime instigators.

The Mailman used to stop, and eat his lunch at the engine house. He had delivered a couple of packages for Charlie about three inches wide, six inches long, and really heavy.

He asked, “What the hell are in those packages?”

Charlie took him to his locker and showed him a stack of twenty or thirty bricks. Then added, “The brick yard wants \$2.00 a piece to deliver them. I can mail them for 85 cents each.”

“There’s only another hundred or so.”

“You Rotten bastard!” The Mailman screamed.

Captain Myers took his turn with the jabs. The Fire Department, hired temporary employees (Subs) to work vacations and sick leave in the summer when the vacation schedule was the heaviest.

Engine 10 got a new kid, bright eyed and bushy tailed, right out of college. He wasn’t sure if these “Old Farts” knew what they were doing. But The Captain seemed serious when he cautioned the Sub to stay calm. “Just do your job, don’t run, don’t get excited. We’ll be here to show you what to do.”

First time the bell hit, the crew ran in circles screaming, “Fire! Fire!” Bumping into each other and stumbling up the stairs.

Once on the rig, They screamed, “Hurry! Hurry! It’s a Fire! It’s a Fire!”

By the time he figured out he had been had, the kid moved to the next engine house.

“WELCOME! to The Portland Fire Department.”

Engine 10 got a new Captain. Fresh from military duty, felt firm, decisive, authoritarian leadership would be the answer.

First day on duty he announced, “I didn’t come here to make friends. I’ll make the decisions; you just follow orders.”

Adding, “I get my Loving at home.”

Charlie wasn’t going to let that one lie.

“Screw you Ferrell!” He shouted, “I get my loving at The Raymon Rooms.”

“Well up yours!” Ferrell Replied, “I get my Loving from the girls on Union Avenue.”

“Yeah! Vince chimed in, “I get my loving on Front street.”

So it went. Day after day, shift after shift. Finally the Captain said, “Okay! I get the message. This ain’t The Army.”

Yeah! Old Charlie Smith was something. Always ready for a joke.

Banjo (Clark Stephens) was driving the fire engine. We trainees would take turns driving on drill. We were heading back to the station across the Ross Island Bridge. The rig began to bounce as we drove over the expansion joints. This looked like fun. We flexed our knees and pumped our legs in time with the bouncing Soon the fire engine was bouncing up and down. Zeke’s and the driver’s heads were bobbing up and down foot or more. We kept pumping, and the rig kept bouncing, all the way back to the Engine House.

When we pulled into the lot at the Central Station, Zeke yelled, “200 ft. of 2 1/2 on the top floor. We took the hydrant on the fly, pulling shoulder loads of hose - each man would carry 35 feet, leaving 15 feet of slack between men. We would

have 50 or more pounds to carry as we climbed 100 feet straight up.

We started up the fire escape.

Zeke said, "When you get through laughing, you can break for lunch." (I don't remember if we climbed to the top or not.)

First Avenue was a busy street, and the cars rolled through there fast. A couple of Winos came staggering down Ankeny St. stepped between the parked cars and started to cross. There was a squeal of breaks. One jumped back, but the other was hit and landed almost in front of the engine house.

Somebody yelled, "There has been an accident!"

The Crew ran to the scene, and found the victim laying in a pool of blood. There was blood everywhere. The First Aid Crew was trying to keep him down.

His buddy was kicking him and yelling, "Get up you Son of a Bitch! you're not hurt, you just want sympathy."

The First Aid Men were rolling him around trying to find where all the blood was coming from, while his buddy kept kicking him and telling him to get up.

The truck driver asked, "How bad is he?"

"We can't tell. There's an awful lot of blood, but we can't find where it's coming from."

"Aw Hell!" The truck driver said, "I've got a couple a barrels of blood on the truck. I'll bet that's where this pool of blood came from."

Sure enough, the blood had slopped out when the brakes were locked.

The Wino got a trip to the hospital to get a broken leg set.

The firemen got a laugh, and the First Aid Men took a shower and changer clothes.

For part of our training we went to The Oil Fire Training Ground. Where we learned about and practiced fighting flammable liquid fires.

An old, oil delivery truck chassis setting next to a mock-up of an oil loading dock could be flooded with gasoline and set on fire.

We were taught to go in with two - 1 1/2 inch fog nozzles, stay close together and sweep the flames back and to the sides as we moved in.

If the fire flashed back around us, we could stop our feet and drive the flames away.

It worked pretty good. As long as we stayed close together the spray from our nozzles kept us cool.

We moved in swept the fire away, worked our way up the side of the oil truck and flipped the cover shut. THE FIRE WENT OUT! It worked pretty damn good!

The water mains that supplied water to the Training Grounds were small (2 inch pipes) and couldn't supply enough water for the exercises. A tank was installed to store extra water.

After the, "You guys were great," Bull Shit. Chief Leinweber, the Training Officer, pumped a little extra gasoline over the area and touched it off.

They let burn for several minutes to get every thing good and hot.

She was going REALLY GOOD when we started in. The flames were higher and a HELL of a lot HOTTER.

Charlie was on the back up hose, a 1 1/2 inch fog line connected to a separate water supply. He would wet us down if we got in trouble.

We open up our nozzles, and moved into the flames. We crouched in close to the fog nozzles to keep cool. Every now and then swinging the spray behind us to keep the flames from closing in on us. We were nearly surrounded by flames.

Suddenly our lines went LIMP! We were loosing pressure, We started backing out. The fire closed in rolling over us.

Charlie opened up his fog nozzle, and moved into the fire. He wet us down while we backed out.

We were okay, a little toasted around the edges. Charlie had his cheeks singed, but he stayed there until we were in the clear.

In that six months we went on over 100 fires - working fires. If anybody called for help, anywhere in the city, we went. Training 2 laid-in hose and fought fires every day for some 40 days in a row.

We had more working fires than I did the next 5 years.

Each month a trainee would be assigned as driver. This was my month, first day driving. The bell hit in the early morning. I took the front seat. Zeke looked back. Everybody was on board. I hit the gas. Out the door we went, lights flashing, sirens squalling. We were first out. I would lead the parade. Counting the two Chief's cars, there were 7 rigs, and we were first in line.

I missed second gear. The rest of the rigs were right behind us, engines roaring, the officers yanking on the bell rope and pumping the sirens as they pulled out onto Front Avenue. And there was engine 2 blocking the way, slowing down in the middle of the street, while Carter fumbled with the gears.

I double-clutched and goosed the engine, the gears grated. I slowed down and tried first gear. Nothing worked.

I anchored that sucker. Everybody skidded to a stop. Even the sirens kinda fizzled down and died.

I put her in gear and started all over. This time I hit the gears.

Nothing is ever quite what it seems - Never let your guard down.

On of the guys came out into the day room, he was holding a noodle by one end. Then with his right hand he smoothed out all the bumps, pulled it tight and held it perfectly straight up and down. Adjusting the lower hand until he was sure it was set, he very carefully let go of the top end. It stayed up. Moving his hand ever so gently, he balanced the noodle on end. Concen-trating, he maintained the balance for several seconds before the noodle bent over, sagged, and finally hung limp over his hand.

One of the firemen said, "Let me try that."

He couldn't balance it for one second, no matter how hard he tried.

Comes the laughs and hoots from the kitchen; the noodle had been frozen and he just pretended balance it.

There were a few parking spaces in the basement. Usually the men left them for men wanting to work on their cars.

Charlie didn't know the system, and put his car in the Deputy Chief's space.

Charlie came up stairs muttering, "Some son of a bitch was jumping up and down and yelling about his parking space."

Who does that Ass Hole think he is, Jesus Christ?"

"No!" Zeke replied, He thinks he is the Deputy Chief."

"Oh! I guess I better move my car."

We had been at Training 2 for about a month or so. Long about four o'clock in the morning we got a call, "Fire in a book store."

It was going good when we rolled up.

Everybody was there. The whole crew from the main station: Engine 1 Truck 1 Training 2 and the First Aid Car. Engine 4 and Truck 2 came down from Montgomery street.

The fire had been smoldering for hours. Training 2 took a 2 1/2 in the front door. There were apartments over the store, and the truck crews were opening up a ventilating. Ladders were going up, and the hose companies were moving in on the fire on the ground floor.

Bob Beal, driver of the First Aid car, went up on the second floor to help evacuate. Next thing we knew there was a YELL, and a ball of fire rolled down the stair well. Bob was running for his life. He had a woman by the heels. Down the stairs they came, her head bouncing on the steps, a sheet of flame rolling over them as they cleared the front door!

Engine 2's crew was pouring water into the smoke - they couldn't see much. They could feel the heat and see a glow. suddenly, a firemen walked out of the smoke.

The nozzle-man asked him, "Where did you come from?"

He pointed up, he had fallen through the burnt out 2nd floor landing in the fire and ashes on the first floor - He wasn't hurt, just singed a little when he landed in the fire.

Engine 2 had the luxury of man power, six hosemen, an officer and a pump operator. We'd hit a fire. Couple a men would throw up ladders, someone would bust in the door or windows, and we'd have water on the fire in seconds.

We had this fire down on Front Ave. A house was going, flames coming out the windows, the first floor fully involved. Smith and Leb. (Hlebechuck) took a 1 1/2 in the front door and started up the stairs. Banjo and I followed with a 2 1/2 fog nozzle. We popped the nozzle as we went through the front door, just one blast. A cloud of steam filled the house and rolled out under the eaves. The fire was out.

Smith and Leb stood there, water dripping from their helmets. I've never seen a fire knocked down, No! Knocked out that fast. There wasn't a spark anyplace. A text-book stop.

One of the trainees was assigned to ride on the Truck (Jump-man). He would put his Turn-Outs on the floor between the rigs riding on the truck if they took the alarm, and moving to the engine when we went alone.

The Training Company drilled with the ladders. I had picked up, carried and put up every ladder the Fire Department had. Not some, but over and over, and Over. I felt I could do it in my sleep, not only right, but fast.

Then I worked a fire as a Truckman, we had just barely stopped, two men grabbed a ladder and pulled it out. One man was ready to catch the ladder as it cleared it's rack. I was the fourth man. I caught my corner, and we headed for the building.

Nobody said, "Ready, squat, pickup, turn and shoulder carry." We grabbed that Son of a Bitch and took off on a run.

It was full speed! Up the bank, and across the lawn. The two men in front kneeled down and braced the end of the ladder into the ground. We swung under and hand over hand pushed that ladder up. The Heelmen (the guys pushing the end of the ladder down) put a foot on the lower rung, grabbed the rope and raised the upper section of the ladder while I steadied the bottom section. I never had time to think. They were up that ladder like a shot.

I learned something. These guys know what the HELL they are doing.

We were trained to act and react. BUST ASS! Someone will cover you.

The Superintendent of Buildings, would post little notices on the bulletin board.

“There will Be No this.”

“There will Be No that.”

He earned the name “Be No.”

During the late 50’s, The new Big Chief (Chief Simpson) and his wife lived in the apartment on the third floor of the Central Fire Station. She had shot a moose on a trip to Canada, Had it mounted and displayed it on the wall of our recreation room. Somehow it gripes the men. Nearly every day someone would stick a cigarette under the Moose’s upper lip. Soon there was a notice on the central station bulletin board, “There will Be No, cigarettes in the moose’s mouth”.

Next morning, there was a cigar.

When the new Central Fire

Station was first built, Old “Be No” announced, “There will be no nails in the walls.”

The crew pleaded, “We need a calendar, can’t we just put up a calendar?”

“Okay, but that’s all, one calendar.”

“Ah haw! An opening. Now we got him!”

Down to the machine shop, a big spike was cut in half and a small brad welded to the end of it.

They pounded it in the wall, drew some jagged pencil lines to look like cracks in the wall and poured some broken plaster on the floor.

The Next morning the calendar was up, and the crew was waiting.

“Be No” saw that spike and started to say something, but just in time he saw the half hidden smiles.

“You sons o’bitches!” he screamed.

He knew he had been set up.

There was an alarm up on S.W. 5th. A tavern had been torched. Engine 1 went in the front door. We went around the back. We hit the door with axes, crowbars, what have you. We never did get in, but we sure beat the hell out of that door.

A wind-up duck had been saved from the “Toy and Joy,” toys for kids program. After everybody had gone to bed and things quieted down, the duck was set on the floor - QUACK, QUACK, QUACKING as it rolled to the next bed where it was scooped up and hid under the covers.

Someone asked, “What was that?”

“What was what?”

“I heard God Damn duck!”

“Aw! go to sleep, you’re dreaming.”

After a few minutes the duck was sent back.

“Quack, Quack, Quack.”

Someone yelled “There it goes again!”

The lights came on.

Nobody ever knows anything.

But you can bet, the men laughing the hardest had something to do with it.

Training 2 took a call. “Grain ship was on fire.” When we pulled up the crew was evacuating. We went on board. Smoke was oozing out of vents and hatches. This didn’t look too good. But the ship’s Engineering Officer stayed on board. There were the ship’s fire fighting lines, and their pumps could supply all the water we might need.

We stood around, Zeke didn’t know what we should do. The fire was in the number one hole. The Ship’s Engineer suggested we cut a hole over the fire and try to put it out.

What the hell, lets try it.

Zeke got the Stevens car (A first aid and rescue rig) to bring their acetylene torch. They fired her up and started to cut a hole six inches in diameter. They just barley got started when she BLEW! WHUMP! The ship shuttered. Everybody who hadn’t left before, left now.

Zeke hung on to the Engineer.

He said, “I’ll have the Wench Operator remove the cover from hatch #1. Then maybe you can get at the fire.”

She was smoldering, the fire was deep down in the wheat and we weren’t going to be able to put it out. They would have

to unload the wheat, or at least uncover the fire so we could get at it.

Zeke and Banjo took a 2 1/2 down into the hole. I covered them with a 1 1/2, while the crane operator started scooping out the wheat. This was going to take hours, maybe days.

Training 2 went back to quarters. It was up to the ship to decide what they would do. They had to remove the grain. That was their problem. We weren't called back. I guess they figured something out.

There were 27 men at the central station: 5 officers, the first aide crew and a couple a Chiefs in single rooms. That left 17 or 18 men in the dormitory. Most of the beds were hot. Clean sheets and a different man slept in those beds each night. But there were extra beds made up.

So when somebody got up in the night to take a leak, invariably, who ever happened to be awake would make up his bed. Then when he came back, all the beds, either would be made up or somebody would be in them.

After feeling around in the dark for awhile, the "Night-Time Traveler" would realize he had been had. Turn on the lights. Wake everybody up.

Shout, "You rotten bastards!"

Then check the name tags to see what bed was his.

Or the old favorite, "The paper explosion!" The toilets had a square metal box that dispensed toilet paper one sheet at a time. Should the paper jam, there was a key hanging above the dispenser.

This is too good to pass up. So feed one sheet through the slot. Compress a spring and put the rest of the paper on top. When the unsuspecting occupant takes the key and unlocks the container, all hell breaks loose. Toilet paper would fly twenty feet in the air.

It got so bad, The Captain said, "Whoever had that house work, was responsible for cleaning up the mess." That meant training 2 had to double check the toilet paper each morning.

I took my kids down to the fire station; they would of been 4, 6, and 8 years old then.

The bell hit. The loud speaker squawking, men dropping down the poles and running for the rigs. Engines starting, sirens squalling. The doors going up. Bells clanging as rig after rig pulled out onto Front Avenue. It was a sight they never forgot.

After graduation I took the Lieutenant's exam. I wrote the 5th. Best paper out of a couple a hundred applicants. My seniority, or rather lack of it, placed me 18th on the list. It would be a couple a years before that many openings filled and there was a slot for me to be appointed.

I was sent to Engine 17.

I would sweat-out the list there.

Engine 17 was at N.W. 24th. and Johnson, one of the old horse houses. It was a two story cement building, tall and drafty. We were a five man house; George Viaene, the Lieutenant, Larry Beil driver, Al Catlow, Art Rein and me.

We took turns cooking. I was living on the farm and brought milk, cream, butter and stuff from the garden. We ate good - too good! Rhubarb pie with whipped cream nearly every day in season. We all gained weight. I gained 30 or 40 lbs. the first six months.

It was a good house, tucked in-between single family residences and the industrial district.

We had some good fires; warehouses, chemical plants, apartment houses and tank farms (a cluster of fuel storage tanks with pumps and pipes to deliver oil and gasoline to and from ships.)

Boy! when a fuel storage tank blew, she lit up the sky! We could see it the minute we pulled out the front door. And we knew we would be in for a long night.

It was a cold night. Down in the 20's. The bell hit. Before we pulled out of the engine house, we could hear the rigs moving. Larry turned left and headed up 23 rd. On these clear cold nights you can hear the sirens wailing. The "Move Up

Companies,” on the East side are rolling. The rigs from Central Station are heading up Front St.

The adrenalin is flowing. We’re really moving! Larry has his foot in it. George is pumping the siren and yanking on the bell rope. Yeah! It’s just another fire, But it’s something big. You can’t stay calm. Put on your gloves. Pull the stocking cap down over your ears. Flex your knees for the bumps. Hope we don’t meet a freight truck, or worse yet another fire engine at the inter- section. We won’t hear them over our siren and they may not be able to hear us.

Two tanks are burning. Flames raising hundreds of feet in the air. There was an explosion. The gasoline storage tank covers have blown off. And we’ve got several million gallons of gasoline burning. If she’s not cooled down - and soon, the other tanks will over heat and blow one by one. Each tank, 50 ft. in diameter and 30 or 40 ft. high, holds a Shit Pot of fuel.

An earthen dike around each tank is designed to hold spills. But during a fire the flammable liquid starts boiling, spills over, ignites and she boils faster.

We have to get water on the sides of the tank and fog up in the air over the fire to cool the fumes coming off the fire. Any water in the tank causes the fuel to foam, froth and boil over.

We crawl in low - there’s plenty of air, the fire is creating a draft. Set up large nozzles and sweep back and forth over the fire, keeping the stream high so that the spray evaporates, and doesn’t get into the tank causing the fuel to churn and boil more.

As the fire cools, a column of thick black smoke drifts over head. It’s still hot and will burst into flame as air mixes with it. We’re down under it, kneeling in water trying to shield our faces from the heat. A spray drifts back from the nozzle, and if you stay in behind that, you can keep from getting burned.

The smoke is going hundreds of feet in the air. As fresh air mixes with it, ball of flame roll through lighting up the sky.

The wind pushes the smoke and flames over us. The tops of telephone poles burst into flame like a row of wooden matches igniting one after the other.

We're hoping someone is looking out for us. Will pull us out before we were trapped. You have to go a lot on FAITH and TRUST.

You stay, seams like the smoke is getting blacker. That means we're gaining on it.

We look up at the sky, it's not as bright as it was. You just kinda feel things are slowing down. It gets quit, people are walking around, the flames aren't quiet, as high - You just know, "We've stopped her!"

You get up, stretch, look around to see what the other crews are doing. Look back to see how much hose we'll have to pick up. It's covered with oil and soot, so are we.

We wonder what time it is? Is there any coffee? We won't get to bed tonight. It'll be another hour before they start sending companies home. We were "First in" we'll probably have to stay; maybe they'll put on relief crews.

Our hose will have to be uncoupled and drained before we can roll it.

Sometimes they bring up a flat-bed truck, the relief crews roll and load the hose, Then drop it off at the engine houses.

We still have to wipe down the rig and load clean hose tonight.

The "On-coming shift," will scrub down the dirty hose and hang it to dry. We'll wash our Turn-outs next shift. But tonight we'll grab a shower, and hopefully get some sleep.

The new Chiefs haven't earned our trust. Some of them seem to think their job is to enforce The Rules and Regulations.

The "Old Chiefs," backed us up, they made damn sure we were covered. They figured, "Rules are just Rules." If there was beer on the table, or women in the engine house they never saw anything. But at a fire, they'd be right in there, in the smoke looking over your shoulder.

We never had to ask Chiefs Rudy Karnath or Woodruff if it was okay to go in. Or, "Should we get out?" We went, and we stayed until they ordered us out.

I hoped I could be that kind of an Officer.

George had his time in and was only marking time until retirement. I had the least seniority, and was on the Lieutenant's list. So I was acting officer. Al Carlow had his time bridged from before the war - he would be retiring soon. Larry and Art were content to stay Hosemen. I was stuck with the paper work. That was okay. I would need to know how to do it.

Long about 8 o'clock George would come down the stairs. He'd have his suit and tie on. I knew we were going to be short handed, and I'd be expected to cover for him.

I'd ask, "Will you be back?"

He'd grin and say, "Probably not."

I wasn't in charge, I was just responsible. I could be one of the boys, but I still had to make decisions.

The men were always testing, little stuff, house work, drilling.

You never, almost never have to push at fires. Just the opposite, slow them down.

"Walk don't run."

"Be careful when putting up ladders, watch for over-head wires."

"Wait for the other guys."

And the drivers, "Keep your speed down, slow down at intersections."

The higher the flames, the faster they went.

The "Blank Stare."

"Eyes glazed over."

Sometimes you just lose it. The excitement, maybe stress, but you're in a daze.

We had an apartment house fire. I gave the order, "Lay in." Art took the hydrant and we pulled up in front of the fire. Al took a shoulder load of 1 1/2 hose and started for the front door.

I pulled a couple a hundred feet of slack and was moving up to connect the "Wye" to the pumper outlet, when I noticed Larry. He had a 2 1/2 inch hose butt in his hands and was walking back and forth with a blank look on his face. I took the Female Fitting, handed him a Male Fitting and told him, "Put this there," pointing to the pump intake. I hooked up the 2 1/2

to the stretch line, and glanced over my shoulder; he was putting the pump in gear. I doubt if he ever knew he had been operating on instinct.

The Details, usually a younger man sent from central station, would figure they were away from their regular station, and I wasn't really an officer; so now was the time to invite women over. I didn't care as long as they kept things under control.

The Department soft ball team was playing at the park a few blocks from the engine house. Some of the men from 17's were on the team and had invited a couple of girls to the game. When it came time to leave for the park, the girls hopped into the front seat with Larry and me. I didn't dare let them ride on the back. On the way over I thought, "I hope the Chief isn't at the game."

He wasn't but the details wife was. He introduced the girls as Larry's and my wife. Nobody was fooled. His wife was mad. The girls were mad. And us old guys had a laugh at the kids expense.

Apartment house fires were tough. Narrow halls, locked doors, and poor ventilation.

We rolled up, smoke was coming out around the eaves and under doors. I took a 1 1/2 inch line in through a window. The smoke was thick. It was raw. I couldn't see. I couldn't breath. I hung my head out the window gasping for air. Truck 3's crew got in with masks, opened up doors and windows. When the smoke finally cleared, we found that a burner had been left on under a pot of sweet potatoes. That was the thickest rawest smoke I ever had to face.

With smoke inhalation, often you don't know anything is wrong.

It's the small house or room fires that get you. You go in low with a 1 1/2 inch fog nozzle. The fire is creating a draft, and as long as there are flames, fresh air is coming in around you. But if the fire has been smoldering, carbon monoxide gas is being generated, it's accumulative and you don't realize anything is wrong.

The first clue is when you start bumping into things. If you start stumbling and it takes two or more tries to get through a door way, you better get out - and fast.

This fire was putting out thick smoke and I was backing out. The truck crews was breaking windows and opening doors.

I stumbled over some hose and was a little wobbly going down the stairs.

When I came to, I was looking at the sky.

I thought, "People sure look tall when you're laying on the ground."

Art asked, "What's wrong with Nick?"

(Larry started calling me "Nick." - It stuck.)

Larry said, "Oh he got a little smoke. The First Aid Car is on the way."

I drifted in and out of consciousness.

The first Aid Crew held me up, and I was able to walk into the emergency room. But I passed out while they were loading me on a gurney.

When I came to, I was still in my turnouts, with my helmet setting on my chest. They hadn't done anything! Didn't even wash my hands and face. The clock on the wall said 10:15.

We went to the fire about 8 o'clock.

I'd been laying here for over an hour. I could hear someone on the phone in the next room trying to locate people from the city, or Fire Department to authorize treatment. And most of all, authorize payment.

I was tempted to walk out. Let them try and explain that! But I wasn't sure what kind of shape I was in.

The Duty Nurse must of got someone to okay payment. Three or four nurses hovered around, put me on oxygen - I wonder how much that cost the City? Then they put a blanket over me, helmet and all.

I was feeling better. I told them, I was okay and wanted to leave. Now they were worried!

"You sure you're all right?"

But of course there were papers to fill out and sign.

The night nurse said, "Okay you can go."

I asked, "Where am I?"

She didn't like the sound of that.

I told her, "They brought me in unconscious and I just don't know what hospital I'm in."

I was only 5 or 6 blocks from 17's so I walked back to the engine house and went to bed.

I was really surprised at my treatment. A few months before, five Firemen had been overcome at a fire and taken to one of the local hospitals. When Chief Grenfell came to check on them, he found them laying on the floor in a hall way. Like me, nobody had given them any care. They were still in their turn-outs. He was Pissed. He raised all kinds of hell. But I guess the word hadn't gotten to the Good Samaritan Hospital.

One day a little girl, 7 or 8 years old, came to the engine house. She was all upset, her kitten had climbed up on the roof and couldn't get down.

"It's just a little kitten," she said.

We told her, "They won't let us go save cats anymore."

"But it's just a baby."

"Okay, give us the address and if we're out that way, we'll stop and see what we can do."

That afternoon we had to go out, so on the way back we stopped and got the kitten down off of the porch roof.

When we got back to the engine house we found a note from the little girl. "If you can't come today, don't bother, because by tomorrow it will be dead."

In the summer water pressure is low, and we have lots of brush and grass fires in the out-laying areas west of the city limits. A tank wagon was stationed at Engine 17 as an auxiliary water supply.

In August, the water pressure had dropped on the East side. I was assigned to drive the tank wagon over to an engine house on N. E. Interstate.

I had just pulled up and was backing into the driveway when the bell hit.

The driver yelled, "Follow us."

Well the tanker has no power, and with the load of water it's carrying, top speed is about 25 mph. They were four blocks ahead of me going up Killingsworth. They turned right, and that was the last I saw of them.

I didn't know the address, and didn't have a radio. I could see where they had spilled water from their booster tank when they turned the corner. I turned, up ahead another spill. I tracked them all the way to the fire following the spills.

Being the youngest man, I got all the details. Grain had fermented in a storage bin and built up enough heat to catch fire. These bins were fifty feet in diameter and fifty feet tall. There is a 6 foot-square explosion vent in the roof. But when the fumes ignited, she blew the cover off and the blast ripped a 20 foot gash in the metal cover.

The First-in crews tried to smother the fire with Carbon-tet. When that failed, a fog line was used.

This fire had been smoldering for several days and there was a glowing mass of red hot coals ten to twenty feet in diameter.

Another firefighter and I were sent as a relief crew. We went down into the bin wearing filter masks and safety ropes. We were supposed to cool down the red hot mass in hopes it would go out.

We were warned, "Don't use too much water. The wheat will expand and rupture the storage bin."

We'd give her a shot of water then climb out, wait fifteen minutes or so. Then gave it another shot. This would go on for two or three days. Crews worked on the fire 24 hours a day, gradually cooling it down until the center mass blacked out.

Not knowing what to expect, a bulldozer braced against the bottom hatch. The hatch was unbolted and the grain poured out on the ground.

I suspect the Taxpayers got to cover the cost of the damaged wheat.

Sometimes you think, "It's just a fire, not our house." - Unless there are kids!

We rolled. A train had hit a gasoline tank truck at a crossing. The truck was a mass of crushed burning metal. The train was

setting in a pool of flames. There were a dozen companies. We went in low sweeping the fire back with fog lines.

As we pulled our hoses between the box cars, there was an explosion. “WHUMP” We ducked for cover; the fire didn’t flair up. We moved forward, “BANG, then two more BANG, BANG! It was the tires popping.

Stirring water into the gasoline will dilute the mixture and it will go out. - Gasoline doesn’t explode like the movies. But people die.

Larry recognized the truck. It was his uncle’s rig. We couldn’t put the fire out. We could see the body. We couldn’t get to him.

I got a call from down town, “There was an opening on the Lieutenant’s List, for a spot in the Fire Marshal’s Office.”

I was number three on the list. The top two men had turned down the appointment. I had been waiting over two years for my name to work it’s way to the top.

The list would be thrown out at the end of three years. I didn’t want to be a Fire Marshal.

George, the Lieutenant at 17’s was due to retire in a month or so. - We tracked retirements. There was another opening that would be coming up soon. So number 1 and 2 would probably be appointed.

I thought about it, decided I’d take my chances.

A young, (fifty year old) Chief had a heart attack:

Wayne Harvey was appointed Chief.

Jack Grenfell moved up to Captain of Engine 22.

Dale Palmer would get 17’s when George retired.

I would fill the spot created by Grenfell’s appointment to Captain.

We showed up at City Hall in dress blues, and were formally sworn in.

I would be the Lieutenant on Compressor 2.

Compressor 2

The Compressor was stationed in Engine 22's house, on S.W. First and Jefferson.

There would be two of us. I would be the officer with a crew of one, firefighter/driver, John Guthrie.

The Compressor was a specialty rig. It carried an air pump (Compressor) and a tank to run our jack hammers, air drills and saws. There were hydraulic jacks for forcible entry and rescue. We also had two tanks of carbon dioxide for electrical fires and a small tank of water and a booster.

I didn't get any special training. If something needed doing, we just did it. Faked it, or asked someone, "How in the hell does this work?"

Engine 22's house was a tall brick building set flush with the sidewalk in a block of small store fronts. In this old run down part of town, there were shops and businesses on the ground floor. Narrow stairs led to the apartments on the second and third floors. The store fronts held a pawn shop, a cafe, a couple of taverns and miscellaneous shops.

The apartments were cheap and catered to the wino, the down and out, the destitute and the prostitute.

Many of the men skimped by on a small pension. Some of the lofts and storage rooms had been divided up. Chicken wire cut the space into 8 by 10 foot cells. These were the typical "Flop Houses" that housed single men on the lower West side.

The firemen would give the Old Timers our left-overs. It was a world I had never come in contact with. One of the firemen was assigned to hose the urine and vomit off the sidewalk each morning. More often than not, there would be blood splattered on the driveway.

There was no space or yard around the engine house. The kitchen, in the back, looked out over a parking lot between the buildings. The house faced East. In the mornings we could find a spot of sunshine, stand there and watch the world go by.

A couple of men, and a woman were walking toward us, laughing, chattering back and forth. When they passed, one of the men had blood dripping down his back. He left bloody foot prints on the sidewalk.

Not a care in the world.

The back of his head was caved in.

Some of the firemen had worked here for a long time, and seen the Old Timers' health and pensions deteriorate over the years. On or about the first of the month, the Old Timers would get their pension checks. They'd pay back the money they had borrowed, pay a months rent and buy meal tickets at the local cafe. Then if anything was left over, a bottle of wine would brighten their day.

In a neighborhood where they could be mugged for pocket change, they wanted to be sure of at least one meal a day, usually a 10 cent bowl of soup.

There were Missions down on Burnside where a hot meal was available, but the locals didn't like to go down there.

Miss Pearl, had a stable of girls that worked out of an apartment house a block or so up the street. She and her girls were treated politely by the firemen. They would come in the station to visit over a cup of coffee, or use the phone in emergencies.

There was a Policeman who walked the beat along the lower West side. He looked out for the regulars, and they were his eyes and ears on the street.

In the few months I worked at 22's, I got to know Patrolman Kick. He was one tough cop. One of the few patrolmen that walked a beat alone.

I'd heard stories, how he'd put on his black gloves and go into a disturbance.

The street people told Kick, "There's an outsider shaking us down. He's got a gun! He's in the tavern."

Kick was big, six two or three.

He didn't go in.

He barged in.

He didn't pull his gun.

He asked the bartender, "Where are they?"

The bartender pointed to a couple a guys at the end of the bar. Kick grabbed the first one by the front of the shirt, lifted him off his feet, took him out, banged his head against the wall and told him, "You stay there, and don't move until I tell you to."

Then he went back in after the other guy, the one with the gun. Kick slapped him a couple of times, held out his hand and said, "Give me the gun."

He hauled him out, dumped him on the sidewalk, and said, "Don't either of you move," then went back inside and called for the wagon.

22's was a Chief's House. There was the District Chief, the Officer and crew of 22, me on the compressor with a driver. I was brand new.

After the Swearing in Ceremony I got to he station house about 10 am. Looked the rig over and had lunch.

Some of the hosemen invited me down to the corner bar to meet "Bunny Noses."

The bar maid wore a tight blouse and her nipples strained against the fabric. They did kinda look like two small bunny noses."

This was a test. I knew there would be some drinking on duty. I could be held accountable, even though these men weren't on my crew.

I figured, I'd do like I've always done. I'll give the men some leeway, and expect them to act responsibly.

We went in the tavern, and Allen Douglas introduced me to Bunny Noses and we ordered beers. When my eyes got accustomed to the dim light, I noticed the Chief and the Captain at a table in the back having their after dinner drink.

They didn't see me.

I didn't see them.

But it sure took the pressure off.

I paid for the beers.

Doug offered, "I'll buy the next round."

“No! One’s enough.”

They weren’t quite sure where I stood on drinking, but I was in control.

I had given a lot of thought about how I’d handle drinking. It can be a real problem, I pretty much decided I would accept some drinking, but I would set limits.

(None of this, “Don’t let me catch you.” Bull shit.

In several of the store fronts, there were families of Gypsies. Linda and her brother, “Baby Elephant” hung around the engine house. Someone, Children’s Services probably, found out the Gypsy kids weren’t going to school, and ordered a District wide effort to see that all children attend.

Linda was 9 or 10, and she was placed in the third grade. Baby Elephant, 13, was placed in the seventh. They had never been to school, couldn’t read or write. They had homework, but neither their parents or their 16 year old sister could, or would help them.

I was curious about their life and showed an interest in them. I got a “Dick and Jane” first grade reader and helped them write simple sentences. Linda was smart and anxious to learn. Baby Elephant was an over weight teenager, lazy and not too interested.

He was next in line to be King of this Clan. I helped Linda with her school work for a couple of months. Imagine that, Me a Tutor for Royalty. Linda caught on and could read and write some.

One day, I was asking Linda about her life. She asked if I wanted to see her home. It was just down the street a half a block.

I said, “Sure.”

Her family lived in a store front - one big room with big plate glass windows in front. They had covered the windows and hung gaudy drapes on the walls. Rugs and bright colored pillows covered the floor. There were two canopy beds, one for her parents, the other for her uncle and his wife.

There was a davenport where an aunt slept. The kids slept on the floor, there didn't seem to be any kitchen. The kids would be given money, and they lived on Coke and cookies.

I had only been in the room a few minutes, when the door burst open.

Patrolman Kick and his partner came through the door yelling, "What the hell is going on?"

When they saw me talking to Linda, they knew they had been set up.

The guys at the station had told Kick, "The Gypsies took the Lieutenant into their store front."

He back out and apologized. The crew was laughing as I walked up the street.

Linda told about the feasts when the Clans met to settle disputes. There would be music and dancing. Wine, lots of wine - everybody drank, even the kids. The arguments, the traditional name calling, women shouting insults. Fist fights. Pushing and shoving. Several hundred Gypsies voicing both opinions and righteous indignation.

One hell of a party.

A sheep would be roasted over coals. And traditional dishes prepared. The Elders, of the Clans called, would arbitrate and enforce a settlement.

They were an interesting culture, and I would have liked to learn more about them.

The Clan moved out on S.E. Powel. I never heard from, or about them again.

Sam, a couple of other firemen and I were standing out front. Vicky, a young Afro-American woman waked by.

Sam said, "You look nice this morning, is that a new sweater?"

She beamed and said, "Yes!"

She was young and attractive. We watched her walk on down the sidewalk. Half way down the next block, Crazy Eddie stopped her. They argued some.

Soon they yelling. Vicky said, she didn't have any money.

Eddie screamed at her. Then they were cussing, shouting obscenities at one another. Vicky had a polished vocabulary, and gave as good as she received. We started toward them, worried Eddie might hurt her.

Eddie turned as he crossed the street, shouting his final insult, "You, YOU OLD COW!"

It struck us as funny. Vicky walked on, and we went back to the engine house. Vicky stood on the corner for what seemed like 5 or 10 minutes. Her head hanging down, she seemed nervous and undecided. She started to cross the street, stop, look at us, then hang her head down. We had just about decided to go see what was up. Maybe Eddie had hurt her. Slowly she walked back. We knew something was wrong.

She said, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't talk like that. I'm ashamed. You always talk good to me. Treat me like a lady."

"Ah! hell," Sam said, "He had it coming, you did okay."

"But you never talk like that in front of me. I'm sorry."

After she had gone down the street, Sam said, "She's one of Miss Pearl's girls. A hooker. She works the street."

Patrolman Kick keeps an eye on Vicky. When she began to look run down - losing weight, he would pick her up on some charge and get her a month in "County" to get off drugs and regain her strength.

The only Health Care the Street People had, was Jail.

The bell hit. 22's and the Compressor rolled. John Guthrie was driving. A house, there was a lot of smoke, the companies were going in on the ground floor. John and I went around back. there was someone stumbling around in a basement room. We called to him. We could hear him. We couldn't get to him.

Vern Miller, from Truck 2, called out, "Come to the window."

Vern got him just before the guy passed out.

John went back to the rig and put on a Scott-air Pack.

Smoke was pouring out of the window; Vern had the victim by one hand.

He was dead weight.

Vern couldn't pull him out.

He couldn't breathe.

He couldn't let go.

I was blocked.

John showed up. We stuffed him through the window, and he boosted the body up to us.

The truck Crew scooped him up and ran for the First Aid Car.

That was fine, but ya know, a couple a days later the Chief was bragging how Truck 2 had pulled a man out of a basement.

Hell! We got him out. Well it was John and Vern. I was there, it was my company, my driver.

The Chiefs make damn sure who gets the blame when something goes wrong.

We had only one bad fire while I was at 22's. I was acting officer on the Engine. A large old house down on S.W. Arthur St. was going, top to bottom. Flames shooting out the windows and under the eaves. She was really going!

Turned out it was arson. The fire had been set in three or four places.

Banjo and Doug took a line in the basement. Ezra and I took an inch and a half up the stairs, kicked in the front door and hit the flames in the front room. Smoke was coming up through the floor. I was thick. We couldn't see. We backed out and got a gulp of fresh air. There were still a few hot spots. We wet them down and pulled out.

The crew of 22's was standing outside while the Truck Companies shoveled out the debris.

I felt myself tipping over backwards. I stepped back and caught my balance. I felt my head swimming. I started to tip back again. Something was wrong. I've got to get to the First Aid Car.

I slapped Banjo on the shoulder and said, "Take the front seat."

I started off across the field.

"If I could just get to the First Aid Car, I'd be okay."

I started down.

My legs wouldn't work.

I was falling forward.

They caught me before I hit the ground.

I stayed in the hospital a couple a nights.

When I came back to work , my clothes were still laying on the floor, where I had left them the night of the fire.

It kinda Pissed me off.

The house was closed down.

Engine 22 became the training company and moved to the Drill Tower.

Compressor 2 moved to Engine 4 and Truck 2's house On S.W. 4th. and Montgomery.

Engine 4

Engine 4's house was a big old two story building scheduled to be replaced by the new house being built on S.W. 5th. and College.

The guys were young. I was 35. Most of the crew were in their mid or late 20's. It was a fun house. Always something going on.

Once a month, we had window day. Everybody turned to. Ladders were extended to the upstairs windows.

The buckets of soapy water, wet sponges, and garden hoses were too much of a temptation. A little water spilled. A wet sponge thrown. A bucket of water dumped on the men below. The garden hose sprayed the men on ladders. Next the Compressor was fired up, and the booster stream out -reached the garden hose. The booster team chased the garden hose team into the back yard. Not to be outdone, the engine crew laid in a 1 1/2 inch line from the hydrant. A full fledged water fight was under way. Charlie Gray bent the hose double, Kinking the inch and a half line to shut off the water. The men shoved the nozzle up under his turn-out coat, and were asking him, "What are you going to do now?"

About then the Chief showed up.

"I don't want to know! But every drop of water better be cleaned up when I come back. You've got one hour."

He drove off laughing to himself.

The Compressor was used for shopping. The cook would take my place. Bert (Bertalot was my new driver) would drive him, and I'd ride on Engine 4.

We had a regular cook. The crew chipped in \$10 every payday. There were 13 men on duty. We had a budget of \$26 a day for food. The cook would plan the menu and do the shopping for lunch and supper. Whatever he cooked was fine. Those who made the mistake of bitching, found themselves with the job.

We ate good. And we had lots. The house had turkey platters that were used for dinner plated. Mashed potatoes and gravy was everybody's favorite. The word followed those cooks who could make good roast beef gravy.

When the cook was off sick or on vacation one of us would fill in. I volunteered to cook supper. I make a pretty good gravy with braised Ox tails.

In those days they only cost 25 cents per pound. I figured 3 lbs. per man- $3 \times 13 = 39$ lbs.

Man we had a ton of braised ox tails.

Only 3 or 4 of the firemen would eat them. The mashed potatoes and gravy went over big, but there sure was a lot of ox tails left.

Robbie Roberson got a new car, A brand new Buick. God! He was proud of that car.

He wouldn't shut up. It was, without a doubt, man's greatest accomplishment. Well, at least he thought so.

After a couple days of hearing him brag, it was time to act.

Robbie, with his black Italian cigar and pompous air, strutted out to his car. He acknowledged the firemen gathered in front of the engine house. Pride radiated from every mannerism and gesture as he open the door and entered - HIS NEW CAR.

With regal bearing he started the engine, glanced once in the direction of the assembled firefighters and let out the clutch.

Nothing happened! The engine raced. The car didn't move. He put it in reverse. Then he tried second gear. He checked the brakes. He tapped the gas peddle.

He got out and walked around the car.

"What do you suppose is wrong with it?" he asked.

Panic set in. Even his cigar looked crestfallen. The firemen gathered around suggesting possible reasons for the malfunction. Twinkles of merriment showed in their faces.

"Try her again, we'll push."

The engine roared to life.

"Put her in reverse. We'll try rocking it back and forth."

The twinkles became smiles, soon followed by fits of laughter."

Something was wrong.

"Okay! You Sons a Bitches; what did you do?"

They had jacked up the car leaving the tires just a fraction of an inch off the ground.

One of the first fires I had at engine 4, was The Booze Fighters Club - an Alcoholic Rehab Center. It was a four story, brick residence hotel down on the corner of S.W. Second and Arthur. I was working an extra shift, filling in for the officer on the engine.

When we pulled around the corner onto Second St. we could see the flames. She was going through the roof. Flames were coming out every window. I was pumping the siren.

Pitman, the driver, yelled, "Pull a second!"

I grabbed the mike and yelled over the sound of the siren, "this is Engine 4 give us a second."

The Operator came over the air, "Do you want a second alarm Engine 4?"

"Yes!" I screamed. "Two! T-W-O give us a second."

I'd lost'er for a minute or two.

But we laid in took a 2 1/2 inch for nozzle in the front door. Mac (Lieutenant on the Compressor) took the booster up the fire escape in hopes of containing the fire to the first and second floors.

It was a slow dirty job. Knocking the fire down. then going from floor to floor, room to room, mopping up. Fortunately no lives were lost.

Jim Klum was driving the Compressor. We got a call to go to Boat 1. The Building Superintendent wanted to use our air driven saw to cut off some pilings.

It was mid-summer, the water level in the river had dropped. The Fire Boat's floating dock was hung up on something.

Well, the Chief of District 4 called the Chief of District 2 and asked if Bob Landauer, a firefighter at Engine 5 would get his scuba gear and help Boat 1 out.

When Jim and I arrived we found one end of the float was resting on the stub-end of an old piling. This float was 30 or 40 feet long, made out of half inch iron plate. It weighed several tons. The end resting on the piling was two feet higher than the other.

Bob looked apprehensive, and I didn't like the look of it either.

I told Bob, "If you want me to, I'll take a look at it, but the only decision I'll make is, It's not safe."

He told me, "Yeah, go down and look it over."

I stripped down to my shorts. He helped me strap on the air tank, and showed me how the face mask and mouth piece operated.

I was only in four feet of water. This was one of my concerns; if he did cut off the piling, the float would drop. Would it smash Bob into the mud?

Visibility under water was only a foot. He would be working blind.

I called The Central Office and told the Personnel Officer the situation as I saw it. "Unless the float was raised off the piling, it wasn't safe."

A crew from building maintenance brought a hoist and lifted the float clear. Then I insisted they add a safety chain before allowing Bob back into the water.

Bob wasn't too happy about it, but he went under the float, and cut the piling off - without any trouble.

It was the middle of the night. The bell hit; and when I tried to get out of bed, I bumped into the wall. It was right beside my bed. I knew that was wrong. I tried again. I was completely blocked. I felt over the head of the bed, another wall. I was closed in, Only one way out. I climbed over the foot of the and started feeling along the wall. It was pitch black, But there had to be a door somewhere. I knew I was in an engine house. But I had no idea which one. Then I realized I had my eyes shut. I spotted a door. I opened it, praying, "God, I hope it's not a closet."

The tape punch was banging and the speakers were giving the address.

I thought, "If I don't know where I am, how will I know which way to go, to get to the fire?"

I crept down the stairs. The doors were up. The engines roaring. I still couldn't spot a familiar face to give me a clue as to what engine house I was in. I came down the stairs. The watchman gave me a slip of paper with the address on it.

I still wasn't thinking clearly. The truck was pulling out the door, engine roaring, lights flashing, the sound of the siren echoing off the walls. I was beginning to panic. Then I saw the compressor. I finally came clear awake. With a sigh of relief, I pulled on my turn-out coat, hopped in the front seat and told Bert, "Okay, let's go." And we pulled in behind the other rigs.

I've heard, "You sleep the soundest, the first half hour,"

I don't know, but I always sat on the bed for a few seconds before jumping up.

One fireman wasn't so lucky. Engine 4 was an old two story building that had originally been built for a horse drawn Steamer (A coal fired steam pump used at the turn of the Century). The high ceiling provided room for the harness to hang above the horses, and could be dropped for a quick Hitch-up and getaway.

The bell hit one night. The kid wasn't fully awake. He hit the pole. Dropped the twenty feet to the apparatus floor. Broke both ankles.

The Fire Department was action and stress. Go as fast as you can, as long as you can. But time seemed to go in slow motion.

Only, trouble happens fast.

Wismer was Tillerman - steering the back wheels on a hook and ladder truck.

The over-head door failed to catch.

As the driver pulled out, the door drifted back down.

There wasn't time to think.

There wasn't time to yell.

Act, and act fast!

Al pushed the door up.

He ducked down.

Only inches separated his making it okay, and being crushed against the seat.

Fires in davenports are a common source of fire calls. A cigarette drops between the cushions where it smolders for a few hours. Then long about 1:30 in the morning she flairs up and fills the house, or apartment full of smoke. If the people wake up, they call the Department. If they don't wake up, We get the call when she goes through the roof.

We pulled up in front of this apartment house, smoke was rolling out the windows and under the eaves. While we were laying in, the Truck crew was opening up.

Charlie Grey kicked in a door and spotted the fire in a davenport. He yelled for a truckman to help him. One man on each end, they carried the davenport out into the hall. As soon as the fresh air hit the smoldering cloth she busted into flames. Next thing we knew, a ball of fire came down the stairs, a fireman on each end running for daylight, flames swirling around up and over them as they ran out the door and threw that son of a bitch end over end out into the street.

Charley and the other guy got their eyebrows and cheeks singed. But they saved a lot of smoke and water damage.

The fire was out. Out in the street.

Somebody wet it down, while we rolled up our hoses and headed back to the engine house.

It's funny, the public is both fascinated and terrorized by fire. They will crowd up to a bonfire, but run screaming in terror if a wastebasket or a pan of grease catches fire.

Some times the public is deceptively calm. The first in companies had arrived a few minutes before Bert and I showed up. There weren't any firemen in the lobby.

I asked the desk man where the fire was.

Very calmly, he answered, "Up on the 10th. floor."

The building was a high rise retirement complex.

Four or five of us got into the elevator and pushed the button for 10.

When the elevator stopped, the bell rang and the door opened. There was smoke down to our knees.

We couldn't see anything, and no one was around. We dropped to the floor and crawled forward. We could feel the heat on our faces. Something was burning up ahead, but we still couldn't see anything or anybody.

I looked back just in time to see the elevator doors close. We were stuck, in the smoke, no water, no radio, and no idea how much fire we were facing or where the other firemen were.

I crawled toward the heat and found a davenport blazing. The windows in the hallway of an air-conditioned building can't be opened. I crawled down the hall looking for a house line or a fire extinguisher in one of those cabinets that say, "In case of fire break glass."

I couldn't find one.

I had pushed the button for the elevator, when it came back up, I stuck my foot in the door to keep it from closing. No more firemen or equipment could get to the floor, but at least we had a way out if we needed it.

The first group of firefighters had found an unlocked apartment door, went in and opened some windows to get some fresh air. Then they were able to locate a fire extinguisher and

wet down the davenport. The others stretched a house line and put the fire out.

There wasn't a lot of fire, or much damage, but for a few minutes it was one of the worst spots I've ever been in.

4's was a good house. I enjoyed coming to work. Something was always going on. Roger Cawood asked one day if he could take the Compressor. We used it for errands. It has a radio, and if a fire call comes in, the guys can meet us at the fire and we won't be short handed.

I said, "Sure."

After an hour or so I began to wonder what was taking so long.

One of the men said, "Rog and Wismer went someplace.

It had been nearly three hours and they weren't back yet. I was getting worried. Just before supper they came in.

"Where in the hell have you been?" I screamed.

Wismer had a strawberry farm, and Roger and he had gone to Hillsboro to pick a crate of berries for supper.

The compressor had "Portland Fire Department." written all over it.

I told the crew, "If anybody asks, just laugh and deny it."

They had gotten caught in the afternoon traffic, began to worry about being spotted, pulled off the highway and took the back roads up over German Town Road and back down Front Avenue.

They didn't get caught.

I didn't have to write a letter.

Sometimes we got caught.

Bert was an elk hunter. He had several hundred pounds of elk meat in his freezer. He offered a couple a roasts for supper. "Great!"

He and I took the compressor and headed for his house. We just got back to quarters the front phone rang. The Chief of District 3 wanted to know what the compressor was doing way out there.

I better come up with something, and it better be good.

“Well chief” I answered, “That’s in our Second Alarm district.” (We took all second alarms, anywhere in the city).

“But If you’d rather we didn’t familiarize our selves with your district. We won’t go there unless there’s a fire.”

He knew I was “Shitting him,” But what could he say?

It was a game. Us against the Chiefs.

If there was a fire, fine.

But all the Rules and Regulations were Bullshit.

We had, had enough of those in the Military.

“A Shift” had to work Christmas Eve.

During the day the guys got to talking, “We should have some hot toddies, or something to celebrate.”

I said, “Yeah! that sounds good. I’ll take care of it.”

It would cost me a few bucks, but I wanted to be in control.

Bert and I took the compressor up to the liquor Store. I bought a bottle of Rum and a tub of Hot Buttered Rum mix.

After supper, those who wanted one had a Hot Buttered Rum. This way, no extra bottles, no extra problems.

One of the men, maybe Vern, brought a motor scooter to the station. The men were taking turns riding it around the block. Nothing would do but me taking a ride. The scooter didn’t have a clutch. You had to put it in gear, push to get it started, and then hop on. Of course they didn’t tell me that. I started the engine, put it in gear, and all hell broke loose. The scooter jumped forward and dumped me off. I managed to hold on to the handlebars. The engine winding up, the scooter bouncing up and down on the back wheel and me hanging on for dear life while the crew rolled on the ground laughing.

I guess that was about the time I got the name, “Crazy Coyote.”

I was called a lot of things. I’ve heard, “Yes Sir!” twisted to an insult. And, “You lucky Bastard,” uttered in the most complimentary terms.

I figured, “You don’t give an Ass-hole a nickname. You call him a “Ass-hole!”

Sam, at engine 22, told the local Madam, "Carter is so full of shit, his eyes are brown." So at Engine 22's I was known as, "Brown eyes."

At 17's Larry called me, "Nick." After the movie detective, "Nick Carter."

I feel, I felt, "These manes are a symbol of acceptance.

I was, "Crazy Coyote," for the next 12 to 15 years; I cherished that name, and all it implied.

Not everything that happened was funny. Vern pulled the compressor out on the apron to wash it. When he backed back into the house, he didn't notice a storage door open.

It hit the door jamb.

It crushed.

He didn't want to write a letter.

He spent the afternoon pounding the door back into shape. A coat of paint and no one was the wiser.

John Guthrie was driving the compressor, We had a run down on the lower West side, it was a sporting goods store. The crews were inside and were getting the fire under control.

The plate glass window was broken out and there was some fire in the window displays. I grabbed the booster hose, John put the pump in gear and followed me pulling hose.

We stepped up to the window and had just started wetting the display down when it started; Pop, Pop - Pop, Pop - Pop! It sounded like popcorn. Then I thought, "Oh Oh! that's ammunition exploding."

As we backed out I felt something hit my cheek and felt a trickle of blood.

The Fire Fighting Manuals contend, "Cartridges in a fire aren't a problem. The casing bursts but the bullets don't fly through the air."

Then I saw some small bottles of glue or varnish. They must be what are popping.

We started back in. My heart wasn't in it. I kept thinking, what if it is bullets?" And something did cut my cheek.

We kinda hung back, not getting any closer than we had to.

Another case of, "Something could of happened but didn't."

The firefighters at Engine 4 were all about the same age. I was a little older. We spent our time together - softball games, beer drinking.

My driver, Bert, and Smith from Engine 15 had gone fishing together, and decided to go hunting up at Wickiup.

Bert said, "The fishin's good. Big German Browns move up the river in the fall, and there are lots of deer in the country."

Smith had fished that stretch of water for several years. He'd fish a drift, then run to the next, skipping the poorer water in between. We weren't having too much success. Smith came into camp that evening with a limit of fish all over twenty inches.

We fished with a big streamer fly that had been tied on a long shanked triple "O" hook. We used a spinning rod and reel, put a #7 split shot six inches in front of the fly, cast across stream and twitched the line as we slowly retrieved the fly.

I had waded out from shore in hopes of being able to drift along the far bank. I was taking up line, when this big son of a bitch jumped. I'll bet he was four feet long, looked like a salmon. They jump out of the water two or three feet, They don't jump like a trout, standing on their tail. They jump horizontal and then land flat in the water. First time I heard one, I thought Bert or Gray had tossed a big rock into the water beside me.

Another time I was retrieving my fly. I had cast across current letting the fly drift down deep. When it swung up on the surface, I tipped the pole down and cranked in the line. Not six feet in front of me the water boiled, I got a glimpse of the fish just as the line snapped. This was eight pound test. It popped like a string. That was the biggest fish, "I almost-hooked, had on or something." It was damn near a foot deep through the belly.

We - mostly Bert and Gray - caught a lot of fish out of that stretch of water.

We didn't have too much luck with the deer hunting. There were deer around. Other hunters were successful. We did all right in fishing, poker playing, story telling and beer drinking departments.

That first year Bert and Smith were cooking over a camp fire. Smith had under-cooked and over-burnt some spuds, and was adding a can of vegetable soup to the mess.

Bert asked, "What the hell! are you doing?"

Smith replied, "What difference does it make? It all goes the same place anyway."

Bert looked in the window of the trailer.

Charley and I were sitting at a table, backed potatoes, half a chicken apiece, salad, garlic bread, and a bottle of wine with our meal.

When Smith suggested they write their initials in the grease on the plates so they wouldn't have to do the dishes.

Bert came over to the trailer and said, "Next year I'm coming with you guys!"

Deer hunting became an annual tradition. Bert, Charley and I would load up the trailer and go for a week or so. Soon some other firemen would join us in camp. One year Rog (Cawood) and Pittman drove over just to play poker.

We'd load up a bunch of beer, ten or fifteen pounds of peanuts. And food, lots of food. Good stuff too, steaks, chicken, German sausage and pepper cured ham for breakfast. Spaghetti and Monterrey Mix-up from the freezer. No Franco American spaghetti, or tin-can soup for us.

We used to play penny Ante poker at the station. Nickel, dime, penny. One of each - 16 cents, was the limit. We had some great times. Especially after I talked Bert and Charley into going to Frenchglen. We'd get up at daylight. Have a big breakfast. Then drive up on the Steens for the morning hunt. We'd turn off on a dirt road just past Lilly Lake, about 8,000 foot elevation, and take stands overlooking a shallow brush

filled canyon. We took some deer, well other firemen shot them. I got to help carry them out.

Bert got a big one. I think it was Bert; anyway it was big. We were a mile or so from the cars, and up hill all the way back. We tried to drag it.

Next we tied a stick in it's horns. That sucker must of weighed 200 lbs. It didn't slide too good over rocks and sage brush. Someone chopped down a pole. Really it was a tree. That pole weighed more than the deer. It was grunt and strain, lift, drag a few feet and gasp for breath. God! That was a lot of fun - or was it? We finally got the deer back to camp and hung in a tree. It was a nice deer and the other campers came over to pay their respects.

I had brought a couple a gallons of my home made potato wine. A raw, powerful drink, more like vodka than wine. It was made from potatoes, lemons, oranges and sugar. It carried quite a kick, but went down pretty good. It could sneak up on ya.

The two guys from the camp beside ours asked where we had been hunting. They hadn't seen any thing all day. After a couple more glasses of wine, Bert, Russ, and maybe Joe gray said, "Come on we'll show you were the deer are."

I'll have to admit, we were a strong case for gun control.

They grabbed their guns and a glass of wine for the road and piled in the other camper's old Buick. I stayed in camp. I'd have supper ready when they got back.

When Bert got back to camp, he told about the trip. Bert, Russ and Joe were in the back seat, the other guy and his partner were in front. Just before the turn off, Bert saw some deer along the side of the road. They anchored the Buick and threw open the doors. Bert got his rifle cross-wise in the door. By the time he got untangled, the deer had trotted off a few yards down the hill. They were standing there watching in disbelief at the spectacle taking place. Bert got himself untangled after a couple a tries, then fell down twice trying to get through the fence.

Russ yelled, "Where are the deer?" and slammed the car door.

The deer had enough of that and walked off, shaking their heads I'm sure, in amazement.

After a kill, I would dust the liver and heart slices with flour, and cook them up with mounds of fried spuds and onions. After supper, Charley would do up the dishes, and I'd get the cards and poker chips set up.

We played every night, from six or seven until midnight. Then we would grab a few hours sleep.

Long about 4 o'clock the alarm would hit. I'd make coffee, fry up some spuds and German sausage. After breakfast, Well before daylight, we'd drag our sorry asses up on the mountain to sit on a ice cold rock and wait for a deer to walk by, or at least, untill the sun came up.

Afternoons, after lunch and a couple a beers, we'd grab a nap before hitting the river, Fishing was good.

No! it was fantastic.

We regularly caught 17 and 18 inch trout. In those days, we used two pound test line, and though I had bigger fish on, I couldn't hold em.

One afternoon, my son Joe, was fishing for "Big Ben" down at the culvert - We had names for the fishing holes and the big fish that lay in them.

Bert and Russ were out on the point drinking beer and fishing. Bert had already fallen in the river three times and Russ was running a close second.

I had walked on down to see how Joe was doing. I heard him yell, and saw his pole bent double.

Russ yell, "Hang on Joe! I'll get the net."

Here he came. Splashing up the creek, waving the net and shouting, "I'll net him, I'll get that son of a bitch."

Russ made a couple a passes and missed. By the time I got there, he was on his hands and knees splashing around like a grizzly bear after salmon.

Finally he cornered the fish. Trapping it with both hands. Then holding it aloft, waded over to congratulate Joe. It was a big one, 18 maybe 20 inches. One of the bigger fish caught that

trip. And for Joe, a teen-ager at the time, quite a feather in his cap.

Joe got a kick out of the firemen and their stories. He was watching the card game one evening.

Russ was trying to convince the others, that they should go into town. Russ was leaning against the wall. He was getting a little sleepy, His eyes would drift shut, and he would slowly slide down the wall. He would catch himself, shake his head, straighten back up and insist he was okay.

Joe looked over at me and asked, "He's going to drive?"

I answered, "Sure, he's too drunk to walk."

One of the firemen, Eichler, was a tall raw boned kid. Quite a fighter. Bert had told about Elk hunting the year before. The hunters, mostly firemen, had gone into town for some action.

They hit the bar, ordered drinks, and moved in on a table full of women.

Well the Cowboys thought this was their bar and the women were part of it. Anyway, they didn't like hunters. Especially hunters from Portland. The firemen got drunker and louder. The women got friendlier. The Cowboys got hostile. Next thing you knew, insults were flying. Chairs were tipping over. Women were screaming. Threats and fists were flying. Ike, the tall quiet kid, had stepped back against the wall and put on his smooth leather gloves. He looked a little like John Wayne. A smile on his face, eyes sweeping the action. He didn't say anything. Just watched. When the fight got beyond the pushing and shoving stage. He stepped up. No wasted words, or punches. He dropped the first cowboy. knocked him flat. Then he dumped the other two, one by the jute box and the one by the front door. The fight was over!

The next night someone suggested they go into town.

Ike said, "Aw! you guys just want to get me in another fight."

Anyhow, this night they went over to the hot springs and took a bath instead. There's a hot spring at Frenchglen. It's fenced off now. There used to be a bath house over the hot

springs. The water is naturally hot, and felt pretty good after a tough day on the mountain.

Ike was tough and he was strong. They tell about the time, some of the firemen were working on a car. They had a V-8 engine sitting on the floor, and they were standing around trying to figure out how they were going to get it up in the back of a pickup truck.

Old Ike asked, "What's the trouble?"

"We've got to put this engine in the truck."

"Ike just picked it up and set it in the back of the pickup.

Hell! It weighed what? 250-300 pounds.

There were some real men in the Portland Fire Department: Tough, strong, brave.

Damn good men!

I went hunting at Frenchglen for ten or twelve years I guess. Caught a lot of fish, never killed a deer until the last year.

I had a 30-30 Winchester. I picked a flat rock in the open and waited for the sun to come up. It was cold, down in the 20's. I was asking myself why I ever left that nice warm trailer house for this. Just as the sun came up, I spotted five deer walking along in single file. The first in line was a buck. Heart pounding, I brought the rifle up. They saw me, stopped and turned their heads toward me. I squeezed off a shot. The buck flinched and looked up at me. I jacked another shell in the chamber and fired again. This time he shook his head. I shot again, another flinch. Each time I shot he would flinch. By now I was rattled. My glasses were fogged up. I took them off and fired a couple of more shots. Finally the buck just folded his front legs and lay down. The other deer just stood there. The second in line was a buck. When I shot at him, he bounded away.

Bert had heard all the shooting and was coming over.

I yelled, "A buck is coming your way. I think I hit him."

When I got to the first buck I'd shot, he was looking at me. I finished him off with a shot to the head.

He had been shot through the ear. The blood was dripping, that is why he kept shaking his head.

The first bullet had hit his backbone severing his spinal cord and paralyzing him. I had hit him four or five times before the neck shot knocked him off balance, and he lay down.

I looked at those big brown eyes.

“God!” I thought to myself, “I’ll never go hunting again.”

After that, I went to Frenchglenn, but I didn’t hunt, I’d hang around camp, go fishing, drink beer and play cards.

A lot more fun and a lot less work.

Engine 4’s house was in the area scheduled for Urban Renewal. The buildings around us were being vacated, Bulldozed down and the debris burned.

There was a large three story apartment house on the lot next door. Piles of used furniture covered the ground behind the engine house. The men would pick out a rocking chair, take it back to the engine house and rock for a while.

If it didn’t fit, they would take it back and choose another. Some of the men got some pretty good chairs before the furniture was burned. Little did we realize how valuable those oak tables, chests of drawers and chairs would become.

This bulldozing and burning took several months. Smoke hung over the Southwest part of town. The Compressor was assigned Fire Watch duty. I spent many a lonely night watching these giant bonfires.

We had noticed that food left out over night appeared to have been nibbled on. We figured it was probably rats.

The night watchman’s bed was just off the kitchen. One night something jumped off the table and landed on his chest. It was too big for a rat. We figured it must of been a cat prowling for food. A couple of days later someone spotted a cat in the furnace room.

Bert said, “I’ll get it out of there.”

He grabbed a broom, and backed up by two other brave souls went to do battle. A yell and a poke with the broom brought a YOWL and a SNARL. One more poke with the broom. The cat snarled, lay back it’s ears and charged. That cat chased Bert, his broom and the other two firemen back up the stairs.

This was war!

Bert fired up the booster and went back down. Last we saw of that cat, he was getting a 20 gallon enema as he ran for his life.

The single guys would invite their girl friends to the Engine house now and then. Hodges had met a woman in a bar. He told her he was a Fireman. She said she always wanted to visit a fire station, "Could he take her?"

"Sure."

Vern miller recognized her as a barmaid from a Topless bar. She had a pair of tits she was real proud of, and the firemen were crowding around giving her lots of attention.

Vern asked if she had ever played Strip Dice?

"No, but she would like to learn."

Vern produced a pair of dice and introduced her to the fine art of getting a woman's clothes off.

They both lost their shoes and socks.

Then Vern started to cheat in earnest. Off came her blouse and brassier. We crowed around. Vern let her win. She clapped her hands, jumped up and down, and her boobs bounced

Hodges was pacing the floor like a caged lion.

Vern suggested, "One throw of the dice. Loser takes everything off."

She lost!

Vern say's "You don't have to. I've been cheating."

We were disappointed, and I suspect she was too.

The Department had built several new engine houses. Engine 4 and truck 2 would be located in the new house at S.W. 5th. and College.

The Compressor was deactivated.

I was assigned as Lieutenant at Engine 15.

Engine 15

15's was a bungalow house in a quiet residential neighborhood of large, well kept homes in the West hills.

The crew, though young had been together for several years and knew the location of the winding, hard to find streets. Ken Savage the driver, Larry Miles, Bob Wilkinson and I made up the crew.

We took turns cooking, and we liked to eat, I remember cooking a full five pounds of mashed potatoes with meatballs and gravy. We ate it all.

I had only been there a few weeks, when something told me to look under the sink. There was a nearly full bottle of vodka.

I knew I had to do something.

I set the bottle on the kitchen table. Went to the watch desk, turned off the overhead door opener and Tapped Out.

I went back in the kitchen and sat down.

The punch wasn't moving.

Nothing on the speaker. They knew something was wrong.

They spotted me and came into the kitchen.

I said, "I don't care who's this is. I want it out of the engine house, and I want it out now."

Ken poured some of the liquid on a saucer and lit it.

It was vodka.

Ken said, "Well if nobody else wants it, I'll take it."

The vodka was gone.

I made my point.

Well maybe not. Some time later, a month or so, I had that feeling again.

I looked in a storage locker in the basement, there was a half gallon jug of wine.

I took it up stairs and told the crew, "A beer now and then after a fire is okay, but nothing like this."

I'm pretty sure the wine belonged to one of my men.

I always wondered how I knew.

If it was a hunch, instinct, what?

If it was instinct. that feeling would save Bert's and my life a year or so later.

This was a good crew. We didn't have a lot of fires. But when we did, we'd have it all to ourselves. Back up companies from down town, wouldn't arrive for 5 or 10 minutes. If we didn't get the people out, and knock down the fire, it was a lost cause by the time help arrived.

It was a rainy night. We got a call, "A car wreck. Woman trapped. Car on fire."

We were first in.

A car had flipped over and was laying up side down in the middle of Canyon Road.

The engine was burning, but the leaking gasoline hadn't ignited.

We skidded to a stop. I grabbed the booster hose, ran to the car and called for water.

Ken yelled, "Something's wrong with the pump."

I sent Larry back for an extinguisher and went to see we if could get the woman out. The doors were crushed shut and jammed.

Somebody, from one of the cars, found a rock, broke out the side window, and he and I slid the woman out.

Larry knocked down the flames in the motor compartment.

I looked over, Ken was under the fire engine doing something.

I ran back to radio for an ambulance. Engine 4 and Truck 2 pulled up. Ken yelled, "We got water."

Larry used the booster to wash down the gasoline that had spilled.

Ken had figured out what was wrong. found the loose screw, tightened it up and got the booster pump working.

Not bad! when you consider; at night, a car on fire, me yelling for water and spectators screaming, "THERE'S A WOMAN IN THERE." He stayed calm and did his job.

I should of put him in for a commendation. I didn't.

I swore, "The next time something like this happens. I'll see that the man got credit."

Being Lieutenant meant doing the "God Damn paper work."

Our gasoline pump was defective. Every time we filled the rig, the pump would register 1 1/2 gallons before the gasoline began to flow. We requested repairs, but that would require digging up the tank.

So every month our Gas Report would be ten or fifteen gallons off. The office would call. The Captain would have to write a letter.

Finally I asked, "Do you want me to take care of The Gasoline Report?"

He asked, "How are you going to fix it?"

I'll lie. Don't ask any questions, I'll take care of it."

"God yes!" he exclaimed.

The bookkeeping was a bunch of Bullshit. They just needed a number in each slot. I gave them a number. I'd shade one number a little, add a few gallons here, as long as they fell within acceptable limits they didn't really care.

Every year the fire crews checked the hydrants and flushed the fire mains. We were working an area off West Burnside, when I recognized an address that had been in 17's old inspection district.

I told Larry, "Go check that hydrant."

He said, "What hydrant?"

"There under the ivy.

He poked at the ivy, and sure enough there was a hydrant in there. He started pulling the leaves aside to get at the caps.

"No," I said, "Some Lawyer lives here, and the City is scared to death he'll make them remove the hydrant."

I had inspected this district when I worked at 17's.

I turned in the hydrant as "Inaccessible."

When I came on duty for the next shift, Lieutenant Stone was waiting for me.

"What the Hell did you do to me? Who was that guy anyway?"

Then he told me what had happened. His crew had gone down, pulled the ivy away and tested the hydrant.

He got a call over the radio, "Return to quarters."

The Front phone was ringing when they pulled up.

It was The Commissioner: He chewed Stone out. Next the Big Chief called and added his two cents worth.

The District Chief came to the engine house to find out what had happened, so he could write a report.

I told Lieutenant Stone the story. He had to admit it was kinda funny.

After the men had finished their house work, We drove down to see what had taken place, and what his front yard looked like.

The Water Department crew had stripped the ivy off and painted the hydrant BRIGHT ORANGE.

I drove away laughing to myself.

Let the Chiefs explain it.

I never heard a peep.

I guess the lawyer didn't have as much clout as he thought he did.

The City put on some kind of a "Slogan Contest" for school kids. One of the winners was a little girl who went to Abernathy School, just across Vista Ave. from Engine 15.

Part of her prize was to be picked up at home and driven to and from school in a fire engine.

We had dropped her off that morning, complete with lights a sirens. We were scheduled to pick her up at 2:30.

Firefighter Lynch, from engine 4, had been off on sick leave with what had been diagnosed as an inflammation of the heart lining. The District Chief assigned him Light Duty and sent him up to 15's for a few days.

Lynch showed me a bottle of Nitroglycerin pills, telling me, "If I have trouble breathing, put one of these under my tongue."

I had already decided. If we have a run. I'll leave him in the Fire House. And we'll go short handed.

Well long about 2 o'clock, minutes before we were to leave to pick up the little girl, an elderly woman had been hit by a car while crossing the street in front of the engine house. She had been knocked down and her knees skinned up. We cleaned her up and put bandages on her scrapes. She insisted, she wasn't hurt, Didn't need an ambulance, and would take a bus home.

She wouldn't give her name or address.

About this time a Reporter from one of the newspapers showed up wanting information about the little girl who would be getting a ride home in the fire engine.

I told him, "We aren't allowed to give any information to the press.

I wanted to get rid of him.

He wanted to argue.

I suggested he call the Main Office.

I was concerned he would notice there was something going on with the injured woman.

We were running out of time.

I left Larry and Lynch with instructions to try and get somebody to pick the injured woman up.

Savage and I picked up the little girl and took her home. By the time we got back to the station, the woman had agreed to let us call her son to come get her.

When Duncan York retired, I was assigned in his spot at Engine 15. He was a legion, and the men would tell stories about him.

Every so often, the City would call him up and ask him to please deposit his pay checks so they could clear the books. He'd toss them in his locker, and cash one whenever he needed some money.

George Miljus used to work with Duncan. He told stories about him. York had a farm out near Estacada. One day he brought a couple a geese to the engine house for some reason. Put them in the storage room in the basement of engine 15's neglecting to tell anybody about them. George went down stairs to get something. You had to go inside and close the door to reach the light switch. There was a small window, but it didn't let much light in.

George opened the door and started in. Flapping wings, and hissing sounds greeted him as long snake like necks attack. Something bit him on the upper thigh. George screamed and jumped back.

Squawking and hissing, the geese chased George around the basement. Geese don't goose, they bite, and they hurt.

George was running around the ping pong table screaming for help.

Goose shit, feathers and frantic squawking of geese and George filled the air.

Duncan grabbed the geese, tucked their heads under their wings and put them back in the storeroom.

George had bruises where the geese had bitten him. And there were feathers and goose crap all over the basement. The men insisted York would have to clean up the mess.

York kept bees. He would take calls to pick up swarming bees. He had picked up a bunch on his way to work and had them in a box in his car. During the night the bees had gotten out and covered the inside of his car. The men watched in amazement as Duncan wiped the bees off of the steering wheel and drove off. Bees crawling all over Duncan and the inside of his car.

15's had a run to one of the big old estates up on Council Crest. The crew took a line in the front door, knocked the fire down and came out for a breath of air.

Duncan was nowhere to be seen. He was 60 something and the crew were in their twenties. He seemed like an old man to them. Two of them went back inside to see if they could find him. The other fireman went around behind the house, He yelled for the other two.

Laughing, he told them "I found him. He's around back. Come on, help me get him."

When the other two arrived they found Duncan hanging three feet in the air, with his turn out coat caught on the iron spikes of a metal fence. He had tried to climb over it, slipped, and was suspended in the air, unable to get loose.

Engine 15 was a treasure house of stories: One of the men found a Parakeet on the floor when they were picking up after a fire. He came on the porch with the bird laying on his hand. As a joke, he pressed on the birds' chest with his forefinger pretending to be giving artificial respiration.

The bird came to and flew away. The owner of the house saw the episode unfold. Babbling with wonder and excitement, she told everyone how this wonderful firemen had saved her pet.

The stories don't always turn out so well. An Aire-dale had been overcome in the smoke. One of the firemen wrapped his arms around the dog's chest to carry him out side.

Well an Aire-dale is only about four feet long when it's standing on all fours. You pick one up and he stretches out about nine feet long.

The kid had to hoist the dog up chin high to keep him from dragging on the floor. Fortunately the dog was facing away when he starting to come to. He whimpered. he squirmed. Then he barked and growled. Next he was thrashing and snapping his teeth.

"Somebody help me with this dog."

The firemen scattered. Those in the front yard howled with laughter.

The man with the dog, went to the porch railing, swung the dog up and over the railing, and dropped it in the middle of the firemen below.

Nobody got bit, but it was quite a show.

We were out on inspection, and had parked on a hill facing down. 15's rig had air boosters on the brakes. If you park with your foot lightly on the brake pedal, sometimes the air pressure will bleed off. This is apparently what had happened.

Slowly the fire engine started creeping down the hill. Ken pushed on the brake pedal. We picked up speed. Ken was pushing as hard as he could on the brakes, but the rig was gathering momentum. Ken hit the starter button. She didn't catch. Ken was grinding on the starter. Smith and Larry stepped off the back. By now we were going 10 mph or more and heading for a guard rail above a hundred foot drop off. I stepped out on the running board. Mike in hand.

I thought, "Geeze! I can't say, Over and out."

By now Ken had his back braced against the seat.

We ain't slowing down, we're picking up speed.

I'm afraid, if Ken takes his feet off the brakes to jump, we'll roll faster.

You can wind up under the wheels trying to jump from a moving rig.

But even if the engine starts, how long will it take to build up enough pressure to stop us?

I was about ready to tell him to put her into the bank.

The engine caught.

The pressure built up. And we slowly rolled to a stop, just a few feet from the guard rail and the drop off.

One day, I wasn't feeling good when I got to work. Guess I had a touch of the flu. I went in to my room and lay down for a while, might slept a little bit. I was feeling worse the longer I lay there.

I guess, "I better go on sick leave."

Not wanting to pass up a chance to give the crew a Jerk, I went into the kitchen, looked in the pots on the stove and said, "I'm not eating this slop. I'll go on sick leave first."

Then I went to the watch desk, picked up the front phone and asked for engine 4.

I told the officer, "Put me on sick leave and send us a detail."

Then I picked up my coat and went to the bus stop. The crew stood with puzzled looks on their faces. Expecting me to come back, laugh, or something.

I didn't. I got on the bus and rode off.

When the detail showed up, they knew I had gone on sick leave and wasn't coming back. But they still weren't sure, what the Hell had happened.

New Engine 2's house was nearly completed and personnel were being selected. Jack Stevens was to be assigned Captain and he was picking men to be in the crews. Jack was choosing men that he had worked with at engine 4 and Truck 2.

I heard he was planning to ask me if I wanted to be Lieutenant on "A" shift.

As a courtesy to Captain McRoberts, I asked if he would mind if I asked for the spot.

He said, "You'll never get that house."

Well, so much for being polite. I decided, "I'm going to get that slot."

Jack had told me I could have it, if I wanted it.

A few days later, The District Chief called; I'd be moving to "B" Shift, Engine # 2.

Engine 2

I moved my stuff to 2's, painted a new number on my helmet and met the crew. This was choice duty. A four man house on the campus of the Oregon Health Sciences Center. A brand new building. The kitchen was fully equipped: stove, refrigerator, pots and pans, even a dishwasher. In the past the crew had to chip in and buy everything but the stove. we got a toaster, dishes and silverware. Even a couple a easy chairs for the day room. We did have to chip in for our colored TV, But that was about it.

The kitchen was in the back, on the end of the day room. Large windows over looked the parking lot and the "Game Trail" - A path the Nurses used to walk through the woods to the Veterans Hospital complex.

It was a pretty site. One of the firemen on "B" shift had done some landscaping. Jack, the Captain, ordered flowers and shrubs from the Park Service.

I painted a couple a pictures for the day room. One was 2 feet x 8 feet, a goose with the bright colors of a sunset reflected off the wet sand. The other was small, A cowboy in shades of red. They set off the room and added a masculine touch.

Wess put his table saw and some wood working tools in the basement, giving us a shop where we could build stuff. We had a set of weights. The back lawn was terraced and we made one level into a putting green.

We kept the lawns and the flower beds up. It was a pretty spot.

Parrish and I would jog around the parking lot in the mornings. I'd pump a little iron then take a shower and put on my uniform.

We'd fry up some spuds and eggs for breakfast. And over toast and coffee, catch up on the latest gossip.

We didn't have a lot of fires, Mostly nuisance runs on campus, Smoke scares, false alarms - stuff like that.

We did move up on second Alarms in the lower East side. Where there were warehouses and light manufacturing plants that gave us some good fires.

There was one fire down on the waterfront, a warehouse for chemicals and fertilizer. It was a sheet-metal building with few windows. a thick brown smoke greeted us as we pulled up. There weren't any flames showing. We laid in and were prying open a metal covered door with crowbars. The door was meant to keep people out. There were double locked, reinforced security doors and iron bars on the windows. It took a while to beat our way in. And the Truck crews were having hard time getting anything open for ventilation. The smoke was thick and rolled out into our faces. It burned our throats and set off fits of coughing.

I left Larry on a 1 1/2 fog nozzle. Telling him to stay out of the smoke until someone showed up that knew what kind of chemicals we were facing.

I went to check on the rest of the men, warning them to stay clear of the fumes.

When I came back, I found Larry crouched inside the door spraying water into the smoke, between fits of coughing.

I yelled at him, "GET YOUR ASS OUT OF THERE!"

"What the hell do you think your doing?" I asked."

"The Chief told me to get in. Called me a coward."

"I'M NOT A COWARD."

God he was mad.

I told him, "I don't care who tells you to go in, you don't go, until I tell you to."

I had to drag him out.

He was furious. I was pissed.

I went looking for that SUPER HERO, SMART ASSED, SON of a BITCH of a Chief. I cooled down before I found him.

I figured, I better get on the nozzle with Larry. We'd be going in soon as the smoke cleared out.

It was a long drawn out fire, Lots of smoke, not much we could do except pour on the water. Finally the owner showed up.

He made arrangements for fork-lifts to move the bags of chemicals.

A couple a companies stayed on fire watch, and the rest of us went back to quarters.

We had chipmunks in the woods by the lawn. We called them, "Yeeks."

One of the nurses asked, Why do you call the chipmunks Yeeks?"

Ted told her, "The other day, one of them tried to run across the road and a bus hit him."

He screamed, "YEEK!" and spit a cloud of bread crumbs ten feet in the air."

"That's awful," she exclaimed.

Rog and I decided to build a bridge from the second floor, kitchen window to a fir tree at the edge of the lawn. It would have to span twenty feet or more.

We spent the biggest part of the day stringing wires and cutting little blocks of wood to support the lath roadway. Then Rog and I put up guy wires to hold up the center of the span and keep the bridge from swaying in the wind. A beautiful suspension bridge.

We smeared peanut butter on the tree and put bread crumbs on the end of the bridge in hopes of coaxing the Yeeks up on the bridge.

We thought, "If we can get them to come up on the bridge, we gradually move the bread out a little at a time until we get them to come over to the window."

In less than five minutes, the Yeeks were over the bridge, standing up looking in the window and begging. They would run across the bridge, fill their cheeks with bread, run back down and bury it in the bark dust. Some times they couldn't find where they had buried the bread, or another Yeek had

stolen it. They would hunt all over, then climb back up the tree and cuss everybody out.

They were fun to watch, and we passed a lot of time playing with them.

The Yeek were Damn Good Nurse Bait, too.

Commissioner Connie McCready had some time to kill before a meeting at the Medical School. So she stopped off at Engine 2.

We gave her a cup of coffee and told her Yeek stories. She thought they were cute, and the bridge was really neat.

She hung around for an hour or so. Rodger and Ed made a fuss over her, bringing her coffee and telling her jokes. She was a Good Old Gal.

Connie took off her shoes, smoked a cigarette and seemed to enjoy herself.

When it came time for her to leave, Ed helped her on with her jacket, and Roger brushed off the shoulders, back and front of her coat. She giggled like a school girl.

A few days later, The Chief stopped by the engine house, probably checking up to see if we were holding morning drill. We were supposed to drill at 10 am every morning, but we couldn't always work it in.

We could see the Chiefs car when he turned the corner, giving us time to break out the books and look busy.

We drilled, but what difference did it make if we held the drill at 10:15 - 10:05, or skipped a day?

How some ever. He was looking for something. He spotted the Yeek Bridge.

“Who authorized the drilling of holes in the wall to support that?”

“Chief,” I replied, “Connie likes it.”

“Oh, OH! That's okay. I was just wondering who built it.”

“Sure.”

The Chiefs, It seemed to us, spent a lot of time playing detective.

Chief Brink stopped by one day.

He asked, "Lieutenant, where is Lowell Lane?"

I thought, "You Ass."

Lowell Lane is a short, dead-end, gravel road, off Terwilliger.

"It's down on Terwilliger! You saw it when you turned onto 11th. drive."

"Don't play games! I know my district."

"Oh! No, I just wondered."

"Bullshit!" I thought, "Like this is your job?"

When there were big fires needing extra man power, a Third Alarm was called. More companies would be sent to the fire, and the Off Shift, men at home, would be called to duty as relief crews.

A grain elevator was burning on the lower East side. A Third was called, and I went to the engine house, got my Turn-outs and reported to the fire scene. Bert, Joe Gray, and I were assigned to take a 1 1/2 inch line up into the conveyer tunnel. This tunnel had a sheet metal roof. Wooden sides and a floor enclosed the conveyer belt that carried the grain from the storage bins out over the docks where the grain could be loaded into ships. It was nearly 100 feet in the air. Bert, Joe and I were told to take a fog nozzle in and knock down any spot fires we found.

It was smoky, but no heat, Not much sign of flames. For some reason, a hunch, something stopped me. I picked up a pike pole and tested the floor as we went out into the tunnel. We had gone a few yards, 25 - 30 feet maybe. I was hitting the floor good solid thumps when a section of flooring, some sort of hatch fell out and dropped the 100 feet to the dock below.

I always wondered, "What made me check the floor?"

I had never done it before, or since.

We were tapped out late at night, Oh maybe midnight, one O'clock in the morning. It was an address off Sunset drive. I was checking the map.

Wess, the driver said, "I know where it is . I was to a party on that street last weekend."

The address was way out on the edge of our district. It was dark, it was raining, and there aren't that many street signs.

Wess insisted, "Don't worry. I know where the street is,"

About that time the Chief's Car went by, Heading in the other direction.

I thought, "I should warn him he's going wrong."

"No, I don't want to put that over the radio."

We pulled up beside a hydrant, I told the crew, "stand-by."

Wess said, "It's a narrow street. We won't be able to turn around if we go in there."

I reported our position by radio, and waited for orders.

It was a False Alarm, Smoke Scare, something. The Recall came in and we returned to quarters.

Next on-duty shift, The Chief stopped at the engine house and asked if I had known the location of that fire. Implying, I thought, "We had Gone Wrong."

It had been raining. The roadway was dark, and we had ground along at 15 or 20 miles per hour. Apparently someone had squawked about how long it took before the first engine arrived.

Sure! Dump on an engine company.

I wanted to say, "You were the one who didn't know where you were going."

I answered, "Yes I knew the location. I never leave the engine house without checking the Map."

One of the worst - most costly fires was Zidell Shipyard.

It was a hot summer day - August, I think, 80 degrees with twenty to twenty five mile an hour East wind blowing.

A welding torch, probably, set fire to the oil soaked planking. The workmen tried to put the fire out with fire-extinguishers, not knowing the fire was burning in the beams below. The East wind drove the heat and flames under the docks spreading the fire.

By the time they realized, "It was too late, IT WAS TOO LATE!"

An alarm was turned in, but the fire already had a ten or fifteen minute start.

The Fire Boat was ten minutes away. By the time they arrived the piling under the docks was fully involved, and the fire was being driven under the ship-ways and was spreading to the huge metal-clad buildings.

Engine 10, the first In Company, laid in and set up a 2 1/2 inch fog nozzle in one of the buildings. The fire had spread to the rafters nearly 100 feet over their heads. They couldn't reach the flames. A ball of fire chased them back out.

The wind whipped through the flames into their faces.

The fire rolled over them. The fire spread to other buildings.

The sparks and embers were carried up and onto the hills, setting brush and grass fires.

Nobody is sure what happened next.

Greater Alarms were called, Engines rolled in. The fire was beyond control. The Fire Boat swept it's main turret over and under the docks. The sheet-metal cover protected the fire, and the force of the stream pushed air that fed the fire under the docks.

This was a God DAMN inferno! Sheets of burning plywood were carried a mile or more. Grass and brush fires spotted the west hills. Engines sent to fight the grass and brush fires, were diverted to save homes.

Rigs with Boosters were told to patrol and do whatever they could. "Save houses if you can."

Portland had dispatched all their fire equipment. Fire Crews and Rigs were coming from neighboring town: Beaverton, Tigard, Oswego, Gresham and as far away as Hillsboro and Hood river. Some twenty fire rigs moved into Portland.

We were out of rigs, People were advised to wet their roofs down with a garden hose.

There were no Fire engines available.

The Fire Boats were sweeping the docks with their Four inch nozzles. Land companies were setting up portable Turrets, Brush fires were burning out of control and showering sparks a mile or more up into the west hills. We had dozens of houses on fire. The patrolling fire rigs did what ever they could; hit a

brush fire, fill their tanks, drive along the face of the fires and attack the next hot spot.

The main fire in Zidell's Ship Ways; We couldn't even slow that son of a bitch down, she burned until there wasn't anymore to burn.

Two or three fire engines burned up. A Chief's car was destroyed, far as I know nobody was killed. It was one tough "Son of a Bitch!"

S.W. Hall was another near "Fire Storm." An apartment house was on fire and the fire was spreading to the houses up Hall street - A "Greater Alarm" was called: Engine 2 was assigned to come in from the upper side. There were no hydrants available; We emptied our booster on the last house on fire, after wetting down the next in line.

Larry Miles, had been a hoseman at Engine 15, he remembered where a hydrant was; hopefully it was close enough. 2's laid-in 1200 feet of 2 1/2 inch hose. Lieutenant Mile's rig, a company from North Portland, laid-in their 1200 feet.

By using all our 1 1/2 hose we could get between the two houses, cooling down the fire, and wetting down the side of the next house.

We were able to keep the fire from spreading. The fires on West Hall burned down, and we could keep them under control with boosters.

Mostly the house fires burned themselves out.

During the 60's, Vietnam War Protests, Long hairs, all that.

Someone thought, "The Fire Department needs a Dress Code." - What they meant was, NO LONG HAIR.

Ed Johann has always been different, body builder, boxer, mountain climber, professional wrestler, and wore his hair longer than most firemen.

The Chief of District 2 informed Ed, he would have to get a more conservative haircut.

“But Chief, the regulations state: the hair shall not cover the ears or extend below the collar. It doesn’t.”

Well, it’s supposed to be neatly trimmed.”

“My hair is neatly trimmed.”

“Well frankly, you are a disgrace to the department.”

“I’ve worn my hair like this for the past twenty years. How is it that suddenly, I AM A DISGRACE?”

“Well, the public prefers the All American Look.”

Poor choice of words.”

Larry asked, “Like this Chief?”

The Sport Page had an article, “All American Boy sets new record.” The accompanying photo, showed a young man crossing the finish line, well ahead of the competition, his shoulder length hair fanning out behind him.

The Chief threatened Ed with a transfer.

Ed went and got his Turn-outs. Set them on the floor in front of the Chief and asked, “Where do you want me to go?”

Ed wasn’t transferred.

We were given credit for some decisions. During cold weather, the Fire Alarm Operator would call Engine 2 and ask the condition of the roads up, on the West hills. If we were chained up, the West side was ordered to put on their chains.

Then there was the time we got a call on the front phone. The Chief of District 2 (our district) said, “Go out of service and proceed to the Medical School. The bomb squad is on the way from The National Guard Armory.”

“Take care of it. And stay off the radio! If the Media shows up, don’t answer any questions. Play Dumb.”

“Call me on the back Phone here at 4’s if you need anything.

The Medical School didn’t want publicity. Not too long ago, the Med School had a jumper. He was on the 12 th. floor balcony. A TV Station sent it’s helicopter. It hovered a few feet in front of the patient filming Close-Ups.

HE JUMPED!

They didn’t want a repeat; I don’t blame them.

We moved in and blocked off the area.

A Doctor showed up waving his arms and shouting, “This is my parking space!”

Demanding to know what was going on.

I said, “Look! There are fire engines, police cars and that’s The Bomb Squad. You aren’t coming in here.”

“But , that’s my parking spot!”

“SO?”

Once again it gets Hairy; not a Chief in sight, “If we screw up, they’ll DUMP on us.”

It was an over-reaction. No bomb, no nothing!

We had some good fires. Our fire district, in the West hills, had limited access. The roads were narrow and winding.

Addresses were confusing to say the least. There were dead ends, and streets would change names for no reason, Then turn a corner and go back to the original name. Our maps weren’t accurate.

We could plan on being on our own for the first five minutes or more. The next in company was Engine 4 on S.W. 5th. - a couple a miles away. We could hear them coming as they ground up the hill. Now and then we would wind up on different side of a canyon with dead-end streets blocking the way. Often it was a matter of a block or so, as the crow flies, but it would be a mile or more to circle around and come in on the right side.

Tenth Street was like that. It dead ended off of Marquam Drive. Eight Ave. was a quarter of a mile long, turned the corner and was renamed Tenth. There was another Tenth Street off Marquam Hill drive.

We called them “Upper Tenth and Lower Tenth.” In an attempt to keep track of which house numbers were on which street.

We got a call late one rainy night. It wasn’t clear which street the house number was actually on. I guessed Lower Tenth. There weren’t any hydrants back in there. We took the hydrant on Marquam and laid in all our hose. A back-up company would have to pump to us. Once committed we couldn’t turn around. When we turned the corner I could see the flames, and knew the house fronted on Upper Tenth.

I radioed directions to the fire and warned the in-coming companies, "Your hydrant is buried in the bushes on the corner of Marquam and 10th."

By pulling up into a driveway, we were able to reach the fire with the booster hose. dragging it across an empty lot and into a daylight basement, We were able to get at the fire. Actually it worked out good. The fire was in the lower level. Ted and I, hit her. The steam rolled up an open stairway and smothered the fire on the upper floor. We were lucky. We wouldn't of had enough water to fight the fire had it spread to the upper floors.

It would of been, "One Tough Son of a Bitch."

For the hosemen working their way down the stairs into the smoke and flames, had the basement continued to burn.

At Engine 2 we did a lot of public service stuff. We were in the Portland Fire Department, but we were stationed on the U of O Health Science Center's campus. We did stuff other companies probably wouldn't of done.

A woman ran over to the engine house nearly hysterical, saying her children, ages 4 and 6, were lost in the woods. Across the road there were several hundred acres of forest land in the undeveloped part of the U of O Campus.

I called the Alarm Office and told them, "Put us out of service. Some little kids are missing, and we were going to help look for them."

We went into the brush. I tried to organize sweeps, but the other volunteers, mostly teenagers and house wives, were crashing through the underbrush nearly as hysterical as the mother. I was concerned about them getting lost or injured.

We positioned ourselves, two on each end of the search line, keeping the searchers between us. I figured, the kids probably know the woods and will come back out, but we could wind up with two or three middle-aged, over-weight housewives lost.

It was getting dark, about 5:30 - 6 o'clock before the kids showed up, and everybody got out of the woods.

The kid's dad was a butcher. He sent over four huge "T Bone" steaks for our supper.

Not too bad!

Another time, a Special Education Buss, one of those half size busses, went into the ditch. It was just across the street. We ran over to see what could be done. The bus was in the ditch resting on its' undercarriage. We couldn't push it out. I didn't think we should try to pull it out with the fire engine, but something needed doing. I was about to call the Fire Alarm Operator and ask if he could dispatch the Training Company. That would give us fifteen to twenty bodies. With their help we could pick that sucker up and set it back on the road.

Fortunately a jeep with a winch pulled up about that time and pulled the bus out.

People on campus thought we were there to serve them, to start their cars with dead batteries, giving directions, and anything else that needed doing. We visited the various buildings and became familiar with the people in charge. They could be, and were helpful.

As long as we got good reports from the Medical School, the Fire Commissioner was happy, and so was the Fire Department.

Engine 2 was a requirement. An on campus Fire Station was a precondition for Federal Funding for the planned expansion of the Marquam Hill Medical School complex.

If was great! If we wanted flowers or shrubs, a phone call to the park service, and the next day they were delivered with a crew to plant them. We'd give the men coffee and tell them, "Take a break, we'll plant the stuff."

Painters or carpenters, same thing. We got the house repainted, the Captain chose the colors.

Repairs? No problem.

The District Chief said, "God I've been trying to get a new coat of paint for Engine 4 for five years."

"Well Chief," we replied, "You know how it is, Connie likes us."

Every year, the Fire Department enters floats in the Rose Festival Parade.

They use red roses to decorate. Usually an old fire rig is blanketed with thousands and thousands of red roses.

They're scrounging red roses everywhere they can think of. Fire crews are sent out to beg for roses in their neighborhoods. We hated going up to doors, and asking if we could pick their God Damn roses.

I figured, "There are a ton of roses up at the zoo."

The fence around the tennis courts are covered with Red Roses.

Engine 2 loaded a bunch of boxes on the fire engine, brought knives and pruning shears, and headed out.

We dropped down town, cut across on 18th. and entered the park from Washington St.

There were a "Zillion" cars heading for the Rose Garden. We broke into a string, and were putting along 5 or 10 miles per hour. At the first switch-back, I looked ahead. There was the Mayor, the Rose Festival Queen, Her Court, motor cycle cops, and everybody that was anybody. We were right in the middle of it.

I told Wess, "Pull off! Pull into that street."

"It's dead end."

I don't give a Shit! Pull in."

If we had been 5 minutes earlier, they would of caught us stripping roses off the fence.

TV cameras, the Police Chief, Fire Chief, probably the Governor, and God knows who else!

We turned around in a driveway, broke through the line of traffic and got the Hell out of there!

In the 60's, people who had TB were still being isolated. The TB Hospital was a couple a hundred yards down the road from Engine 2. It housed mostly "Winos" and "Derelicts."

There was this young woman in her early twenties. She had tested positive and was sentenced to six months confinement and treatment.

This was like being in jail. She didn't have any choice.

Jack got to talking to her. He invited her to drop by the engine house. She had a cup she drank coffee from, and we'd boil it.

The Nurses told us there wasn't any danger unless we had close physical contact. (Sex I guess.)

She was a cute kid. It really helped her through a very tough time.

We never heard from her.

There must of been more to that story.

Roger was shopping. He could stretch two pounds of hamburger and a sack of spuds into two hours, easy!

Wess had walked over to the canteen in the Vets Hospital.

They sold magazines, candy bars, Cokes, stuff that patents and firemen might want.

That left George and me.

The Bell hit.

"Okay," I said to George, "You're driving, Let's go."

"Where's Wess?"

"He's over at the Vet's."

We drove over to the Veteran's Hospital Complex. George pulled up inside the gate. I tapped the siren as he backed into a place where we could turn around.

No Wess!

I hit the siren again. A little longer and a lot louder.

Still no sign of Wess!

I knew the down town companies wouldn't be arriving for three to five minutes. It had been a minute or more.

I said, "Okay George, lets go."

"Just the two of us?"

"Yeah! just the two of us."

He hit the starter. It didn't start.

I was pumping the siren. Wess was nowhere in sight.

George was shaking like a leaf. Finally she caught.

Before we could pull out, Wess came huffing and puffing into view.

George breathed a sigh of relief and climbed on the back step.

Wess drove to the front of the Intensive Care Unit.

We beat the down town companies by seconds.

But we were First In.

No squawks. No letters.

Nobody knew the difference.

Afterwards, George said, “God I was nervous, weren’t you worried?”

“No, I knew could handle it.”

“Yeah! Sure.”

But at the time, I was thinking, “What kind of an excuse can I come up with, this time?”

I figure, “I get the money, I’ll take the blame.”

1964: The Presidential Elections. The Hippy Protests.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention would be held in Portland, Oregon.

City, County, and State Police were mobilizing.

A Protest March was planned.

The Fire Department knew they would be involved.

(I don’t think they had a clue.)

The Police Department had a radio frequency assigned. Plain clothed Officers were assigned to monitor the assembly sites.

Masking tape would cover their windows, and basement garages would be blocked off, so that flammable liquids couldn’t torch the building.

The Fire Department’s “Oh! I think it will probably be all right.” Didn’t instill a whole lot of confidence.

Our training, Hah!

Engine 19, and Engine 2 would move up and support Engine 4, on the route of the Protest March.

Men, from the Fire Marshals Office would be paid overtime to baby sit our fire houses.

Engine 2 would go to engine 4 and do something.

When I asked, “Who will be in charge?”

The Chief said, “Well you, I guess.”

When I asked, “Who gives the orders? The Police, A Chief, Who?”

“Well we’ll see.”

“Do we take fire calls?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Probably the alarm Office will let you know.”

I figured, “I’ll go with the Cops.”

“These Ass Holes have no idea what’s going to happen.”

Chief Brink held a drill. The assistant Chief watched. Engine 19 came down and joined Engine 2 in a simulated Riot situation. We laid In, not knowing Engine 10 had been instructed to interrupt and harass us. It was chaos, They uncoupled hoses, threw stuff at us, and generally disrupted things. We didn’t know what the hell was going on. Engine 10’s crew were firemen. The Chiefs laughed.

A joke. No plan, no discussion, no evaluation, nothing.

“I’m not going to stick my neck out. I can’t count on these Pricks!”

Come the big day. There were 10,000 Legionaires, give or take a thousand. The Protest Marchers were gathering in Duniway Park

The park was ten or twelve blocks South of Engine 4’s house, where Sixth street dead ends.

I was in charge. I had a crew of 12 firefighters. We would do something when somebody told us to do it.

Conventional wisdom had decreed: remove anything that can be used as a weapon, all personnel should be in or on top of the rig, nobody hanging on the outside. Don’t go in until the area is secured.

There were Hippies, like thousands of them. Rumors were flying. The police had observers in buildings overlooking the park.

We heard, “They are filling bottles, could be gasoline. If so, be ready for Fire Bombs.”

We waited.

The chants, “Hump Humpries!”

“LBJ, How many babies did you kill today?”

They came down Broadway.

We got a call from down town, “Where is the Fire department Stand Pipe on the Equitable Building?”

“Hell, I don’t know.”

I think, “Why don’t they ask the Chief? He’s at the Central station.”

BOY! This doesn't look too good.”
I look around; there's not a Chief in sight.

The Police Department has a plan.
“Walk those sons a bitches.”
“Tire them out.”

Four Motor Cycle Officers escorted the protesters. They led them down Sixth, up Columbia to Eighteenth, north to Everett, South on Broadway.

The protesters had marched, screamed, and drag Assed two miles.

By the time they got to the Hilton Hotel on S.W. 5th. they had lost half of the marchers and two thirds of their enthusiasm.

Bob, my brother-in-law, told me various police agencies had monitored car loads of agitators armed with both guns and explosives. They would be picked up and held for seventy-two hours without charges.

By then the Veterans Convention would be over and hopefully, so would the protests with their threat of violence.

I would be sleeping downstairs next to the watch-room.

I turned off the automatic door openers and informed the crew, “We'll Turn Out, but the doors will remain closed, and the rigs won't move until we have detailed and specific orders.”

Hopefully we would have a police escort, and we would move as a unit.

The night passed without incidence.

This was the year the Rainbow Family started. McIver Park, on the Clackamas River was designated: Police free, Counter Cultural Friendly.

“A Free Thinking Environment.”

Ten to twenty thousand naked, half naked, young and not so young, camped, squirmed, listened to Rock Bands, splashed in the river, and shared their dissolution with “The System.”

“The Government.”

“The war,” and stuff in general.

I think, “The big attraction was naked women, music, wine, and unrestricted access to Pot.”

It was quite a show.

Hell! I went.

I was curious. There were people camped everywhere.

The Medical School sent a team. They set up a First Aide Station, even had a helicopter for Medi-vac.

Kitchens served vegetarian meals; green stuff, and vomit colored boiled barley.

They laughed at us. We laughed at them.

Some of us got mad.

Some of them OVER-DOSED.

a couple a babies were born. Oregon made the National News.

I don't know if it was Good or Bad. There was: no clash, no damage, and the jails weren't full.

The Rainbow Family, that's what they called them selves, have gathered, camped out, shacked-up, and wallowed in the mud of a different State every year since.

I went to one in Northern California, twenty years after McIver. There were some young people there. but more were sagging, hanging on, middle-aged, "I still remember the good old days" types.

"Old, and semi-old dreamers."

But then, why was I there?

Twenty years - Twenty Years?

God! It doesn't seem possible.

Portland had Race Riots. Summer of 1967. Nothing like Watts, or La. we had SNIPERS, FIRE BOMBS, and bricks were thrown at fire men when they tried to put out fires.

The crew of Engine 2 was detailed into the Riot Area.

I lucked out. I worked a shift at engine 5, and another at engine 8; It was on the edge of the Riot Zone.

I didn't know what the hell was going on. We had been called to a house fire. The crew laid-in and knocked the fire down, I walked around the back of the building to see if everything was "OK." I just barely turned the corner when a fireman came after me. "You don't go anywhere by your self. They'll hit you with a GOD DAMN brick!"

It was then I realized, this is Serious.”

By the next shift - B shift, things were out of hand. There was looting and Fire Bombs. The Police Department put four men with shotguns, in each squad car. Four cars, 16 men with 16 shotguns set up a perimeter. The Fire Engines went in, used big lines, knocked down the fire and got the hell out.

There were several buildings bombed and looted.

No firemen shot, a few were hit with rocks and bottles. It only lasted a few days, Pursley and Jack Stevens from engine 2 had Riot Duty. I missed most of it.

Things happen fast. B. P. Johns had a vacuum system that collected saw dust from the machines in it's wood working shops, carried it through over head tubes to a central collection hopper. Friction or static electricity would ignite the dust, the burning sparks moved through the system and into the hopper. This happened every few weeks.

Engine 10's crew got to where they could recognize the smell, and would have a pretty good idea where and what the fire was.

The Smoke Detectors turned in an alarm.

10's rolled and found smoke coming from the tower that housed the hopper.

Charlie Smith and 10's Lieutenant took a line up the ladder and onto the catwalk leading to the hopper. Spencer, the lieutenant on engine 5, climbed up to see if 10's would need another line laid in.

There was a lot of smoke, and some hot spots where the saw-dust was smoldering. Nobody remembers exactly what happened next. A stream of water was directed into a spot of burning dust, the sparks drifted down, dancing like sparklers as they flared up.

Then a puff of smoke, Whoomp.”

The dust ignited, the building shook.

BLAM! She blew! A dust explosion.

Fire was everywhere! There was glow, a red glow, like the air was burning.

A walkway led to the roof. Flames swirled around. Burning dust cascaded over them as Charlie and the officer of Engine 10 looked for a way out. They groped their way, hands serving as eyes. A couple of steps led up to the doorway. The man in front, the Officer, was having trouble. Charlie couldn't breathe. He picked the Officer up and threw him through the opening. Stumbling out of the fire, Charlie gasped for breath. The skin on his hands hanging in ribbons.

Lieutenant Spencer turned the wrong way. A gulp of hot air seared his throat and lungs. He fell to his death.

I was called in to work the rest of the shift as officer of Engine 10. John Guthrie filled in for Lt. Spencer on Engine 5.

Engine 10 got another call to B. P. Johns that night. Smoke in the saw-dust hopper activated the alarm system.

There was no way I was going to send the crew up the ladder to check out the dust hopper.

"Let the Son of a Bitch burn."

We'd stay there all night, and fight it from the ground if necessary. I wouldn't ask them to go up there again.

They said, "Aw Shit, we'll go."

I took one of the hosemen with me, and we checked the hopper.

"God! I sure was glad there wasn't any sign of fire."

Charlie had been burned real bad; spent a month or more in the hospital, but he never lost his sense of humor.

He laughs, as he tells about his injuries. How the hospital staff took care of him. The nurses were great, treated him like a hero. The Doctors, the pain, the shots, skin grafts.

In the Emergency Room, the doctor was checking Charlie's head, mumbling, "I don't understand it."

Charlie says, "What's the matter Doc? I didn't hurt my head."

"But he exclaimed, "Your hair is all burnt off, but the skin isn't burned."

"Aw hell, He answered, I don't have a hair on my body, I lost it all years ago."

Seems, Old Charlie's hair started falling out. He went to see the Doc. He checked Charlie out and decided, "You have Leukemia. You have maybe six weeks to live."

Charlie wrote a Will, got his affairs in order, explained as best he could to his kids and said "Good-bye" to his friends.

After a couple a months he called up the Doc and said, "This is Charles Smith, What should I do now?"

"Mister Smith, what do you mean?"

"You said I'd be dead in six weeks."

"Time's Up!"

"And I ain't dead."

"You better come into the office."

They couldn't find anything. His hair never grew back. Out side of that he felt fine.

No sign of the Leukemia.

Maybe that's why Charlie treated life as a joke.

The doctors in the Burn Ward had been working with Charlie: skin grafts, physical therapy, stuff like that, trying to regain the use of his hands.

During one of the sessions, the doctor was coaching, Charlie was flexing his fingers to stretch the tendons. He asked, "Doctor, do you think I'll be able to play the violin?"

"Oh. I think so."

"Good! I've always wanted to play, but never could before."

Bert and McEnany Got to thinking, "God! it must be terrible to be stuck in the hospital with out any beer."

They decided that wasn't fair. They'd take him some.

Well they got some beer for Charlie and several bottles for themselves.

Charlie told about it later. Bert thought they better hide the beer. Fred got a shopping bag, and they carefully slid the bottles inside.

They were feeling no pain; in fact they were SMASHED. They were having a little trouble getting through the elevator doors. Charlie could hear them giggling and Shushing one

another as they tip-toed down the hall. The bottles Clinked and Clanked whenever they bumped into the wall or stumbled.

The Sister Superior was waiting for them when they arrived.

“Do you have beer for Mr. Smith?”

“Well yes. We don’t want him to get in any trouble! But we thought he might like a bottle.”

“Seems as if you have more than one bottle. You can put it in the refrigerator, in the Nurses Lounge.

In fact, we can order beer and wine if Mr Smith wants it.”

Trade time privileges ... Firemen are allowed to work for one another. A few hours or a full shift. But the man who owes the time is required to pay equal hours back whenever asked. It was a privilege we enjoyed, And didn’t want anybody messing it up.

Larry and Roger traded a lot. They would take off a full shift, come to work late, sleep over, Or just take off for a coupe a hours. They kept track of the time. I didn’t worry about it.

Roger was going somewhere, Larry had promised to work for him from 5 o’clock on. Rog was eager to get going. When he saw Larry turn into the parking lot, he ran down stairs, jumped in his car, waved “Good-bye” and drove off.

Larry came up stairs. He had been drinking. Not some, a lot! Rog was gone. I couldn’t just look the other way.

I told Larry, “Go to bed. If we have a run, you were on the toilet. You couldn’t make the rig.”

“Don’t ever put me in this spot again!”

Now was the time to be a “Little bit Chicken-Shit.”

I had to do something.

“Roger, you are responsible for the condition of the man who relieves you.

You lose trade Time for Three weeks.”

Larry, You have risked Trade Time Privileges. you will not be allowed to Trade Time on “A” Shift for three months.”

George said, “That’s not fair. I trade with Larry. I didn’t do anything.”

Rog says, “Just leave it alone.”

It was good to know the men supported my decision.

It wasn’t long after the B. P. Johns fire that John Guthrie was injured.

An inch-and-a-half nozzle was whipping out of control, It had gotten away from someone. A fireman yelled, men ducked and ran. Ten or twelve feet of hose swung this way and that. Jumping and bucking, it knocked people down. The pound and a half nozzle struck Guthrie’s helmet shattering it and crushing John’s skull.

He lived, but would never recover enough to return to work.

The department held Annual Inspections. We would spend a couple a weeks cleaning and polishing. Then on the big day the crew would put on their dress blues. The District Chief would walk through the house and look things over.

Engine 2 was new and we kept the house neat and clean, but the Chiefs seemed to feel, it’s good for discipline, to find something.

This Chief, an Army Reserve Officer, stopped in front of the Turn-outs. The helmets were on a shelf, the coats, on hangers hung from a pole. He pointed out, “The helmets weren’t an equal distance apart.”

Then he re-arranged them to a uniform inch and a half spacing.

He asked, “There, doesn’t that look better?”

Well, he asked.

“No” I replied, “It doesn’t.”

“If you want the helmets one and a half inches apart, say so.”

“I’m the God Damn Artist! Don’t tell me what looks the best.”

He gulped and snorted.

I wanted to add, “This ain’t the God Damn Army.”

This guy had turned into a “Real Prick.”

Hell! I'd worked with him at 15's.

I faked reports. Covered up short-comings. Fed The Office the numbers they needed, and kept the Chiefs "Off our Asses."

Now he's measuring the distance between helmets?

Engine 2 had Moved Up on a Second Alarm. (When there is a Big Fire, companies are assigned to fill-in every other space.)

So there's no big holes in the fire coverage anywhere in the city.

That put us on the East side of town.

The bell hit. We went in on the First Alarm, over in North Portland. A house was going.

We had taken a hydrant and were starting to Lay-in.

I heard a yell. Roger and George were running up the street. I followed. Two Firemen were on the ground.

A 2 1/2 inch hose, water spraying from it, was whipping back and forth.

Roger and George never hesitated. They dove on the hose line, averting their faces from the thrashing hose butt.

It was over in seconds. A hose clamp shut off the water. Rog and George picked "Their Sorry Asses" up out of the water and checked themselves over for injuries.

I breathed a sigh of relief.

The fire was put out and Engine #2 went back to quarters.

I got to thinking, "Those Bastards! they knew what they were getting into. Skinned elbows, water gutter deep, and that hose butt could Kill."

We all remember John Guthrie: and how his skull had been crushed.

These guys deserve some recognition.

I wrote a letter of Commendation.

The Chief notified them.

They were embarrassed.

They said, "Screw it, It's no big deal."

But it was!

Anyway, I wrote the letter.

Like the one, I should off written for Ken Savage, But didn't.

“C” shift had a late night fire, a house, smokers carelessness probably.

Jack Stevens (Our Captain) was working an extra shift.

When I came on duty, he wasn't up yet. He never was one to jump out of bed and be in a hurry to head home.

The crew said, “They'd had a late fire, probably he was sleeping in.”

By eight thirty, we were beginning to wonder what was wrong.

There were no sounds from his room.

The door was locked.

Something was wrong.

Really Wrong!

Jack's Wife called, “Has he left for home yet?”

I didn't want to open that door.

Parrish said, he could pick the lock.

I went in. Jack was dead.

One hand gripped the head of the bed.

I couldn't see any wounds.

I thought, “It has to be suicide.”

God! He was young. Only 43. He jogged, pumped a little iron, and played golf.

He wasn't over-weight.

It just didn't make any sense.

He was three years younger than I was.

His wife was calling.

His dad wanted to know “What the hell going on?”

We were being evasive.

I called for the District Chief and the first Aid Car.

I wanted help!

Somebody, anybody, something!

Parrish called Roger Cawood and John Pickle: they said they would be right down.

I called for a Coroner.

I told Jacks Father, “There has been an accident, and the doctor is with Jack now.”

He didn't buy it.
He asked, "Is he dead?"
"It looks like it."
"You better prepare his wife."
"What happened?" He asked.
"We don't know, but it appears to be a heart attack."

The family, the District Chief and the Assistant Chief arrived about the same time.

Roger and Parish consoled the family.
The First Aid Car took the body.
The Big Chief call to offer condolences.
What ever.
I finally hung up on him.
"Chief were busy. I have to go now."
The other two Chiefs stood in the way.
I hinted, they go into the kitchen.
Stress was building.
I Was afraid I was losing it.

Someone put the company out of service, and requested a new mattress for the bed - My bed.

Rog was a God sent. He talked to the family, and helped me sort through Jack's belongings.

One of the Chiefs had the presence of mind to suggest we make sure there was nothing that could embarrass Jack's memory.

Fahey was appointed Captain in Jacks place; that took less than twenty minutes.

That's all we're worth. Twenty God Damn minutes!

It was the damnedest thing! A box came in. It was down on the lower Westside, just off Macadam Ave. I went into the Watch Room to write down the address.

Wess took the front seat.

Roger, and the kid filling in for Parrish, were in the kitchen. They ran for the rig.

I pulled the assignment card and was writing down the address, When the Operator said, "Hold up Engine two."

I looked at the tape in disbelief.

The engine was roaring.

Roger Yelled to Wess, "Shut her down. I guess we don't go."

The crew drifted into the watch room, as puzzled as I was.

I Checked Back. (Lifted the phone to light a light in the Alarm Office, indicating we had received the message.)

Well it turned out, there was a fire, and the Chief wanted a letter stating, "How come we missed it, and where everybody was when the alarm came in."

The next morning I went to the alarm Office and listened to the playback of the Alarm. It was loud and clear, "Hold-up Boat Two."

The Operator offered to introduce a little static on the tape.

I said, "No, that would be worse, If the message wasn't clear."

I wrote a letter stating, "The only explanation I could offer was that the engine caught just in time to blank out the word "Boat" and our subconscious had supplied the word "Engine."

I also stated, "When we Checked-back, (lifted the phone), We sent the same signal as the tattle-tale, (A switch, that activates when the fire rigs rolls across it, on the way out the door,)

The Operators checked the Tattle-tale warning lights to confirm that all the rigs assigned to the alarms have left their houses.

The District Chief questioned the crew. They confirmed what I had said.

He had never heard anything like it before.

He asked, "Why didn't you question the Operator?"

"Chief, We don't question the Operator. If they say go. We go. If they say hold up. We don't go."

"Yeah, you're right."

I still don't know if he believed me.

It was another saw dust fire on N. E. Columbia Blvd. Crews had been working on it all day. There were spot fires under

ground that couldn't be put out, but would flare up and shower sparks into the dry grass and brush.

It was necessary to have watch during the night. Engine 2 was assigned to the midnight shift. We took a thermos of coffee, a portable radio, and extra clothes. Wess brought his car so we'd have a comfortable place to sit, maybe grab a few minutes sleep. It would be a long night.

Long about a quarter to eight, we started listening to the radio for orders to return to quarters, Or at least some word as to when we would be relieved.

Finally, I got on the radio and asked if a relief crew was on the way.

The Operator asked, "Engine Two, what is your location?"

SWELL!

I told him we were "A Shift" and had been on fire watch since midnight.

"Stand by Engine 2."

Then I heard Jim Klum, "Return to quarters Engine 2."

Jim was just a Captain. This fire was in his district, and his company was on the way.

The (On-coming Chief of District #3) came on the air, "Engine 2, you may return to quarters."

They had forgotten all about us!

Seems, the "On duty Chief" had been relieved early, and didn't pass the word to the On-coming Chief.

Well The Union heard about it. There was a letter to the Assistant Chief. Apparently, the Chief involved was called to explain what had happened.

This didn't set too well.

I didn't know anything about the damn letter. It wasn't long until he got a chance to register his feelings.

There was a Greater Alarm. Engine 2 moved up, then on the Third went to the fire.

It was a lumber yard on the lower East side. Stacks of lumber, fifteen to twenty feet high, were burning. We were assigned to a section.

"Wet em down, and don't let the fire spread."

We laid in 600 feet of 2 1/2 inch hose, “Wyed” the line and connected some 1 1/2 with a fog nozzle.

All we were going to do was spray a little water.

The Third Alarm call-men (Off duty firemen called back to supply relief crews) were arriving and setting up hoses.

C-3 “A” shift showed up. “What are you doing with that piddle-de-assed inch and a half line?”

We were shut down; The “Wye” was closed. We weren’t getting any water.

He informed me, “You’ll stay here all night, don’t leave until I authorize you to.”

The Chief of District 4 said, “Take a break, get some coffee.”

I told him, “C-3” said we weren’t to take a break until he okayed it.

“Screw Him! This is my fire. Go get some coffee.”

“Okay.”

It was 2 o’clock in the morning, we weren’t doing anything. The crews were standing around drinking coffee. I saw c-3. He was pissed. I ignored him. This fire was “No big deal.”

Well it turned out I was wrong.

It was a big deal, to him!

Next shift, Chief Brink and C-3 “A” Shift showed up at Engine 2

“We just want to find out what happened. No, hard feelings, we’re just curious, we don’t want any misunderstandings.”

YEAH! right.

C-3 said, “You had a inch and a half line on that fire.”

I told em, “We were laid in, a fork-lift ran over the Wye. We lost our water. I went to check on it.” I thought the word “Misunderstanding” would give us both cover.

He said, “You wrote a letter.”

“Chief, did you read that letter?”

“No, but your name was in it.”

“I didn’t write that letter, I didn’t sign it. My signature wasn’t on it.”

“I think it would be a good idea to read any letters before punishing a crew for what you think the Officer may have done.”

I knew he would get me.

I didn't give a “Shit.”

But to punish the crew?”

I told Brink, “Were not even talking about the same fire.”

One of my last fires.

Engine 2 had moved up on a Greater Alarm. A six story building down town was going, fire had spread to the upper floors. Crews were fighting it room by room, floor by floor.

An Aerial Ladder was extended to the roof, crews had gone up and were working their way down the stairs in an attempt to cut the fire off and stop it's spread.

2's crew was assigned to take a 2 1/2 inch line up the ladder and onto the roof.

The hose was stretched out on the sidewalk, and men spaced every 35 or 40 feet. We would place a loop of hose over our shoulder and take it up the aerial ladder. With our Turnouts and Scott Air Paks we would be carrying close to 100 pounds.

The sixth floor, 75 to 80 feet straight up, or damn near straight up.

I was second or third in the line. As soon as you had climbed the twenty feet necessary to lift your loop of hose off the ground, the full weight hung on one shoulder.

I had climbed half way up. The hose slipped off my shoulder. I would lift with my arm, then step up one rung.

I was completely exhausted and gasping for breath. I was afraid I would pass out. I couldn't let go of the hose - It would peel the men below me off the ladder. I took a step, rested a few seconds and took another step. I'd go as long as I could.

Somehow I managed to reach the roof. A Young Fireman leaned over the wall and lifted the hose off my shoulder. Dumped it in a pile and came back to pull me up and over the wall.

I collapsed in a corner. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't breath much less do any work.

It was then I realized, “This is a young man’s job!”

I was on duty January 24th. 1975 / It was my 50th birthday.
The first day I didn’t have to work.

I had my time in, but I was still working.

All this time I have been lying to myself.

I’d always said, “When I have my time in, I’m going to take it.”

And here I was working, and for half pay too.

Lora and I had planned a trip to Spain in April. That was my excuse for delaying retirement. But I knew it was just an excuse.

George had warned me, “You can’t believe how much it costs to travel in Europe.

If I have to borrow money, I’d better stay on the job until I got it paid off.

Another excuse.

We took our trip to Spain.

I painted watercolors and dreamed of retiring.

After we got home, I was still suffering jet lag, Couldn’t sleep. It was three or four o’clock in the morning. I was sitting on the heat register trying to get warm, thinking “God! I hate the thought of going back to work.”

Then it dawned on me “I don’t have to go to work!”

I heard Lora stirring around.

I yelled to her, “I’m not going back to work.”

She answered, “I didn’t think you were going to.”

Once I decided, it was like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I never gave it another thought; I never regretted it. I was free.

I called in at seven o'clock and said, "I'm not coming to work."

Captain Fahey answered, "Okay, I'll work the shift for you."

"No," I replied, "I'm never coming back to work."

So I quit.