

The History of Lynn's Bravest

By Jay Pozark

Firefighting is Like a Box of Chocolates.

You Never Know What You'll Find.

Chapter One

Sundays at the firehouse aren't necessarily quiet. Sunday mornings at the firehouse however, are supposed to be quiet. Coffee and pastry or a full breakfast in the cozy firehouse kitchen, with a paper somebody else brought in, that's a Sunday in the firehouse.

It was Sunday morning, August 11, 2002. I was working the dayshift at the Fire Alarm Office. My partner is Bob. The morning's first cup of coffee was just starting to settle in my stomach. I had started the paper work for the day. Ladder #2 is out of service for the day due to mechanical problems. This leaves the city with only two hook & ladder companies. Engine # 8 had come back from Peabody. They had gone over around 0330 to cover. Peabody had been fighting a brush fire for a few days and Eight had been among the "Out of Towner's" relocated to fill vacant stations. Back just in time, they changed crews.

0730 hours, a red light blinks on a 911 trunk line. The 911 Call Taker, (Cathy with a "C") pushes the button and answers the call for help. "911 what's your emergency?" she speaks into the receiver. After a pause, she instructs "Stay on the phone while I transfer you to the fire ambulance dispatcher."

I push the button on the 911 console, the screen shows the call coming from a pay phone, "Fire and Ambulance Dispatch" I say. "There's smoke coming from a building across from the Hotel Edison." The caller tells me, "It's the one they're renovating." I punch the address into the computer. Up pops City Box #435, Broad Street opposite Exchange Street, I hit the tones on the Zetron Model 26 Fire Station Dispatcher Device and announce the assignment. I reach up and punch Box 435 into the transmitter and the bells go down in the firehouses. I look over at Bob and say, "Now if the Police line rings it's not a good sign." The Police ring-down phone rings. "Yea, I got a call from a guy, says there's smoke coming out of the third floor of a building on Exchange Street", the Police Dispatcher states.

Box #435 was transmitted at 0731 hours. Response is Engines #5-1-8, Ladder #1, H-1 Capt. Jim McDonald (the shift safety officer), and Car C-3, the East Lynn District Fire Chief. I advise the District Chief of the second source of information. He acknowledges the message. A moment later C-3 arrives and reports smoke showing. There is no Rescue Company responding to help with the primary search. The Rescue has been deactivated, a victim of budget cuts.

At 0734 hours District Fire Chief John Miles orders a working fire. Ladder #1 commanded by Lt. Bourgeois (Engine #5 O.T.) goes down Exchange Street to the front of the fire building. Chief Miles orders them to throw their stick to the third floor. His plan, run a line over the aerial ladder for a quick and easy stretch. The tip of the stick lowers towards the window next to the one with the smoke coming out. Suddenly a man leans out of the window and begins gesturing wildly. He speaks no English and the firefighters can't understand what he's signaling.

The building is a three story brick and wood commercial structure approximately 150' wide by 100' deep with retail space on floor #1 and office space on the floors above. One section of the building is a former bank.

Engine #5 with Lt. Alley in charge goes to the front of the building and begins an interior stretch of a 1 ¾" hose line. Second due Engine #1 commanded by Capt. Alcock takes a hydrant to ensure a positive water supply then they assist Engine #5 with stretching the line. Engine #5 has a tough stretch, 250' of hose, Engine #1 lights up on the line as they go to the third floor. Ladder #1 is performing the primary search. No building can be assumed to be vacant. The accuracy of this is proven as Ladder #1 begins to find people. Arriving on the fire floor Engine #5

finds the door locked. Lt. Alley calls for forcible entry tools and third due Engine #8 commanded by Lt. Bradley (detail from Ladder #2) starts up with his crew and some tools. The door opens but the people want the fire department to go away. They are throwing pans of water on it and claim they need no help.

Dispatched on the "Working Fire Signal" Tower Ladder #4 with Capt. Raimo in charge and Squad #3, a BLS ambulance, respond to stand by. C-3 reports locating apparent squatters in the building and orders Tower #4 to assist with the primary search. Arriving on the fire ground Tower #4 also isolates the gas and electric services. The fire is located on floor #3. A pile of trash extended to the wall. Engine #5's officer calls for water and the line is charged. Members of Engine #8 assist with open up. There is fire inside the wall. The buildings occupants are amazed, they can't believe fire would burn inside a wall. H-1 is checking safety and assisting the two truck companies with occupant tracking and accountability.

On the working fire, Engine #7 is relocated to Engine #5 to even out the coverage and provide a unit in downtown East Lynn. The wisdom of this becomes apparent when they are dispatched to Silsbee Towers along with Squad #2 on receipt of a central station medical alarm. The patient is transported to the hospital by Squad #2 and Engine #7 returns to their cover assignment. With both in service hook & ladder companies committed to the fire the City of Revere is called for a truck to cover West Lynn and their Ladder #2 goes to the Western Avenue Station to keep Lynn Engine #3 company. Swampscott Ladder #21 covers East Lynn from Swampscott Headquarters.

The fire is knocked down and the units begin to overhaul. C-3 reports the fire address as 90 Exchange Street and requests the Arson Squad respond to determine cause and origin.

A dozen or so people have been located. The secondary search locates an old bank vault that has been converted to a bedroom complete with beds and dressers. A ladder on one wall of the top floor goes up to a ceiling hatch. The top floor cockloft is big enough for some people to stand in. Apparently it is also big enough to sleep in as the fire fighters find mattresses made up into beds here. The people are not squatters but are immigrants working on the renovation of the building and living there as part of their deal. C-3 orders the All Out on City Box #435 at 0824 hours.

Units return to quarters and begin cleaning up. Engine #8 will have no chance for that cozy breakfast today, and their lunch will be take out. Shortly after they come back in service they are sent back to Peabody. No rain means Peabody will spend the day in the woods. Maybe the good Lieutenant on Engine #8 will take his people to "Land and Sea" for lunch. It's only up the street from the cover assignment.

Sunday mornings are supposed to be easy. But.....

Firefighting is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you'll find.