

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA FIRE DEPARTMENT
Truck Company No. 8
Platoon No. 3

January 21, 1971

MEMORANDUM TO THE FIRE CHIEF:

SUBJECT: Fireground Rescues.

At 0003 this date #25 was dispatched on a local for brush to 4307 3rd St., S.W. Upon their arrival they found fire coming from a picture window on the first floor of a three story apartment building. The flames were extending to the second and third floors. At 0006 they requested a Task Force Alarm to which Truck 8 responded first due. Upon our arrival fire could be seen blowing from the first and second floors and extending into the third floor and attic area. The rest of the building was obliterated by the very dense smoke that was boiling from every opening. A crowd of 15 to 20 people immediately began grabbing at us and hysterically screaming of people trapped inside. Due to these circumstances I requested a Box Alarm.

With the members of Truck 8 performing so many tasks at the same time, I feel that it would be impossible to place the events that followed in any kind of chronological order. Therefore, the following is a synopsis of each man's activities after arriving on the fireground:

Pvt. Barrett W. Payne, Halligan Bar: Immediately donned his Scott Air Pak and raced the stairway, which was full of heavy smoke and searing heat, to the third floor. He broke into Apt. 301 (directly over the fire) where, with the assistance of Pvt. Kenneth M. Cox, began to search for victims. While searching the back bedroom he heard the fire crackling overhead, but continued with his work. As he started out of the room and into the hallway the entire ceiling fell, engulfing the room and hallway in flames. With the ceiling down the two men could see that the flames had spread over top of this apartment and on to the next one (302), so they split up, with Pvt. Cox going to Apt. 302 and Pvt. Payne going back into the hallway to search the other bedroom (not yet involved). After completely searching Apt. 301, Pvt. Payne made his way to Apt. 303 and broke in the door. Just inside the door he heard Lt. Lawrence L. Beardmore in the back of the apartment. He worked his way back and found Lt. Beardmore with two children at a kitchen window. Taking the child that was still conscious (Anthony Howard, age 7), he crawled back to the stairway and down the three flights of steps. Once outside he gave the child to Pvt. L.H. Brummell of Ambulance 3 and immediately returned to Apt. 303, where he checked with Lt. Beardmore and then completed the search of that apartment.

Pvt. Kenneth M. Cox, AX and Hook: Pvt. Cox, assisted by Lt. Beardmore, raised the 24' ladder to the balcony of Apt. 301 and, without a mask, ascended the ladder, kicked in a window, and entered the heat and smoke filled apartment. There, he was

joined by Pvt. Payne. The two men had been searching the apartment for about a minute when the ceiling came down and the flames could be seen spreading to Apt. 302. Pvt. Cox then went immediately to Apt. 302 and began crawling through in search of trapped victims. In the back bedroom he encountered pieces of ceiling and fire dropping down, but he continued to search. Then, guided by a woman screaming, he found an open door to the third floor balcony. There he found James and Jean Coleman, with their two daughters, Karen, 7, and Theresa, 3. Pvt. Cox got them down on the floor and calmed them down. He then looked over the balcony and saw Engine 32 laying out down the alley, but no ladders long enough to reach his third floor position. With the fire now burning in the back bedroom he decided that they had to try the interior stairway. He calmly explained to the Colemans that they would crawl out of the apartment, that he would lead the way carrying Theresa, Mrs. Coleman would be in the middle, and Mr. Coleman would carry Karen and trail. He further explained that the going would be rough but if they all held hands and tried to hold their breath that they could make it. His explanation must have been very convincing, for they followed his plan to the letter-----and made it. (Mr. Coleman later thanked Pvt. Cox and told him that they were just ready to drop the children over the side and jump themselves when he found them.) Once outside, Pvt. Cox observed that the fire was being knocked down on the first floor, so he placed a Scott Air Pak in service and went back inside and searched that area.

Pvt. Michael J. Malone, Truck Driver: With the assistance of Pvt. Thomas M. Sweeney, Pvt. Malone raised the 30' ladder and knocked out the two large windows at the top of the stairwell in order to relieve the interior stairway of the superheated smoke and gases. They went back to the Truck and got the other 30' ladder and had just started to raise it to the third floor balcony of Apt. 304 when Mrs. Geraldine Addison and her 11 year old son, Burnell, came through the balcony door, choking, screaming, and coughing. They had started climbing over the rail when Pvt. Malone hollered for them to stay there, that they were coming to get them. He then climbed to the top, got the boy, and assisted him down. He started back up for the woman. As he neared the top of the ladder, the smoke, now gushing from open balcony door, rendered the balcony untenable and Mrs. Addison jumped on Pvt. Malone's head. Somehow he managed to hold on to her and carry her down, with her legs straddling his neck. Pvt. Malone went back up the ladder, and searched the rest of the apartment. He then tried to get to the next apartment (303), but was driven back by the intense heat and smoke in the stairway. He went back down the ladder and over to the first ladder (30' at the stairwell), raised it to the roof, and climbed up in search of a roof hatch to further relieve the interior stairway. There was no hatch, but the ventilation was taken care of while he was up there as the fire broke through the roof.

Pvt. Thomas M. Sweeney, Tillerman: Raised the 30' ladder and knocked out the large windows over the stairwell, went back

with Pvt. Malone and got the other 30' ladder and raised it in order to rescue the woman and boy from Apt. 304. Pvt. Sweeney, then realizing that there must be a need for ladders in the rear, enlisted the help of three civilians to help him. They went to the Truck, got the 35' ladder, carried it down a very steep embankment, over two fences, and up a steep terrace to the rear position. It was there that Pvt. Sweeney met Capt. James P. Reilly, of Engine 32, who did indeed have a need for the ladder, as he observed Lt. Beardmore in a third floor window with three children in his arms and heavy smoke boiling out above their heads. Pvt. Sweeney, Capt. Reilly, and Pvt. Arthur D. Swadley, the 3rd BFC's Aide, raised the ladder under the most difficult circumstances, as the ground in the rear came out about 6 feet from the building and then dropped abruptly off, down a sheer embankment of about 12 feet. Being the most winded of the three, Pvt. Sweeney then braced the ladder in a near straight-up position, while Capt. Reilly and Pvt. Swadley went up and got two of the three children (Bonnie and Alberto Howard).

Lieut. Lawrence L. Beardmore, in charge of Truck 8; Raised 24' ladder with Pvt. Cox and ordered Pvts. Sweeney and Malone to knock out the large windows over the stairwell. Then, hearing a woman scream "my kids are inside", I ran to her and asked her exactly where they were. She said that they were in the apartment straight ahead at the top of the steps and that she had left the apartment door open. I ran up the stairway, found the open door and started in when I heard a child crying. I shut the door behind me and crawled toward the sound. Immediately after turning through a doorway (which later turned out to be the kitchen) I found a 4 year old Ronnie Howard, unconscious on the floor. I picked him up and kept moving towards the crying sound. About 8 feet into the room I saw 7 year old Anthony Howard on the kitchen table that he had dragged to window. He was climbing out the window, ready to jump, when I grabbed him and pulled him back in. I turned, with the intention of taking them down the stairway, but had only taken a few steps when I stumbled over Alberto Howard, age 6, unconscious on the floor. Not being able to carry all three, and not wanting to leave one, I changed my plans. I sat Anthony on the table with his head out of the window and laid the two unconscious children on their backs over the windowsill in an effort to create an airway. I then yelled down to Capt. Reilly, of Engine 32, that I had three children and needed a ladder or a man with a mask to help me get them out. I had no sooner yelled when I saw Pvt. "W. Sweeney and some civilians coming with the ladder. It was raised to the window and Capt. Reilly came up and got 4 year old Ronnie. As Capt. Reilly started down the ladder I heard the apartment door being broken in so I gave a yell. Pvt. B.W. Payne had broken down the door, heard me yell, and came crawling back into the kitchen. I asked him if he thought he could make it back down the stairway and he said he could. I gave him Anthony, who was still conscious, and he made his way to the stairway and down. I then gave Alberto mouth-to-mouth resuscitation until Pvt. Swadley got to the top of the ladder to get him.

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After the nine people had been rescued the men of Truck 8 continued to do the routine truck work that is required at a working fire.

Lawrence L. Beardmore
Lieut.