

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown Fire Department Project

Personal Experience

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GEORGE PANNO

Interviewed

by

Mike Kurilla

on

July 22, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE PANNO
INTERVIEWER: Mike Kurilla
SUBJECT: early career, duties and responsibilities
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K: This is an interview with Chief George Panno for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Youngstown Fire Department, by Mike Kurilla, at Chief Panno's office, on July 22, 1975, at the main fire station in downtown Youngstown, at approximately 9:50 a.m.

Chief Panno, could you provide some information on your family background and schooling?

P: Yes, I come from a family of four children. I was about five years old when my father passed away and I was raised primarily by my mother. I attended McGuffey Elementary School; and from there I went to Madison Elementary School and in the eighth grade I went to East High School where I graduated in January 1947. I immediately joined the service and was enlisted for eighteen months. After coming out of the service, I attended Heidelberg College in Tiffin, Ohio for two years. After two years I ran out of money, came home, got a job, and attended Youngstown College, night school, part-time for one year and then I attended Youngstown full-time for one semester in 1951. Then I went to Miami of Ohio in 1952 for a year and a half and graduated from the school of business in June of 1953. I have a B.S. degree in Business and my major is industrial management. After graduation I went back to Youngstown State University in the early 1960's and

took courses in education and I also have a certificate and a degree to teach in the Youngstown public high schools from seventh through twelfth, which I have done part-time teaching for four years in the Youngstown school system.

K: What occupations were you employed in before becoming a fireman?

P: Well, all through high school I worked as a laborer part-time on Saturdays and Sundays in the steel mills. I worked for U.S. Steel, I worked for Sheet & Tube. I worked on the railroad while going to school for a short period of time. When I got out of college, my field was industrial management. I got a job at U.S. Steel and I worked in the forty inch mill with the idea that I would move up into personnel. At the end of 1954 the personnel manager who had promised me that I would move up once I received some work background in the blooming mill, the forty inch blooming mill, got transferred to Gary, Indiana, and told me at that time he would not be able to honor his commitment. When the new personnel man came in, he said that he was not obligated to honor the old personnel's commitment. So in 1955 I was offered a job on the fire department and I decided to take the job here because I didn't think I would be able to go anyplace with U.S. Steel. I had a background for fighting fires because my eighteen month enlistment in the service I was trained and in the fire service while serving in the U.S. Army.

K: What do you remember about your first years with the department?

P: Well, I was very excited to get on the fire department, first of all, and I really believe this is one of the greatest jobs in the world because you get an opportunity to help people here and to serve the community. One of the greatest things that ever happened to me was when I saved a woman's life. She was sleeping in her bedroom and her house was on fire and I crawled in and got her up and took her out. I believe the reward within yourself when you do something to help people is probably the greatest thing that this job has to offer.

K: How many different stations did you serve at and when did you receive your promotions?

P: I was appointed federal aid of first in 1955. Three years later I took a test and placed high on the test and was eligible for promotion, actually getting promoted in March of 1960 to an engineer. Then I took a test again after becoming an engineer and was promoted to captain in June of 1966. I served as captain for three and a half years, and January 1, 1970, I was

promoted to chief.

K: What type of training did you receive on becoming a fireman, your initial years?

P: Basically, my training was received mostly while I was in the service. We had a regular eight week training program and an ongoing training program while I was in the service. When I came on the Youngstown Fire Department we really didn't have a training program at that time. We had a training person who was a captain and he went around to the different stations. He took you out and he made sure you knew how to catch a hydrant; he made sure you knew how to use a nozzle; he made sure you knew how to tie ropes; he made sure you knew how to climb ladders, he taught you the different leg locks and hand locks on ladders, how to ascend and descend ladders, and what to look for on roofs. But it was all individual training.

K: How does one become fire chief? What are the qualifications necessary to become chief of any fire department?

P: Well, basically, there are no qualifications to become chief. To become a chief of the Youngstown Fire Department according to the charter of the city of Youngstown, this is an appointment that the mayor is permitted to appoint anyone who he sees fit to do the job. Basically, in the history of Youngstown, only one time has there been a civilian appointed to the office of fire chief. That was around 1940 when they appointed a civilian. But basically all the fire chiefs in the city of Youngstown have come up through the ranks, have been a member of the fire department, and usually have been captains or district chiefs.

K: Now what are the duties and responsibilities of a fire chief?

P: Basically, we have a department that consists of about 265 people. We have twenty to thirty pieces of equipment on the road constantly. We presently have thirteen stations. We have an arson investigation unit, inspection department, and we deal primarily with fire suppression and fire inspection, or fire prevention, whichever term you want to use. The duties of the chief are to make sure that all these units are coordinated toward the best interest of the public. In other words, we're here to serve the public and the best interest of the public; we're here to help them in most types of emergencies that occur within their homes or on the streets or within city limits of Youngstown.

K: What are the differences and similarities in the type

of work done by the chief, the assistant chief, and the battalion chief within the structure of the department?

P: Basically, we try to set up on a semi-military basis organization, where the chief is the top and we work our way down to assistant chief, who is immediately under the chief, to the battalion chief. The battalion chief is in charge of one side of the river; the assistant chief is in charge of the other side of the river. At each station there is one captain who is in charge of the station. There is an engineer who is in charge of the fire truck and under the command of the captain, and at least two fire fighters on each piece of equipment. So the chain of command is pretty rigid and it's pretty well followed. It's the job of the chief to make sure that it is followed. That way everybody coordinates with everybody else.

K: So the chief is the main coordinator? Does he handle most of the administrative work?

P: All of it. He's the only administrator, really. He handles everything. The chief sets up all the policies, all the vacations. He does all the paperwork, writes all the letters, handles all the communications for the fire department. He receives a budget from city council, and through his secretary or whomever he designates, does all the purchasing of all the equipment of all the materials in the entire fire department. Our present budget is \$2,845,000, and he's responsible for every penny of it.

K: So the chief is the go-between between city council and the community itself?

P: Yes.

K: You have to report periodically to them?

P: Yes, every Wednesday by charter we're required to attend city council meetings, so that if council has any questions pertaining to our department we will be there to answer them. If we don't know the answers right then and there, then we are given a week or so to make sure that we do have the answer. We serve a fire chief who is appointed by the mayor, but he serves the community under the jurisdiction of the mayor and city council.

K: Can you describe a typical day on duty for Chief Panno?

P: Yes, basically, we work a fifty-six hour week, fire fighters work a fifty-six hour week. He starts at 8:00 in the morning. He comes to work in the morning and he has designated housework which depends on the day of

the week. They have something set up for Monday through Friday, and Saturday at noon. Sunday is usually a free day. There is no designated work except to keep the quarters clean on Sunday. They have their designated housework. The fire fighters do their part; the captain does his part and the engineer usually looks after the fire truck and the apparatus floor. Maintenance and preventative maintenance is one of the things we stress on a fire truck. The captain who is in charge of the station makes sure that all the work is done and done properly. Usually this will take a couple of hours. Then between 10:00 and noon they have books, which they are supposed to familiarize themselves with different happenings in a fire department. Among other things, we like to think of ourselves as being professional fire fighters, and in order to be a professional you have to keep up on what's going on in the world. So we supply materials and books at the stations so the fellows can keep abreast as to what's happening in fire fighting throughout the country.

K: How about the chief when he comes on duty?

P: The district chief is really responsible for so many fire stations north of the river or so many fire stations south of the river, and his responsibility is to make sure that there are enough men at each station so that we can operate effectively and efficiently. If we don't have enough men, if for some reason we have a rash of illness or injuries, then it's up to the district chief to call a man out from home to come back to work to fill the slots so that we do have enough men to man the stations.

K: Do you yourself ever attend a fire?

P: Oh yes. The chief's obligation, by mostly practice. . . There's no written law to this effect though but through procedures in the past a fire chief is always called out in case of a death. If there is a death that has resulted from a fire, then the chief is called out to investigate and I must make a report to the county coroner.

Also, chiefs are brought out to any second alarm fires or greater, or any fire in which the chief on duty or the commanding officer on duty sees something suspicious enough that should be called to my attention that I in turn could do something about. Then they call me out and I would go there and investigate.

Also, I investigate arson fires but, generally speaking, the arson fires that occur during the night, I don't go out and investigate those. I wait until morning when I have daylight and I can go in there and

look around and get a more visual inspection. At night it's too dark; you will lose and miss out a lot of clues. The only thing we have to watch for is that nobody else gets in there and tampers with the clues. But arson fires are better investigated during the day.

K: I believe I am correct in this, that each station is set up on a three shift basis in which you have an A, B, and C shift. What about the chief, what type of schedule does he have?

P: Chiefs also work A, B, and C. We have an assistant and a battalion chief on A turn, the same on B, and the same on C. So the chiefs work the same fifty-six hour schedule as the men do. They work fifty-six hours each week. It is averaged out over a three week period. In other words, one week they will work Monday and Thursday; the second week they will work Tuesday and Friday; and the third week they will work Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday, so when you average it out that will be 168 hours divided by three, which gives you your fifty-six hours a week.

K: How long has this been in effect?

P: This system has been in effect since January 1, 1952. Before 1952 they used to work a seventy-two hour week, where they used to work one on and one off and every other week they would get a weekend; they used to get a day off.

K: What type of equipment and staff is housed in this main station as opposed to the regular station?

P: Downtown is our biggest station. We have more pieces of equipment here than any other station. We have a regular thousand gallon pumper which is manned by a captain, engineer, and two firemen. We have a snorkel or ladder truck. Here we have the snorkel, which is manned by a captain, engineer, and two fire fighters. We have a squad truck which carries special equipment to a fire and specially trained fire fighters to a fire. This truck is manned with a captain, an engineer, and four fire fighters. Also, at the downtown station we have a chief and his driver, and an ambulance which has two people--two emergency medical technicians, trained personnel--on board all the time.

K: On an on duty shift, how many people would be housed at the station?

P: Usually seventeen or eighteen people responding to emergencies. Also, at the downtown station we have a shop or maintenance department, which houses four to six people. We have the alarm room which has seven

people assigned. We have the inspection department, which has seven people assigned to it, and, of course, the office staff in my office.

K: When is the main station called in to aid in a fire in an emergency situation?

P: All the stations are divided into districts. Each station has its own district. We answer each alarm with two pumpers and a ladder, and, of course, the chief. This is a one alarm fire. If the fire is too intense, then the chief or the commanding officer will call in another unit, another district; then this is where you get your second alarm fire. If in a second alarm fire, he sends in for another alarm, then two more pumpers and another ladder will answer. The squad answers about eighty percent of the city because of the special equipment he carries on the truck and the highly trained men that are on that truck.

K: How large are the boundaries of the fire station districts?

P: There is no set limit as to how far they are. They are overlapping; they have to be overlapping. Our main concern is the amount of time that it takes us to get to anyplace in the city. We set up our boundaries as far as possible that we should be able to answer any part of the city. We should have a truck there within two to two and a half minutes, maximum.

K: At any point in the city?

P: At any point in the city, right. We could have them there sooner. Overlapping boundaries would have more trucks there faster. At the extreme out points we will have our first truck in there by two to two and a half minutes at the most.

K: Is there any rigid jurisdiction within Youngstown proper, say for example, Boardman or Austintown Township would need aid? Would the Youngstown Fire Department be able to come to their aid?

P: Yes, we would be able; this is something that has been set up through city council. The way the ordinance now reads, it's entirely up to the chief of the Youngstown Fire Department, if he wishes to send any equipment outside of the city of Youngstown. No equipment shall respond outside of the city of Youngstown unless ordered to respond by the chief. In other words, if somebody from Boardman calls and wants a fire truck, our alarm operator cannot dispatch it. He has to come through me. They have to call the chief and then the chief will. . . The way it's usually set up is: Let's

take a city like Struthers. If they request help, it has to come from the safety director, fire chief, or the mayor or Struthers, or whoever the trustees may be there. In other words, a fireman or an individual can't call. The city of Youngstown has the right to charge so much for each piece of apparatus that we send to Struthers, Campbell, wherever we send it. Of course, we don't charge them, but we still have the right to do it.

K: What type of investigation follows after the extinguishment of a fire?

P: Usually when our people are putting out a fire they will look for some telltale signs of arson. For instance, flammable liquids, fire starting in more than one place, unnatural burning of wood and so forth. If they come across anything that looks suspicious, then they report it to their chief. The district chief in turn reports it and makes out in his report, and sends a copy over to the arson investigating department. Then we have arson investigators, two of them, that will go out and check the building and look for further clues. If we find that it is arson, then we are supposed to, and we do, notify the police department, but we also continue our own investigation within the fire department.

K: What do you remember about some of the large fires you participated in during your career?

P: One of the things you have to remember about large fires is that it just takes a lot of time and a lot of work to put them out. Large fires, for the most part, are not as dangerous as some of the smaller fires. A smaller fire, you will go in blindly, hurriedly to put it out before it becomes a large fire. When you are confronted with a situation of a large fire, then you have to take your time, set up your equipment, and make sure that the whole department is functioning as one unit so that you could put the fire out. Generally speaking, large fires are more spectacular, but you really work harder at small fires than you do at large fires.

K: What injuries have you incurred during your career?

P: A couple. We had a fire on Patrick Court in which I fell through the floor and found myself down in the basement. I had to crawl back upstairs again. I had a fire on W. Federal Street where I fell through the floor again and injured my knee. When I was called on a fire in Austintown, about the first two weeks I was chief. . . It was a very cold day; in fact if I recall they say the wind factor was about thirty-five below

zero that day. I had both of my ears frostbitten, not realizing, and I had to go to the doctor. They are still very sensitive. But, generally speaking, I have been pretty lucky. At one fire I fell off a ladder and I broke my left elbow, and I was in a cast for six weeks, but nothing really serious where it has permanently damaged any part of me or it has restricted me from coming back to work. I would say the worst injury I had was my knee. The doctor wanted to operate on it, but the history of knee operations is not too successful and I don't want to take the chance.

K: How frequent and how annoying are false alarms?

P: These is one of the things that is annoying to us because when we respond to a false alarm we have no idea that it is a false alarm and we send out our full complement of men. Our people are dispatched and respond with the idea that there is a real fire or a real emergency and somebody needs help. We rush to the scene as safely as possible but, unfortunately, there are accidents involved, and this is a big problem. Most of the time false alarms are pulled by kids who just like to hear the sirens or want to see us leave the station for some reason or other. Also, we find that false alarms are pulled by a lot of people who are misinformed about the fire department. They believe that we're just sitting around doing nothing anyway; so they want to get us out into the fresh air, and basically that's who pulls false alarms.

K: How much risk do you believe is involved in fire fighting?

P: Without a doubt, we have one of the most hazardous jobs in the world. Fire fighting, if you check the statistics, there are more people hurt, there are more people involved in accidents. We have a high accident rate. We are trying to correct this by preaching safety and getting our people aware of safety, but fire fighting is a very hazardous job. One of the things that I thought of most recently to eliminate some of the dangers is that we now have Scott air masks for all our people, so that when they go into any building they are able to put on the mask and this will eliminate the inhaling of dangerous smokes, gases, and toxic fumes.

K: What changes in the department have you observed during your years in service?

P: Basically, change has been slow. It's hard to change people once they have a set pattern. Now, when I came in 1970, one of the first things I tried to do was to get the fellows to put on their Scott air masks. Previous to me becoming chief, there was always the

idea that it was an honor for a man to inhale or to withstand a lot of smoke and heat in a fire. And I always maintained that someday this was going to hurt a person.

So what I did was I got all the Scott air tanks; they used to be in suitcases. We mounted them all on the trucks. I bought a generator and I bought a machine to fill the Scott air so that we would never run out of air. I bought masks for all the captains, for all the chiefs and, strictly speaking, almost all our people have, can use, an individual mask when they go into a fire. We provided safety belts for the fellows that ride the back end. Although trucks that have jump seats, we put safety belts on those so that the fellows don't have to ride the back end; they could ride the jump seats.

I would say that one of the biggest things we are trying to do is in the realm of safety, so that the fellows can go out and do their job knowing that it's a hazardous job. That's the first thing they have to do, realize that they do have a hazardous job and they have to approach the situation and be careful, and then make sure that the fellows are protected as far as fire fighting is concerned, so, of course, they could come back another day and do another job.

K: Has fire fighting itself changed radically over the years?

P: Not really. It's starting to change now. I think that through a lot of the projects that you read about in NASA where they are changing to different equipment. They are now, the U.S. government is finally getting involved in fire fighting and putting some money into research. I think in the last 200 years fire fighting has changed very little, except for the hose. If you went back to 1859 where they first started sewing the leather hoses together and all the way up to 1959, they made very little changes except they didn't sew the hose together anymore. The changes they made in ladders was that instead of them being eighteen feet long they became thirty and thirty-five feet long. But I would say after 1970, when the government really got involved, by the year 1980 you should see some drastic changes in fire fighting.

K: Are fire departments throughout the country now able to cope adequately with the advent of new chemicals, plastics, and other products?

P: No, not really. We are still researching this field. In a home fire there are possibly from thirty-four to thirty-seven different types of fumes that a person can

inhale. So this is why we try to advocate the . . . So of the thirty-four to thirty-seven gases, we have no way of knowing which of these gases we will confront when we go into a home. Generally speaking, the only protection that we have against these toxic gases is our Scott air masks, or if we could get in there and ventilate and get the air cleared out before we send our people in. The chemicals and the chemistry of fire is one of the things that is really being studied by the fire department.

K: You mentioned that there was a great emphasis within the department on safety. Does the fire department become involved within the community in insuring safety and in inspecting buildings? What are the activities that the fire department is involved in in this respect?

P: We have a fire inspection department that, if anybody wants a building inspected, a home building. Now the state of Ohio has in its revised code that we are not allowed to go into a private home and inspect the home and demand that you do something for your own safety. When you get into a public building, then the laws are so written that it's our duty to go into public buildings and for public safety demand that certain fire codes, building codes, are adhered to. What we basically do, we have a routine check-up of all public buildings, schools, and so forth, hospitals, whatever is considered a public building, wherever the public congregates, and we inspect them throughout the year. We do make recommendations and we do follow up, and we do have the laws to close down a building or make sure that the laws are adhered to.

For instance, in a theater the law says that there shall be no more than one person for every seven square feet of floor space. So if we find that it's overcrowded, or if they exceed their seating capacity, then we have the right to stop the sale of tickets until the proprietor of the theater clears the building or brings it down to whatever the laws require.

But the laws are good and we do enforce them. People, generally speaking, are good. They want to work with us. Their big problem is that they don't know the laws, and once we point them out to them, then they are most cooperative. We have very little trouble as far as cooperation with the proprietors of buildings or the public. Public response to the fire department, generally speaking, is excellent.

K: Is there a close working relationship in the city between the police force and the fire department?

- P: As you know, we were once united back in 1967 and called the safety forces. There's been sort of a split since maybe 1970 or 1969. But in case of emergency we recognize the hazards of their job; they recognize the hazards of our job and we do work close together. We have no trouble with the police department and throughout the country, generally speaking, police department and fire department work pretty good together. There is very little animosity. There's a lot of joking and kidding about whose job is more important or who does more work, but I'm sure that if it all boiled down to it, they wouldn't want to go into a fire, and we wouldn't want to be on the other end of a shoot-out. So it boils down to the hazards of their job versus the hazards of our job. They are trained for the hazards of their job and we're trained for the hazards of ours. We respect theirs as much as they respect ours, and we get along really good.
- K: Taking a situation, say there was a bombing, would both units be called to respond?
- P: They may, it depends. Now a bombing is really considered an unlawful act and should be handled by the police department; however, the police department would be short of personnel, especially in the search of a bomb and then we, as an emergency unit, would go in and help any type of an emergency. If they would call us in, then we would go in and help the police department look for the bomb. So we do respond to them, to bombings and other emergencies. But, generally speaking, it's unlawful to place a bomb or to bomb, destroy property, so it really comes under the jurisdiction of the police department.
- K: Today, in watching various commentaries on tv, in this "time of recession," we see that arson fires have increased greatly. Was arson prevalent in the 1950's and 1960's in Youngstown as it is in the 1970's?
- P: Well, the word prevalent is probably the key to that whole thing. Arson was here; it's always been here. There are about ten different types of arson. The one that people most associate with arson is burning for profit. Whenever anybody could gain a profit, then it's arson, and that has always been here. However, arson back in those days was not as much as you have today. The reason you have so much arson today is primarily because the insurance companies are willing to pay these people mostly because the courts are against the insurance companies and the courts feel that the insurance companies have a lot of money. If ever there was a fire, the insurance companies would have to pay anyhow, so rather than going to court and fight it, they accept the verdict of the court from

past practice and they go right ahead and pay.

Now people overinsure and the insurance company will try to get you down to maybe \$.50 on \$1, and if you agree to that, they feel that they have accomplished something because they are saving fifty percent. Generally speaking, arsonists are people who are involved in arson, overinsure and they are willing to settle on \$.50 on \$1. Consequently, the proprietor of the building is happy, the insurance company is happy, and the fire department does all the work. That's how it happens.

K: Is it virtually impossible to track down the arsonist himself, the person who started the fire?

P: No, we can track him down. That's not the problem. We can get the person who started the fire, and we have a lot of good evidence, but it's not substantial evidence that a court of law will accept. You see, once you go into court with something, you almost have to have an eyewitness showing where the man struck the match and started the fire. The courts are really tough, as far as we're concerned, on us proving arson. We have very good leads. Unless we get a confession, if we get a confession then okay.

It's not all the court's fault too. We had a case in Pennsylvania where we had a burn victim in the hospital who confessed to an arson fire. We turned it over to the proper authorities in Pennsylvania and because it was a minor arson job--in fact, it only involved \$2,000--the insurance company refused to prosecute the individual. The fire chief and the mayor of the village in Pennsylvania, or the borough of Pennsylvania as it was, they refused to prosecute. Consequently, the kid admitted to arson; we had a signed confession, and nobody wanted to prosecute him. So he went free. From my understanding, he went free. The insurance company said that they always had the right to go back and prosecute him, but they don't want to do that because they say it's not goodwill. And here again, the fire department is the loser.

K: Now have the benefits of firemen improved across the board with other occupations through the years?

P: They were a little slow. During the 1950's we were kind of slow, and the late 1960's we had what we called the seminar, most generally referred to as a strike. But we thought it was a seminar because we called our people together to inform them as to what was happening throughout the country. And since 1968 where we had a levy passed on a ballot, the people recognized that we were falling behind other professionals or occupations.

Then with the coming of the new mayor in 1970, he realized that we were falling behind also, so he stuck his head on a chopping block and he gave the safety forces a special raise, if you will recall, above everybody else in the city. But that was only a one shot item.

Generally speaking, for the occupation and for what people make in the Youngstown area is the only criterion you could use to judge. We are about on par. We are doing very good now. We are not where we want to be but nobody ever is, but we are not behind like we used to be. You can go to the Los Angeles Fire Department and a first class fireman there makes \$17,700 and some. But, of course, the economy there is different than the economy here. So I think, generally speaking, the guys realize that. . . The fire fighters, generally speaking, realize that although there are people making more money than us, there are also people making less money than us. We are about where we should be. We would like more, but that is human nature.

K: You mentioned the large budget that the fire department has appropriated. Does most of this get vented into salaries or a very large maintenance?

P: No, most of it. . . We have about ninety to ninety-three or ninety-four percent of our budget goes for salaries. And the maintenance and the new equipment is why fire departments fall back because council just doesn't give us enough money for those items. They always want to put the money where they feel it will do the most good for their constituents and, generally speaking, they feel the fire department can get along with their present equipment for another year. See, and this always goes on for another year.

K: It continues. (Laughter)

P: Yes. Now I was pretty fortunate as a chief because we got a good chunk of revenue sharing money in which I bought some equipment. I bought all new hoses for the fire department, I bought new breathing apparatus, I bought two new fire trucks, I bought new cars for the chiefs, I bought new cars for the arson department, I bought all kinds of nozzles and fire fighting equipment. So right today the Youngstown Fire Department is well equipped; we have a lot of equipment.

K: What types of organizations or are there any organizations that the firemen belong to?

P: Yes, generally speaking, in our department about ninety-eight percent of our people belong to a union, it's an international union. We are designated by local 312

and they are associated with a state organization and an international organization. Every two years they elect a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and so forth at conventions down at Columbus where they lobby for new laws to help fire fighters to make our job more suitable to us and so forth. Fire fighters belong to other community clubs, churches, and so forth. Once they leave the fire department they are just normal people. Go out and live and enjoy, play golf, go bowling, play baseball.

K: Do you feel, from your experience, that the four man staff at a station is adequate?

P: Yes, four men are adequate; however, five and six are better. But our problem comes with the number of vacations, days vacation that we have within our department. So consequently, our four man crews are dwindling to three men crews, and this I think is bad. We should have four man crews but we don't. We have to make due with what we have and we generally work with three man crews. But if you had four men on a truck, yes, they will do a real good job. Now if you would run in with a squad with six men and they could really back you up and help you. You just get in there and get started and the squad will be in there following you up, and by the time you are started to set up, then they come in with manpower, they can really knock a fire down. It worked rather well. We're now employing, as far as back up men, is really working good.

K: Drawing upon your experience, you experienced all phases a fireman could; starting with being fireman, engineer, captain, and now chief. What suggestions or observations do you have about the operation of the Youngstown Fire Department?

P: Well, I have been to and visited different fire departments throughout the city and the state; I think we have a fairly good fire department. We were. . . The ISO, which is the insurance service offices, who come in and rate fire departments have just left Youngstown. Within a period of about five months we should get a rating from them telling us if we have improved, or if we are going down. But, generally speaking, Youngstown has a good fire department.

What makes it good is that the personnel that we have working for us, our people are very conscientious. You don't have to stay on their backs. They know their job, they want to do their job, they want to be career people, and they come out in the morning, and everyday they come out they do a good job for us. This is one of the major factors in a good fire fighter is his attitude towards his job. Ninety-five percent of our

people have good attitudes, five percent of our people have bad attitudes and they make ninety percent of all the noise that you hear on the outside about the fire department. But if you made a survey of the people on the fire department, you would find that, generally speaking, fire fighters are a different breed of people. They are content with what they have because they have seen a lot of people that have gone through a lot of hardships, and they are mostly happy with what they have and they try to help people to get out of their crisis, or whatever emergency that confronts them the best that they can.

K: Do you think that the alarm system could be replaced by some other suitable system? In talking with some firemen, they have mentioned that over the years there is always a sense of anxiety--I guess some people never get over this--that when the alarm rings, the heart starts pumping fast.

P: This is true. There are two schools of thought on that: One is that only the companies that are responding should receive the alarm; and the other is that everybody should be alerted when there is an emergency in the city of Youngstown because you never know when there is going to be a second, or you never know when the district is left open, you have to prepare your company to take over that district. In other words, if there is a fire on the south side then all the south side unit companies are not responding, but the units on the fringe area on the south side, should another fire occur in that district, they will be the first ones in. They should know that.

In other words, if number fourteen or number eight is at a fire, number nine should know that if a fire comes in at Boston and South that they are going to be the first one in. They shouldn't rely on anybody else being there. When the company commander is preplanning his operation he knows that as a first company end he has certain duties to perform, and he should perform the duties of the first company, then the back up companies will in turn come in and do their operation. But if they don't know that fourteen and eight are out to another fire, they will go in assuming that they are the second company in and they will be ready for a back up company and, consequently, the operation will suffer.

So what we try to do is at night we use a different system; we use a tone alert system where we don't disturb the fellows. And if an alarm comes in on those areas, the operator informs them that there is another fire going on and that they will be the first company in. So that we try to make up for this. Now, general-

ly speaking, the chiefs want to be. . . They want to know where all their equipment is. They want everybody to know that there is a fire, and they want everybody to be prepared. Our job is mostly that you should be alert, and if there is a fire on the north or south side, the people on the east side could respond to a second there. If you are responding to a second, then you have certain obligations that the captain should know that he has to do when responding to a second. But if he went in there cold, not knowing that there was already a fire there, it would sort of hamper the operations. So, like I say, that's pro and con.

Personally, I think that. . . The bell doesn't shake me up. The bell could hit and I am going to respond to a fire. If it's for me, okay; if it isn't for me then I just go back to normal breathing. But there are a lot of people that can't do that. I can understand the problem. They would have to, within themselves, learn to control that, which is hard to do.

K: Right.

P: That's really hard to do. I'm not saying that they are going to do it, I'm saying that's what they have to do. Some can do it and some can't. Sometimes if you're sleeping at night and the bell hits, it really shakes you up. Some guys can't go to sleep for an hour or two, and some guys go right back to sleep. So it depends on how you condition yourself. If you condition yourself to get excited when it's real, fine; when it's not real, why get excited. Then you can go right back to sleep, or you can go back to the station and proceed with your regular chores, whatever you have to do.

K: How do you personally react to probably the typical public view of the fireman or fire department who is sitting around with his free time playing cards, and most of the time he's not doing anything at the station, and this type of attitude?

P: Well, see a good public relations program sort of informs the people that as long as we're inactive, they are safe. It's when we're active that they have to worry, you see. And a good public relations department will carry this to the public. But if every anybody has a fire and they call on us to do a job, when those people go by the station they are generally happy to see us sitting there, they are generally happy that we are there and on the job.

Really, I think the public is getting educated to the point where they realize that our job is one in which for the initial attack of a fire, we have to exert

maybe three or four times as much energy as what a normal working person would at their normal job, and this takes a great toll on a guy. So he has to be pretty well in shape and rested up so that he can exert this much energy at one time to make the initial attack on a fire. This is what people are now starting to realize. Before the fire department. . . Everybody knew this within the fire department, but nobody took the time to go out and educate the public. Nobody thought of speaking at public gatherings, putting on programs for the public, going into the schools and explaining to the kids the duties of a fire fighter, the responsibilities of a fire fighter, and how to correlate the two. Now we do this. Generally speaking, I think we have got good public relations. I think the public accepts us for our job and I think we do a good job. I think the men out there and do a really good job.

K: Would you like to make any final closing comments or observations?

P: Well, one thing you will find, that when you talk to chiefs, they are pretty hard to shut up. Especially if you talk to someone who likes his work or if you talk to someone who has a good crew. I know when you talk to Chief Quinn, he's the same type of guy. He's a very conscientious guy. These are the type of people that we need in the fire service. We need people that are willing to go out and do a job, that are willing to accept the slack from the public, knowing that the public is not as well informed about our job as we are, therefore, you have to make allowances for this type of thing.

In all reality, we work for the public and we don't--even though it may sound it sometimes--we don't ever want to criticize our bosses because do pay our salary. We try to do a job for them. We are in public service. If there's any way that we could please the public, then I say that we should consider it and hopefully we should make ourselves available to the public.

Now, in the past the fire department has been primarily fire suppression. When there was a fire, we went out and put it out. I think what you are going to see in the fire service from now on is more of a fire prevention idea, number one; and two, the fire department is moving away from fires, per se, to emergencies. We are now getting involved in the ambulance operation, medical fields. We will be involved in other disasters; hurricanes in some places, hurricanes in other places, wind storms in other places. We will be involved in riots or civil disputes. I think the role of the fire

department is going to change in the next ten years to one of not fire fighters, per se, but people in emergencies that need help and we are going to respond to that type of a situation. Just a personal observation.

END OF INTERVIEW