

FIRE DEPARTMENT

I. Introduction

The Fire Department is organized under the Internal Security Division, although it functions largely as an autonomous unit. Mr. Jacoby, head of the Internal Security Division, devotes most of his time to the wardens, while the Fire Department is left up to the fire chief, Mr. Rhoads. Fire fighting is an important job in the community because of the fact that the buildings are placed relatively close together and are of inflammable material -- wood-covered with tar-paper. While the number of fires have been small, nevertheless it is necessary to keep an efficient staff of fire fighters on duty 24 hours a day in case a big fire occurs. If a fire occurs on a windy day it is possible for whole blocks and wards to be wiped out. This makes necessary not only a crew of fire fighters, but also fire prevention crews and a campaign to educate the public in fire prevention.

To the Japanese people fire fighting is a new occupation whose status in the community is yet undetermined. While the job of fighting fire is important in the community, the number of fires, especially major ones, is very few. It would seem that the more fires the firemen are able to extinguish efficiently, the higher will be their prestige in the community.

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It means that if a good job of fire prevention is done by the Department, their status in the community is likely to go down because firemen will be looked upon as loafers with very little to do. A fireman is at his post 24 hours at a stretch, during which time he also sleeps at the firehouse. Then he takes two days off. This means that he works two days in the week, and has five days free. It would be interesting to compare the attitude of the people toward firemen and the attitude they take toward wardens, who are on duty eight hours a day just like other workers. Or one can compare the relative status of farmers, who loaf on the job when they are not supposed to, and firemen, the nature of whose work is essentially one of merely waiting for a fire.

Because of the nature of the work of the fireman, it would be of interest to find out if any special type of people take up the job as firemen. The most significant question, however, seems to be the matter of status of the firemen.

II. Genesis and Organization

The first Fire Department of the Colony was organized in May with five men under the first Fire Chief, John Bauman. Only one fire engine was maintained by this little crew, which had to keep a vigilance of 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.¹ In June Mr. Bauman left for an assignment on the relocation project in Arizona, and he was replaced by the present Fire Chief,

¹ T.D. Mag., Nov. 1934.

Mr. Ernest Rhoads.¹

Soon after Mr. Rhoads took over the department, two fire stations were established. George Takao was selected as Acting Assistant Fire Chief. Fire captains were chosen as follows:

Fire Station No. 1:

Art Kozono
Kay Maekawa
Minoru Kimura

Fire Station No. 2

Giro Snow
Yoshio Nishida
Ed Najima
Frank Sakita

As a three-shift system was instituted, each captain was made responsible for a shift. The fire fighting team consisted of eight men to a shift.² Stations 1 and 2 were located at opposite ends of the colony at the end of the fire breaks separating Wards I and II from III and IV. Later a third fire station was set up at the south end of the colony in the "Alaska" section.

The first serious fire broke out in the Administrative Staff apartment on May 28 at 11:55 a.m. The fire was caused by a faulty water heater unit. After some effort on the part of the small crew of firemen, the military police, administrative staff workers, and several local colonists, the fire was brought under control, but not until most of the apartment had burned down, leaving several members of the administrative staff homeless.³

¹ Information Bulletin 6/11/42

² T.D. 6/27/42

³ T.D. 5/28/42

During June there were several small fires in messhalls, but all of them were soon extinguished. Also there were false alarms sent in to the fire station without giving the location of the fire, and the colonists were asked to give the definite block and house number in case of a fire.¹

Besides the fire station crew, fire safety teams were organized to be responsible for watching out for fire hazards. Fifteen men were assigned to four blocks each. They in turn were assigned to appoint volunteers in their sections to be on the alert for fires.² In each block a volunteer fire brigade was organized under the leadership of the block manager. Occasional fire drills were held to keep in practice of knowing what to do and knowing where the buckets and ladders were located. Whenever there was a fire alarm this volunteer crew was expected to be at their positions, ready to go into action in case fire should spread to their block. One look-out was assigned to climb on to the roof of a barrack to see where the fire broke out.

On July 22, flames shooting up the chimney of Mess Hall No. 2420 caused some excitement, but the flame was controlled as soon as the firemen arrived.³ On July 24, firemen were called upon to handle two other fires of a similar nature.⁴ Fire alarms have been sounded only occasionally, and the fires were usually of a minor sort.

¹ T.D. 6/27/42
² T.D. 7/8/42
³ T.D. 7/24/42
⁴ T.D. 7/27/42

The only fire worth mentioning is the fire that broke out in Canteen No. 3. This was the second big fire of any consequence, and it put the organization and training of the firemen to a test. The fire broke out about 4:45 a.m. It was believed that leakage of electricity from a shorted wire in an ice cream cooler was responsible for the fire. An alarm was sounded. Company A of Station No. 1 was the first to arrive on the scene. Drilled tactics in attaching the hose and in laying it out worked perfectly, and a stream of water was soon being shot into the flame. Fire trucks from the other two stations appeared on the scene too. Volunteer firemen from nearby blocks ran to the fire to help with buckets and axes. Chief Rhoads himself took the hose and went to the smoking building. The nearby apartments had begun to take out furniture and other possessions, fearing that the fire would spread. But the fire was soon brought under control, and the fears of the colonists allayed. The wardens kept in control the large crowd which gather to see the blaze. There was no panic or looting during the fire. In 15 minutes since the alarm was sent in, the fire was under control. The front half of the canteen was partially burned and the merchandise there burned or smoke-damaged. The damage amounted to about \$7,000.00, but with sufficient proceeds from the fire sale and amount received from the insurance company, no actual loss was taken by the Community Enterprise. The firemen has proven their worth in bringing this fire under control.¹

¹ T.D. 8/13/42

Since the canteen fire the Fire Department has had to answer several fire alarms, but they have all been of minor nature or false alarms.

At present the firemen are organized under Fire Chief Ernest Rhoads and three assistant fire chiefs, one to each shift. There are three shifts, A, B, and C in each of the three stations, each one on duty every third day. One shift, then, starting at 7:30 a.m. is on duty for 24 hours until the following morning when the following shift comes on duty, and then the crew takes two whole days off. There are nine men to a shift or platoon, but only eight men on duty at any one time, one man taking a holiday each time the platoon is on duty. To each platoon there is a captain chosen by the assistant chief. The captain assigns the following positions to the men on his force;

1. Assistant captain
2. Driver
3. Assistant driver
4. Nozzleman
5. Assistant nozzleman
6. Hose breaker
7. Hydrant man

III. Activities

When a platoon comes on duty at 7:30 in the morning, its first duty is to clean up the fire station. Cots have to be folded up, mattresses piled up, the floor swept and mopped. This does not usually take more than half an hour. If the fire truck is dirty it is washed. The rest of the time firemen can sit around

and do what they want to. Some do wood-carving, others play such card games as Pinochle or "500" or perhaps engage in games of ping pong. Two or three may pick up a comic book or a True Story Magazine to read. An elementary first aid course was required of all the firemen, and they have completed this work. A few are still taking advance courses in first aid. Each time the platoon is on duty, there is a drill which requires about an hour. Formerly firemen were required to do such odd jobs as checking the fire hydrants, putting extinguishers and the like, but these have been taken over entirely by the fire prevention crew.

At lunch and dinner time the force divides into two shifts of four each to go to eat at a nearby messhall. At midnight they are allowed to go after a midnight snack, a privilege also accorded to wardens. There was a feeling on the part of the Caucasian staff that midnight snacks were unnecessary for firemen, for whom the snack constituted a fourth meal. But as there was such a protest from the force, they were allowed to continue to have the snack, two at a time.¹

At night two persons are required to stay up every hour to watch for telephone calls. When a fire alarm is sent in, the telephone rings one long call in every fire station. The fire siren at the central fire station (No. 1) is blown immediately to put people on the alert. Through the telephone, the location of the fire is discovered. In the meantime, firemen, who go to sleep in

¹ Interview with Jacoby

their pants, jump into their shoes and shirts and are on their way out to the fire immediately.

As a part of his duty the captain is required to keep a log book, showing what his platoon has done each time it was on duty.

The firemen have organized baseball and horseshoe teams. Time, however, hangs heavy on their hands for most of them. They are restless and spend much of their time joking, talking, and playing pranks. Firemen in fire station No. 1 offered their services to make the backstop for the baseball field close to their station.¹ The C platoon in the same station asked for a volunteer dance teacher.² Firemen's Association was formed and a float put out in one of the parades, but interest in the association seems to be very low.

IV. Analysis of Force

Mr. Rhoads is a very capable fireman, as good as any that could be gotten in any other part of the country, according to Dr. Jacoby. Mr. Rhoads has organized his force efficiently and the force has proven its worth at the canteen fire. Firemen seem to respect Mr. Rhoads and get along with him quite well. He seems to take a sympathetic attitude toward the Japanese. He is a quiet, conservative, kindly looking person. He takes pride in his ability as a fire fighter.

¹ T.D. 6/20/42

² T.D. 7/25/42

No. 3 fire station was largely made up of Hawaiian boys, but many of them became restless and left for the beetfield. There are a few Kibeis on the force, but for the most part firemen do not "go in" for Japanese things. They are largely Niseis, from 20 to 25 years of age, rather young for the most part. The average age in one platoon is about 22. Many firemen have interest in musical instruments. They like to listen to the radio and to popular music. They are the type that likes excitement, but find very little to get excited about, except when there is a fire call. They like the easy work, but many are bored with just sitting around, waiting for fire alarms. For this reason some have gone to the sugar beet fields. Men are easy to replace as there is a waiting list of persons desiring to find a position as a fireman. It seems that only a few of the firemen go to dances or on dates or even know how to dance. Some of the firemen are very quiet and conservative. Sports seem to be the most popular interest of this group.

The picture we get of the firemen is of youths who are ready to take up the ways of the socially adjusted person without having had sufficient training to make the transition gradually. They are of an age when they should be taking girls out on dates, going to dances, and in general taking active part in the social activities of the community. The necessity of having to stick to the values of an exclusively boy's group, the

the loss of status among the firemen if such values were not maintained, probably puts many firemen in a confused and restless state of mind.

V. Special Problem: Status

It is difficult to determine exactly at this point what the status of the fireman is. It is undoubtedly true that many colonists feel that firemen have a very easy job, and hence are likely to classify them as lazy. Being a group of men, they are likely to be thought of in conjunction with bachelors, whose status in the community is relatively low. Many people probably have the conception of firemen as "rowdy" boys, the kind of boys who will make derogatory remarks at couples going by. The status of the rowdy youth is also relatively low. The statement by some girls that they don't like firemen helps to determine their status. It can be said that the status of the fireman is relatively low.

Many people probably changed their attitude toward the firemen after the efficient way in which they put out the canteen fire. Since fire is one of the important legitimate sources of fear on the part of the colonists, this should add to the respect they have for firemen. However, there have not been enough major fires to maintain the prestige of firemen through fire-fighting. To what extent the status of firemen is affected by the number of major fires they put out successfully will remain an interesting question.

The attitude of one fireman, Ikuo,¹ toward other types of work is of interest. He says that firemen and wardens have never gotten along. At the canteen fire the firemen were accused by wardens of looting some of the merchandise. Ikuo feels that people don't think too highly of the wardens. Some of them are gamblers and are about as bad as people they have to arrest. Ikuo changed from the Fire Department to the Hog Department when it was opened and headed by a neighbor. At first he was enthusiastic about going into something where he could learn work which would be of use to him later on. He finds that the workers on the hog farm are extremely quiet and hard-working. His conception of warehouse workers is that they are older than firemen, rougher, and "go around" more. To him, firemen are a relatively young and innocent group of boys who like to have excitement and fun.

The firemen seem to have had relatively few conflicts in their department. At first there were some difficulties because they were being made to do odd jobs such as laying concrete floors and checking up on hydrants, but this source of conflict has been eliminated by having the fire prevention crew do the odd jobs. There was also some dissatisfaction voiced because firemen were not able to get clothing for some time. Even now, they have not received shoes which they feel they should have. They also had to fight for the privilege of obtaining midnight snacks. Other sources of dissatisfaction has been the enforced idleness

¹ Case history to be written.

← required by the type of their work and their inability to make the transition to a more socially acceptable type of adjustment, especially in their relation with girls.

V. Conclusion

In this section two things seem worth mentioning. One is the relatively low social status of the firemen within the community. Part of this is due to the type of work, and part to the nature of boys who have been attracted to this department. The other point is that firemen as a group seem to be adolescents in a conflict situation, especially in relation to girls. For a better social adjustment they should drop some of their old values and take up new ones. They do not seem to be succeeding in doing either.

Sources:

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Interviews:

Dr. Jacoby
Ikuo Morimoto