

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Fire Department Project

Youngstown Fire Department Experience

O. H. 63

FRANK FABRIZIO

Interviewed

by

Michael P. Kurilla

on

September 24, 1975

FRANK FABRIZIO

Frank Fabrizio was born in Youngstown, Ohio on April 12, 1912, the son of James and Principina Fabrizio. He attended local schools and after graduating from high school, during the Depression years, he decided to go to work. He found the opportunity to get a job at a packinghouse, where he worked for nearly eleven years. On October 6, 1934, he was married; shortly thereafter, with the country in the midst of the Second World War, Fabrizio entered the Navy. He took the examination for the Fire Department and worked for the City of Youngstown as a firefighter, engineer, and captain, successively, beginning December 5, 1943.

Aside from having the good fortune of never sustaining an injury while working, Captain Fabrizio has a unique record of perfect attendance for thirty-two years with the department. In 1973, he was awarded Fireman of the Year by the Eagles Association; he is a member of Firemens' Local 312, and the Coitsville Volunteer Fire Department. He and his wife, Virginia, have two daughters, Mrs. Doris Irilli and Mrs. Joyce Brent. Certified by the state for State Fire Instruction, Captain Fabrizio also enjoys woodworking and fishing.

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INTERVIEWEE: FRANK FABRIZIO
INTERVIEWER: Michael P. Kurilla
SUBJECT: Youngstown Fire Department Experience
DATE: September 24, 1975

K: This is an interview with Captain Frank Fabrizio for the Youngstown State University, Youngstown Fire Department Project by Mike Kurilla at the Number Twelve Fire Station, on September 24, 1975, at approximately 8:00 p.m.

Captain Fabrizio, could you provide some information on your family background and schooling?

F: I was born in Youngstown and went to school out here. At the time it was called Scienceville, but now it's called North High. It's on the east side of Youngstown here. I graduated from high school and at that time, things were kind of rough because I got out of school in 1931. And 1929, 1930, 1931 were the Depression days. I had an opportunity to go to college. I had about six colleges that wanted me to go and play football for them, but the fellows I ran around with were all working and had money. I wasn't and so I decided to go to work.

Then I got a job at the packinghouse through a friend of mine and I worked there ten-and-a-half years. In the meantime, I had gotten married. Then World War II came along and I went and was in the Navy. Just before I went to the Navy, I had a little girl. She was about five years old at the time. When I came back out, I got a job down at Truscon and worked there for awhile, till about a year and a half till this job came up. I took an

examination for the Fire Department and come December 1, [1975] I'll have my thirty-two years on. I hope to put one more lucky year on and then, I think I'll hang up the boots.

I have two girls, in the time being: One is a nurse; she is married and lives in Girard and has two lovely girls. My youngest girl is seven years younger than her and we had her after I came back from the service. She had an education, too--college. She was working in an office and now she's married and has a youngster that's one year old. That was about the extent of my family. I would like to have had a boy, but as things turned out with the operation my wife had, why we just couldn't have any more and that was it.

K: Why did you become a fireman when you did? You said you took the examination.

F: I was talking to a friend of mine and he was telling me why I should get on the Fire Department: because of security reasons and pension reasons, and things on that order. He said: "Without a college education, you are liable to be bumped out of a job and you're going to not be working."

I always had a job that never paid big money, because the packinghouse job never paid big money. The only time I made bigger money was the year and a half I was in Truscon before I came on here. These jobs never made big money, but it was steady. So that you learn to live with. And if you want things, you just wait till you can arrange it to have it and then you have it. You learn to live with what you have and we've gotten along real good. I tried to give the kids everything they had and needed that I never had and we always got by. Nothing was real luxurious or anything like that but we had plenty of food on the table and that was the main thing. We were able to keep our bills paid and that's what really counted in the long run. That's the way I looked at it: It was more or less for the future, for retirement, and it was a job that was steady; you had a certain amount coming in all the time. I thought, after thinking it over, something like that is better than some of these jobs where they make big money and they blow it and then first thing you know, they're out of work and then they don't have anything. So if you learn to live with less, why you

can get along with less. That's one of the big reasons that I took the job.

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

F: The first year I came on the department, I started in a house on Falls Avenue. It was a two-truck house and at that time they didn't have a training program like we have today. It seemed like in those days that they didn't tell you any more than they had to, like they were afraid you were going to take their job away from them. That's the truth. I always said if I ever get in here and learn it, I'd try to make it as easy as possible for the next man, which I did. That is why after I had a few years on here I had such a tough time learning it myself and just following and watching without any instructions that any time we'd get a new man, why I made it my business for him to learn as much as he could.

When I got to be a captain on this department I wanted every man on my crew to know as much about that truck as I did. And not only the truck but the work that we have to do. I always laid out the steps we were going to take and everything just worked out lovely like that, because the more the crew knows about what you're doing, it just makes it easier for everybody and you do a more efficient job. You try to cut down your fire loss and by everybody chipping in and doing the work that they're supposed to do, why this can be accomplished. That is why I always stick my neck out to any new fellow and just get a hold of him and just work with him till I think he knows just what the next step is going to be.

K: About how many different stations did you serve at and when did you receive your promotion?

F: I was a fireman for eleven years before I made an engineer's job and I was an engineer--engineer is the fellow who drives the truck--till about the last fourteen or fifteen years when I became a captain. I've been a captain about fifteen years. That is when I took a big interest in helping others.

K: Have the basic equipment or the techniques of firefighting changed over the years that you've

been in service?

F: Yes, it has. I'll tell you why: Years ago, even before my time, the pumpers that we had were steam-driven and you couldn't control your water. There was an awful lot of water damage. With the new equipment today, you can read any fire book and you'll find that one-fourth of your damage is fire and three-quarter is water damage. That is why I like to work with high pressure where you'll put out twice as much fire and half the amount of water. I always preach to the fellows: "If you see no flames, shoot no water," because the water is what does all your damage. Today we have equipment and trucks that you can control this.

But if you don't do it, it isn't the truck's fault. You have to have men trained how to equip their streams and things and control them. With the equipment we have today, we can control just about any amount of water that we want to put on a fire.

K: We are sitting in here and Station Twelve looks like the main office here. What is a physical description of a typical station after the equipment is in it?

F: Now this room you're sitting in, you see this Gamewell system: That's where we get our alarms. If there is a fire in town, that bell we have out in the apparatus floor will ring five times. Everybody [in town] gets ready, but nobody knows who's going to go until they give the address. Then they'll call the companies as to who's going to go and where they're going to go. It used to be, all they gave us was a street number and we had a book, for example, out here at this station if we heard a number starting with a three, we knew we were going because that was our district. But what happened in those days--companies went that weren't supposed to; there were some companies that were supposed to [go] but never went. So now they have this Gamewell system here. They'll ring the bell, let you know there's a fire, but you don't move till they call you, even if it's next door. If they don't call you, you just don't move. So everything now is on the shoulders of the alarm operator in our Number One station downtown, and he tells us who goes and where.

But up till then, why we used to have this "box

five" we call it, and anything we go out on ourselves, like a car fire or anything like that, they call us on the phone. That way they don't disturb the rest of the city. But now a few months back, maybe a year, they started a new system that after ten o'clock at night they only dispatch the companies that are supposed to go to the fire and that way they're not waking the whole city up, two three, or four in the morning. They have found through the country that most of the heart attacks come when that big bell goes off at night when you're sleeping. So now they have a little squawker system that they'll get you up [with]. Only the companies that are going will be awakened, where before, everybody in town used to be woke up. So this is much, much better right now.

Out of this office here, you step into the apparatus floor where our truck is and that's where we keep our extra hose and things. Anytime we go out and use, say, five sections of hose, we come back, we have a reel there that has clean hose on all the time so we throw our five that we used in our cellars to be washed and put five clean ones on. And if it's before six o'clock at night we wash it. If it's after six o'clock the next turn washes it. So that way you're not up all night washing hose.

Then beyond the apparatus floor is our bedroom [in] which we have beds. After twelve o'clock noon, if a man wants to lay down, he can lay down. And I'd just as soon they lay down as be running around outside because when that bell hits they're here to go. And it's a matter of just seconds that they're on the truck. Right next to the office here on this side of the apparatus floor, we have a lounge room where we sit and watch TV.

Beyond that is our little kitchen where we do our own cooking. Now a small house like this, we only have four men and usually one is on vacation or a detail and you usually wind up with only three, so everybody does their own cooking. But these bigger homes--double houses--where they have two and three trucks, why usually one man will cook for everybody. There'd be just too many around that stove at one time. They all want to eat at one time. That way they take turns and they cook their meals that way.

- K: I see what appears to be a log in front of us. What type of information do you keep in a log?
- F: Every time there's a "box five" we mark it down and mark the address. The reason we do that: There might be right next to our district are out and if we get another fire in that same district we know we're going to go because the other companies are out. So we keep a log of everything: of companies going out, where they're going and if we go out, we mark down their addresses, the time we went back on the radio, and the time we get back into the station and back into service again. That's all logged. Then we carry another book that we mark down what we used, what we did, and anything that we can explain on it. We write that down just in case some insurance company wants to stop and ask us [about] a certain fire. Why we look up the date and we can tell them who was there, what they used, how long they'd been there and the time of the day is marked and when they left is marked. All that information is of some use sometime along the line.
- K: How much of a nuisance is a false alarm?
- F: A false alarm is a big nuisance. In fact, I would say most of our men that got killed going to fires have gotten killed going to false alarms. I've been trying to get a couple boxes out in our district here because when that box goes off, you don't know if there's a fire or not, and you have to kind of rush there just as if there was a fire. But you don't know there's not a fire until you get there. They get to be a nuisance, and they usually seem to come in when it's always bad weather: raining, slippery roads, or cold and stuff like that. It gets to be a nuisance. When you get a box that hits anywhere from twenty to twenty-five times a year, if I had anything to say, I'd say pull it out. I would say this: As many years I've been in this house here, I don't think we've ever had one house fire that was turned in by an alarm box on the corner because most everybody has phones today. These boxes are things that used to be in years and years ago when nobody had phones. But today, the kids are just using them for toys and it's a bad thing. It's a bad thing.
- K: Can you describe the type of training you received

during your first years as a fireman?

F: Well, like I said before, when I first came in I didn't get any training. And just like I said, at that time when they got new men on, it seemed like they were afraid to say anything like they were going to take their job away. But the training that these fellows get today [is] from fellows like me and others who take an interest in it. In fact, the last few years now the State says they have to have a hundred and sixty hours of training before they go into a station. So we have a school down in Number One station and this is all run through Ohio State University. They go through their training and we take them out and show them the different phases. Just like I tell them when we're working with them: "We're not going to make firemen out of you, a full-fledged fireman, but when you go out you're going to have an idea of what you're going to do."

Just like when we have to use Scott air packs, which we never have before--which is a wonderful thing today--because it's silly to go in and eat all that smoke when you can use a Scott air. I preach that but I still run in without a Scott air because I'm so used to it. I want to get in there in a hurry and I don't want to take that time of putting one on. But these younger fellows, we preach to them to put a Scott air on, and it works out good because I'll take the line and go in and if I can knock the fire down, I'll knock it down. Then they'll come in with the Scott air and open windows and doors and ventilate, which makes it wonderful. So these fellows today are getting a round picture of what they have to be expected to do when they come on the department here.

Now this young fellow that's here, young Bill Pollock, just got on a year ago and the chief asked me, would I take him and work with him for a while. I said, yes. That was supposed to be for two months and I've had the kid for a year, now I don't want to leave him because he's a good man and he enjoys working out here. We go out, I'll show him what to do; I still follow right behind them and I'll tell them what to do, what not to do and that's the way they learned. You've got to not only tell them, but you've got to show them and lead them in there and let them do what they

can do. I tell them I don't care if you're on here fifteen years or twenty years, some fellows can eat more smoke than others. And that's the truth. So just take what you can and if you can't, let the man know that's in there with you that you're going out and then that way, when he has to go out he won't be looking for you. So that is the way that works: When you work in pairs one man should tell the other if he's going out.

K: Can you describe a typical day on duty, Captain Fabrizio, when you come into the station, your activities?

F: When we first come in the station in the morning-- (Fire bell rings) (Tape turned off-on). When we first come in, we're supposed to start from eight o'clock in the morning till eight the next morning which is a twenty-four hour turn. I always try to get here about fifteen or twenty minutes to eight and see the man that I'm relieving if there are any new orders out because there are always new orders coming out. If they had anything--a lot of times they'll have a fire and maybe something broke or something happened to the truck--we ask them all these kind of questions. Then if there is, as soon as the shop opens up, why I'll get in touch with the shop; or if there are any new orders out, as soon as we get here we usually put a pot of coffee on. We'll have a cup of coffee and we'll talk about these things. After that, why each man has his own quarters to clean.

It's only a matter of, oh, I'd say a half hour to forty-five minutes actual work and your quarters are clean. Once your quarters are clean, that is it. I mean, you don't have to be cleaning them two and three times a day. So you're quarters are clean and then you're actually on your own the rest of the time. If you want to sit and read a book or something like that, that's all well and good. A lot of fellows have little pet jobs. I showed a couple of these fellows how to make chairs out of cans and they're doing that to kill the time. Especially in the winter months; the summer months it's different, you always have something to do: outside work, or something like that. But in the winter months, why twenty-four hours is a long time. We try to have little pet jobs going to keep us busy and occupied.

That is really all you have to do when you're a fireman: wait for the work to come in. We've had people come and say, "Boy, it's pretty easy sitting down." I say, "Well, you go home, set your house afire and I'll gladly go to work." Then it's a different story when it hits their place. But they expect you to be on the go all the time. I tell them this is one job where we have to wait for the work to come to us. We don't go looking for it. That's the way things go on the Fire Department: You just have to wait till they come but when they come, why then you've got to get out there as quick as you can. You don't know what you're going to run into because every fire is different and sometimes they're dangerous and sometimes they're not. Until you get there, you don't know what you have. That's the way the day is spent in the fire station.

- K: I've heard firemen use the term, "fast and slow houses." This east side is one of the older sections of town; you have a small house here. Is this considered a fast house?
- F: What they mean by slow and fast houses: This house right here where you're at now is rather a fast house. It has a lot of calls. We don't only get fire calls since we're out here so far. We get heart attack cases where we'll go and give them oxygen with our resuscitator and call an ambulance and administer oxygen till the ambulance gets there. We have a lot of accidents that we have to go to and then maybe call an ambulance if it's needed, or a wrecker or police, or whatever's needed. So it's a variety of things where you're moving all the time on different things. Some of these houses, we might move in one month what they might move maybe in six months. So that is what they say when they refer to a slow house or a faster house: It's the number of runs that they get, a variety. For example, one month there we had fifty-four runs in this house, in one month's time. That is a lot of runs. Where some of these houses get ten and twelve and they think they're busy.

It's a variety out here and it's not always fires, though, because our work is not only Fire Department work. That is, our main concern is life and property. When people are in trouble they come here. They know they'll get some kind of help.

That's what we're here for.

K: What do you remember about the large fires you participated in? I'm sure over your thirty years you must have participated in some of the larger fires in the Youngstown area.

F: For example, we had one--I wasn't on here more than, oh, about a year I think--a big fire down on Federal Street, that is our main street downtown. It was a fire. Just to give you an example [of how] you don't know what you're running into: This happened to be a cellar fire, but you don't know until you get in because the whole building is just charged with smoke. After getting the front door open so that we could make an entrance it was too smoky to walk in and in those days, like I said, we didn't have Scott air's which was a good thing in one way because we had to get down low and crawl on the floor. We got about halfway back to the building and still didn't see any fire. Then all of a sudden, you stick your hand out and there's no more floor. The back part had gone down already. Automatically, we rushed out as fast as we could. After we get outside we tell the chief and the other fellows that are out there, "Go around through the back, through the cellar because it's down the cellar. The floor is already out in that back-end there."

Now it's things like this that you don't know. If you're not using common sense and be careful not only not to hurt yourself, but not to hurt other fellows, it would be no problem at all just to rush in there and have two or three guys drop right in that cellar and you'd never see them again. That would be the end of it. Those are fires that you will run into once in awhile: that kind of a fire where you don't know what you have till you can get to the base of the fire, ventilate it so you can get that smoke out and see exactly what you have.

Now in this particular fire that I'm talking about, we thought we had it out, which we did. The second floor, there was no fire; the third floor, no fire and while we're just about ready to go, we see the roof breaking out on fire. And what happened, fire travels in three different ways: by radiation, by conduction, or convection. This worked by conduction because these great big heavy electric cables from the cellar go all the way up through

the roof and then out to your poles. That is all copper and that carries heat. It got so hot that it just got hot all the way up, and up near the roof where it was patched around there it got hot enough that it started the roof afire. So, you had no fire on the middle floors but then you had a roof fire. Now they say, "How the hell did that fire get started up there?" Well, that's how it got started because fire travels in three different ways! That is why when we go into a building, they'll say, "What'd you make a hole here for? What'd you make a hole there for?"

By feeling you can tell if there's fire in a wall, by feeling and looking at it to see if it's blistered, or the paint discolored, or feeling with the back of your hand. Or you can even hear a rumble in there and if you hear that, you better get a line there and make a hole because it's going up through the wall. A wall acts just like a chimney because it's straight up and that flame is going to go straight up. The first thing you know, you might have a cellar fire and [if] it gets between the walls you're going to have one up in the attic if you don't get it in time. So you've got to move and move fast.

That is why, going back to the other, it's good to train these fellows when they see things like that; you know what to expect out of it instead of letting them try to learn all of that on their own. It makes for better firemen and it makes for less fire loss, too.

- K: How about the Youngstown Club, or St. Columba fires? Were you involved in those?
- F: I was on that St. Columba's fire but I was rather new on the department at the time and I really don't remember too much about it--only being stuck outside and three fellows on an end of the line and pouring water into it. The damage was already done and we were more or less there for wetting it down. The bulk of the fire was knocked down so there wasn't really that much on that fire. I wasn't [with] the first company in, let's put it that way.
- K: What changes in the Fire Department did you notice over your years of service?

F: Changes?

K: Changes in the department itself.

F: On the Fire Department, changes I have noticed from just the time that I've been on, some of your chiefs that you get are so much stricter than others. Sometimes, when you're dealing with a group of men you have to be strict. You have to, because you give one guy a leeway, another guy sees it and he wants it, and the first thing you know, it mushrooms out and then you have no control over them. They have made a lot of different rules and things. We'd have different chiefs come in and they thought that was wrong and they would take it off and then the men would take advantage of it and then they'd have to throw it right back on again. Then he was no good because he did it. It's all things like this. Everything we'd lost, we lost because of the men themselves. If they would just try and go along with things and do what's right instead of taking advantage of seeing what they could actually get out of because we have fellows today work harder trying to get out of a little work rather than just go do it and forget it. That's true. They'll work harder trying to get out of it and they just irritate you, because after all, let's face it, these fellows are all married men, most of them are, and they have families and they know what their duties are. They're not like kids where you have to tell them everyday what to do. But we have fellows you do have to remind what they have to do. And I can't see that.

Years ago, it didn't seem to be that way. Everybody knew what they had to do and they did it, maybe because they appreciated the job. To me this job is, actually, a snap from the way I used to work. In fact, my first two pays, when I came on here I wouldn't even go and get. I had one of the fellows pick them up for me because I worked ninety hours a week in the packinghouse in the Depression days and when I came on here for the amount of work I did, these fellows thought they did a lot of work and I didn't think we did anything. (laughter) That's the difference between your men.

Even till today, I wouldn't expect my men to do anything that I couldn't do or wouldn't do myself.

In fact, they are always hollering that I always want to be the first one in. Just because I'm their captain, I don't want to say, "Go get it! Go do this!" Because I don't know what's in there and if something would happen to one of them, I would never forgive myself for it. But if I can't take it, I don't expect any of them to take it, and I'll tell them, "Let's get out!"

And that's it. That's the way I always was and that's the way I'll always be.

- K: Is there any type of periodic organizational meeting, say, all the captains get together or the battalion chiefs?
- F: Yes, we have a regular local meeting once a month. That is just for union affairs and things that are going on and what they want to do. But we have started on our particular turn here, "A" turn, a captain's meeting once a month. We meet down at Number One station and anything that anybody wanted to bring up, they would bring it up and they'd thrash it out and if they thought it was worthwhile, we would try it.

Just for example, this truck we have here--I'll show you after a thing that I had made and put on the back-end of the truck. To me, it's just like an extra man because our booster line is on the back and we have to pull it out through the back. Most of the time, we're with only three fellows here and if one man would take it, he could go off to the side maybe six, eight, or ten feet and it would bind. So I had this little thing made and I'll show it to you after. It's got rollers on four sides and they drop it down in there and you can go straight out on a 45°. One man could pull the whole thing right off. We had that on for a few years and we had a chief in there who made me take it off. So I took it off. When he got out, this other chief we have now came in. We're working three-handed all the time--three men are really not enough on the truck; you should have, the minimum four--so I asked him to let me put this thing back on and he did and I'll tell you, it's a wonderful thing. That all helps in making the job easier on something like that.

- K: How much risk do you believe is involved in fire-fighting compared with other occupations?

F: According to the books there are more men killed in the line of duty in firefighting than there are in police work. That is counting the whole States now, not just one city. All over the States you'll find that you'll have more firemen killed in a year's time than you will policemen. You think now policeman is a real dangerous work, but the Fire Department is a different kind of danger. You're not shot at but you're getting into places where buildings crumble on you; you get trapped into places and you can't get out, that kind of danger. When you go into a building you have no idea how far that building has been burnt or how long it's been burning until you get there.

And you think there is a floor there lots of times and there is none and down you go. We've had a lot of fellows fall from one floor to the other and break their legs and things like that. A lot of them, if they fall into a place where they're knocked unconscious, they suffocate. So, it's dangerous.

K: Have the salaries and benefits of firemen increased satisfactorily over the years with other occupations?

F: Let's put it this way: They have increased some but not like your steel mills and things of that nature. But they did come a long, long way. A long way. In fact, even the fellows today, when they're starting off they're making a lot more money than we did and the benefits are much greater today. To give you an example, when I took the test, I think there were only about forty or fifty people that took it. And just last week they gave a test and there were over three hundred who took it. They're looking for that security plus the salary that we are now getting and the benefits that we are getting. Even the fellows who are retirees, their pensions are much greater today than they were. All in all, I would say it's a good place to work today, especially today.

K: How long has there been a fireman's union in Youngstown here?

F: Oh, before I came on; they've had one for years and years. But years and years ago they had a union but they never seemed to do anything with it. If they had a complaint they'd go to the city officials and they'd tell them their story and they'd say,

"That's the best we can do, take it or leave it." And they just left it. Today, these younger fellows have a little more courage and they fight more and they seem to be getting more. So it has changed quite a bit.

- K: Could you take us through a dry run of a hypothetical fire? Say there was a house burning in your district up by East High School somewhere and you are the first unit in. As captain, what would you do? Take us through the motions.
- F: If we had a fire in this district and we're first in, being that we are working shorthanded, when you approach the fire you can just about size it up as to what you're going to need. If you can see just a little bit of smoke and not much fire, usually you'll take care of it with our own booster line. If it's a kitchen fire, even though there are flames coming out of the kitchen windows if it's gone that far, I still would hit it with my booster line because I know I can put it out with that. This truck here holds four hundred gallons of water more than these other trucks, because there are a lot of districts we have out here [which] have no hydrants. So when we've got this truck we have a bigger tank on.

Now if it was beyond one room, I would have one of my men drop at a hydrant and catch what we call a feeder line, a two-and-a-half feeder line, and run it into our truck. I would call on the radio and tell them, the next company in, take my inch and a half, because I have on this truck here, two inch and a half preconnected. So the reason I did that, I told the chief if he would allow me and he said yes. Because out here the next company in is quite awhile getting here and when they have to take hose off their truck and then bring it over and hook it onto ours, there's too much time lost. So I have two inch-and-a-halves preconnected so when they come all they have to do is grab one of my inch and a halves and they're right with me in a short order.

If it was a building, a big store or something and it was really going then I would have to lay two-and-a-half inch lines to the fire and then go back and have my truck pump from the hydrant. Then I get on the radio and tell them, "Next company is in, hook up to me because I'm hooked up at a hydrant."

Well, then they know we really have a big fire going. But they usually wait for what I have to say over the air to them. . . Then they know what to expect when they get there.

K: As the first company in and as captain, are you in charge until the chief comes?

F: I'm in charge until the battalion chief gets there. When he gets there I'll give him a quick resume of what we've done and what I've seen and what we have and then he'll check it out and then he takes over from there.

K: Is there any type of follow-up after the fire is extinguished? Do you have any responsibilities afterwards?

F: Since we were first in, after the fire is out and he thinks it's safe for everybody to go back, me being first in he'll say, "Frank, before you leave check it out again." I'll make my rounds because a lot of times you think you have it out and you've got a smoldering spot. And if you don't get that smoldering spot, by the time you get back to the station you've got another fire going. So we have to check it out real good.

I try to show these fellows the difference between a place that's smoldering and one that's just steam coming out because a lot of that stuff gets so hot that when you put water on it, it steams for quite awhile. And I tried to show them the difference between steam and smoke: where there is a little fire someplace and if you leave that little fire go, in another half hour you're going to have another big one. So I try to show them that. And before we leave we make sure there are no places that are smoldering and that is, checking the thing out. Then when we come back, why then I feel safe that we don't have to go back there. But if it did break out, we would be the ones who would have to go back because we were first in.

K: Taking three different types of fires: let's say we have a house fire, a good size residence; you have maybe a school fire; and then maybe you'd have even a larger thing, maybe a hospital. Does your approach vary radically from the three types?

F: Oh, yes, because if it's a house fire, nine out of ten times it's going to be either a bedroom or a kitchen. That's the bulk of your house fires: in the kitchen or a bedroom, smoking in bed. So we know when we get a house fire, especially if it hasn't been going for a long time where the flames aren't coming out of every window, usually a house fire if people are home or the neighbors see it, or something of that nature where we can get to it in a hurry, why we can pretty well keep it to that one room.

Then if we had a school or a business place or a meeting place, it all depends on the time of the day as to the work that you're going to do because if it's in daytime, you know there are kids there so the first thing you do: you don't bother with the fire; you get those kids out and make sure that they get out. We'll still lay a line and if we can see the fire, we'll have one man hit that fire but the rest will all go for these kids. You've got to get those kids out because like I said before: life is first and the property is second. Then as the other companies come in, if you need a hand on getting some more kids out, they'll help; if not they'll go to work right on that fire immediately.

But if it's in the evening or late hours you know there are no kids in there so then you don't have to worry about getting anybody out. Then you concentrate on the fire. We had this school right across the street here, John White School, not too long ago and it was in the evening. We'd go right around the back and I knew where the boiler room was and I busted one door in and got into that boiler room and got it out right away. We found out later that it was a set fire, but we didn't know that. We don't know there's gasoline in there until we get in there. But luckily, we knocked it down in a hurry. By the time the other companies came, all they had to do was ventilate. But we didn't have to worry about kids.

And [it's] the same thing when you have a place of meeting. Now, meeting halls usually in the daytime are vacated and usually they have them at night. At night, if you get a hall like that, you know there's somebody there. So you try to see who's in or if there is any and how many and then lines. Then you have to figure a way to get them out of

there. The same way when we have these apartment houses, like up on Eastway Drive. There're ten and twelve families in each one of them. If you get a fire in one section downstairs, in no time that whole half, up and down, is going to be covered with smoke. And then in the wee hours of the morning you've got to start banging on doors and that to get these people up to get them out of there or they're going to suffocate. They don't die from burning, they suffocate and die first and then they'll burn up. So you've got to get them out of there before that happens.

Every fire, like I said, is different. It all depends on what you have, the time of day, and even the weather has a lot to do with it. If it's real cold you can't be charging all of your lines and leaving them set without using them because they'll freeze up on you. And the same way with your pump. You've got to keep your pump going and your motors going or else they'll freeze up because these trucks don't carry alcohol or antifreeze in them, because of the speed that they have to pump. This truck here'll pump a thousand gallons a minute and if they had alcohol in there they'd be boiling over. So your seasons have a lot to do, your roads have a lot to do and the kind of a building that you're going to. That's why every summer we'll ride and see if there's a new project being opened up where there are hydrants and the layout of it and if we get a call there, we know where the boiler room is, if it's a boiler room; and single apartment then it's either the kitchen or a bedroom; that's the only place it could be. So that's what you have to consider when you're going to these fires. While you're going there you're trying to figure out what you have and then when you just about get there you can look and see about what you have. Then you can determine if you're going to lay a big line or hit it with a booster or inch-and-a-half, or if you need help from other companies.

There are many, many times we go out here and we see we can handle it ourselves; we'll catch them on the radio and stop them and send them back. Why let them come all the way out there because a lot of times, from the time we stop until they get there they might have another mile or two miles to go. They could get in an accident. So we stop them if we can. The chief has to come all the way from town and he appreciates that because a lot of times

he gets to Albert Street and he'll hear me say, "Send them back, we can handle it." But when I don't send them back he knows they've got something. (laughter) That's the way I work it out here. If I can handle it alone, why I try to keep the other companies "in the barn" where they belong.

- K: How big of a problem are spectators to contend with? I was reading in the Vindicator article this recent West Lakes Crossing disaster and they said there were hundreds of spectators, and if that thing would have blown it really would have been a disaster.
- F: Well, people are curious. I'll tell you: We've had fires at four and five in the morning and where these cars come from, I don't know. But they'll follow a truck down the street. You'll get maybe three, four or five at that hour in the morning, and then when these other trucks are coming in, they can't get through. They're just curious to see what's going on and especially in the daytime. There are times when they are in your way. There are times when we go out here, like I said, it seems like such a long time before someone else comes. I have asked some of the fellows that were around, "Give me a hand on pulling this hose," and they'll do that. When you only have three men, you have one man on the truck--the engineer--he's got to take care of that pump and that; the other man's at the hydrant; I'm here by myself. I've got to pull that inch-and-a-half off or two-and-a-half off and drag it up to the house and that's pretty heavy. You take each section, by the time you get a charge and everything you've got about 138 pounds there and you start pulling five or six sections, you're pulling a lot of weight. So if you can see [someone] who'll give you a hand why you appreciate it.
- K: If the crowds get too big is the Police Department called in?
- F: Oh, yes. They're supposed to come in every fire. Every fire they're notified and they should come because there are times when the hose has to go across a road, and if it's a bad fire and they have two or three trucks together, they'll detour the traffic. They're supposed to take care of the traffic. Every house fire or what we call a "box five" they should be notified and be there. And

I've noticed that they hold true to that pretty good. Very good.

- K: Is Station Twelve or any other regular station other than the main station involved in other activities besides firefighting, say, inspecting buildings within your district? Does that come under your jurisdiction?
- F: Yes. Every summer we'll go to these different projects that we hear are going up and we'll see how they're laid out, so if we get a call there we know how to go in. But if you don't go, you have no idea where anything is. That is why we like to go to these different buildings and your different stores and see if there's an entrance-way or not. These are things that you should find out before a fire and it saves you a lot of time and you do a better job in putting it out rather than just sit here and do nothing. In fact, the last few years we've been going out checking hydrants, where the water department used to do that. And we have a log. Every hydrant is inspected and checked and if there's any defect or fault, we mark it down and we try to follow through to make sure that they correct it.

We have hydrants way out here that our hydrant wrench will not turn because they have an octagon-shape top on them and these people out there have no water so they go to the hydrants and they use pipe wrenches and things like that to get water. They've got those things chewed off so they're just round. We had one fire out there, we have the adjustable hydrant wrench but we couldn't get it tight enough. It would just turn on there so we had to run to the truck and get our pipe wrench to open it because the threads on that thing were just all chewed off. That is why we're making these inspections now. A lot of those caps haven't been off for awhile and they're frozen on there. Even hitting them with a hammer, you couldn't break them loose. So we report that and then the water department is supposed to check them out. When we're out looking at buildings and things, why you kind of get the lay of the land, so if something comes you know just where you're going to go and what you're going to do. If they would call me right now and say, "North High School, the kitchen," well, I wouldn't even go through the front. I would go through the back way because

I know where the kitchen is. The same way with the boiler room. If I went in the front I'd have to drag maybe two hundred, two hundred and fifty feet of hose to get to the back where I could pull the truck right up there. So by making these inspections and finding out the lay of the land, when something does happen, it makes the job easier and you do a better job with it.

K: Isn't there a state law that business establishments have to have their fire extinguishers checked or is there a state inspector that does it?

F: Yes. They have fire extinguishers and they have companies that check them every year. We don't do fire extinguishers; there are companies that do that. There are certain kinds that have to be checked every year for the pressure in them and the CO₂'s, they have a lot of them that are pressurized water. The soda and acid they're not using anymore because they're so dirty. The carbon tet they're not using anymore because when you take and throw that on anything that's real hot it makes a deadly gas. So that they're not using anymore. The fire extinguishers are all taken care of by different fire extinguishing companies but if they bring them in to us, we see that they're charged or filled up for them. We have a fellow in mind that we'll send them to and then he takes care of them.

K: If there were to be, or in fact, in the 1960s when we had the civil disorders, if there was a national or state emergency would the firemen be called upon to take action?

F: Yes. When that happened here we had the national guards stay right here in the station with us, and every time we moved one of them rode with us. There were two fellows here and they would take turns riding the truck with us and they went right with us all the time, yes. Every truck in town had national guards on them. But we didn't have any trouble out here though. It seemed to be in that one section. But all the stations were alerted and protected in case, though.

K: Were arson fires prevalent during the 1940s and 1950s in Youngstown?

F: Not too much. Not too much, no. In fact, they had some, well, let's say they always had some but they didn't have them like they're having today. The bad thing about that is this: No matter how much equipment you can find in the building when you know it's arson--you can find bottles of gas or empty bottles in every room of that house and every room is on fire and you know it's a set job--still the insurance company has to pay until they can prove somebody set that. And that is the bad thing. Now if they would start, and I think you'll find they will, in case of arson there's going to be a delay in payment or maybe not the full coverage in payment, then that's going to stop a lot of this. We have always noticed from years gone by, the only arson cases that we really had [were] not so many homes, because people didn't want to burn their homes up, but it was business places. When business was bad around the first of the year we got a lot of them. But anymore we're getting buildings, we're getting homes, we're getting everything now. And they know that they're carrying insurance.

An insurance man said to me, "Frank, do you have insurance on your home?" I said, "Yes." He said, "All right, what if some night someone bombs and burns your place out. Would you want paid?" I said, "Why, sure." He said, "Yes, but we find bottles with gas all over the place. The people that are paying the insurance, they're entitled to that money until we can prove [different]."

And that is one of the hardest things to prove, arson. You almost have to catch a guy coming out of the door, and then he could lie and say, "I thought I saw a fire and it's too much for me," and still you can't prove that it was him, even though he was coming out of the door. It's his word against your word. It's a hard thing to prove, one of the hardest things to prove there is, arson. I think that's why there's so much of it going on. If they do catch them, if they'd throw the book at them maybe we'd stop some of them. They'd think twice. We've had two or three burn up. This kid that set this fire died, he got burned and died--the one up on Belmont, that restaurant up there--he died from burns that he got. If they get caught, the ones that don't burn and die, and they do catch them and they throw the book at them, maybe it would stop a

lot of this. But until they do that, why I guess it's going to be. That's all. And we can't do anything about it. Just go and put them out, that's all. And be careful. Anymore they're putting this gasoline in bags and just about the time you think you got it out, that thing's got just enough heat ready to bust and down it comes. And boy, you're right in the middle. We had one boy get caught in that one up there. That thing busted and burst out on him and he's lucky he's living today. Yes, we had that happen just about two months ago up there on Belmont Avenue--that restaurant up there. Yes, he really got burnt and burnt bad.

K: What injuries have you incurred over your 31 years of service?

F: I've been very, very fortunate. I have never had an injury. Now I'm not only talking about the Fire Department, but I'm even going back from the time I got out of school in 1931. All the time I've worked, in Truscon, in the packinghouse and in here since 1931, I don't like to brag, but I have to. I haven't lost one day's work since I got out of high school. I've just been a fortunate kid. I've been very, very fortunate, healthy-wise and injury-wise. I've been very, very fortunate.

K: You handed an answer to this question earlier. Do you feel that the four-man staff is adequate per house?

F: When I came on we used to have a five-man crew. And with a man on vacation or a man off sick, you still had four men. If anything less than four they'd transfer a man from another house to make a four-man crew. But they built a couple of new houses and they claim that they don't have the money to keep a full crew like that anymore. So we've been working what they call a four-man crew. But with the vacations and things that they have--we have three sets of vacations. When one finishes another one starts. When that's finished another one starts. Rather than give us money, they've been giving us time off and by doing that we never have more than three men. I'll bet you in a year's time there isn't maybe ten days that I have a full crew. Other than that there are always three. When I do have four they're pulling one out to fill some place that

only has two. They're making a third man with him. It is wrong, it is definitely wrong. But there is nothing you can do about it. The only way you can get away with that, you would have to close two or three houses and still hire more men, because when you close one house you're only picking up twelve men. There are four to a turn so you're only picking up four men so it's a bad situation.

Now your fire underwriters come in, they check this, that and the other and they say it's required for five men. But that they don't want to hear. But other things that they want to hear, they'll say, "Oh, we've got to go [with] this, the fire underwriters say it." Well, if you're going to go with one thing, let's go all the way! Don't just pick out what you want to do! So that's the way those things go. But any house shouldn't have less than five men to a house. With one man off you still have four. And you almost need four because: You have a man at the hydrant, until he gets hooked up, water turned on, he is not at the truck and that's when you really need him, when you first get there. The engineer, he's getting his pump in service; he's getting this ready and that ready. And who does it leave? Just the captain. He's got to pull the hose out, put the nozzle on, drag it to the building and then holler, "Give me water!" (laughter) And by that time you're so damn tired that you don't care if you get water or not! So that's why I say, it should have at least four men at all times, to be efficient.

- K: Before the interview, you mentioned to me that you were working with some of the volunteer departments. Is there much cooperation between the Youngstown Fire Department and other local volunteer departments?
- F: Let's put it this way: I don't care where you go, most paid departments think that the volunteers are not firemen. But let me tell you this: Your volunteer outfits today have better equipment and more equipment than us paid guys do and I can prove that. I've told that even to my chief. I said, "I'll take you out in Coitsville and I'll show you. You want to see some equipment, I'll show you some equipment. And anything you want is on that truck."

I've been trying to get foam here, for example, because we have this airport down here. We've had a couple fires there where planes crashed and guys burned up. The only thing I can go to is my high pressure water and use that, where if I had foam, I could use that. But I just can't get it and it really isn't that expensive. I think about three hundred or three hundred and fifty dollars would set me up with foam. It isn't that the cost is so great, but they just don't want to give it to you.

This house, I would say the last five or six years is when we finally got two Scott airs. We used to work with nothing! We used to have those little canteen-types like they use in the mines, and all those things were good for was to bring a refrigerator that sprung a gas leak out and drag it out on the porch. You couldn't go into a fire with them because they're not built for that. And that's what we had here. It just seems like the surrounding station at that time had less equipment than anything. And it isn't right. But we have two Scott airs now and we try to use them.

K: Do you have any closing comments or observations or some suggestions you could make over your years of experience?

F: Well, I'll tell you: When Coitsville started, I started over there and I always was interested in firefighting. I tried to do the job as quick and as easy as possible. I've made a complete set of things to go out and demonstrate to people. For example, I had a little box built just like a house and I had fuses in there and I would explain to the people about overloading their fuse box. Then I would shut one switch off and hook it up directly to a wire and tell them that if they had a fuse too strong--a lot of the fuses we'll find with a penny behind them so that they don't have to be replacing them all the time--eventually this wire would catch fire and it would be out in the open where they could see it. That was the way I had this thing made; and I would explain it to them. Those wires are usually in the wall. You don't see them but that's what happens when you overload them.

Then I had another thing made where I would take gasoline and I had a transformer and I had a handle

made where I would take it and show the people the arc that it would make. I'd carry a little jar and put gas in it and stick this right down in the gasoline and arc it. And it wouldn't do anything. I said, "But when I operate this I operate this alone because I don't want to be pulling that out and the guy hit the button by mistake. Because as soon as I get to the top," I said, "if you see [the] white fumes that form on top, we would have an explosion here just like about five sticks of dynamite. That is why I do this by myself."

I explain it to them how I had a Pyrex tube, four feet long, and would take cotton and wet it with gasoline on one end. And I'd put a candle down this end and show them how the fumes would go down and catch this on fire. That's what happens with a lot of these one-story homes where the garages are attached to the house. They have their car, they have their lawn mowers and they have gasoline in there and they're supposed to keep them in tin containers. Some of them have them in glass. And maybe somebody bumps the glass and it breaks and they think the gasoline evaporated and it's all gone. Well, the fumes are heavier than air and especially in the summertime, it would get in that cellar door, go down the steps and when it got over to the pilot light of their hot water tank, they had an explosion. Then they're calling the gas company up and say[ing] there's a gas leak and they've got an explosion. When they find out and check it out, it was the gasoline from their own garage that did it.

It's little things like that in this demonstration I would bring out and show them. I used to go quite a bit doing that but it got to the point where there was just no free time. Everybody wanted you to go, you know. And I didn't mind doing it if there was a big crowd there where you had somebody you could explain things. But one time I went out and he had told me there'd be fifty or sixty and when I got there, they miscued on the date or something and there were only five or six. I just got so disgusted I said, "That's it. If I have to come out for five or six people why I'm not coming anymore." Because you take all that stuff, you've got to haul it out there and set it up and everything. But I enjoyed doing it.

That's like when I was working with these different departments--I started with Coitsville--and these fellows from town used to say, "You're silly for working with them. You're not getting anything for it."

I said, "Listen, if I can help those guys from getting hurt or if they could save a life, I would feel all of my time is well spent." I had guys come to me that got in predicaments where they didn't know where they were at because of the smoke and things they got all screwed up and they stopped and they thought [of] what I told them [about] how to get out in case that happened. And they got their bearings and out they came.

They come and they thank me for some of the things that I explained to them. And the way they pay me back is this: when they have a steak dinner or something, they always have it a day that I'm off. You can't beat a bunch of guys like that, can you? Anything they have over there, they always try to have it the day that I'm off and that's how they show their appreciation for what I did for them, and I enjoy doing it for them.

K: You said you grew up in Youngstown. What was Youngstown like during the 1930s in the Depression period? What are some of the recollections you have?

F: The town wasn't anything like it is now. They had the streetcars in those days and Federal Street was a real busy street all the way down to Basin Street--that's down on the east part of Youngstown. They were all busy stores and it just seemed like most of the people in those days lived in a neighborhood, they grew up there, their kids grew up there and they got along so well. I'll give you a good example: When I was a kid, cars would come and they'd say, "Where's a certain street?"

"I don't know, but who are you looking for?" [we'd say]. It could be somebody who lives way out on the Sharon line; we'd tell them exactly how to get there and what house because we knew everybody. But today the way people are moving in and moving out, some of the people don't even know who their next-door neighbor is. And that's bad because you always need a hand, or they need a hand. If you don't get along with your neighbors or get to know them why that is a bad, bad thing. That's what I've