

TURNOUT–SECOND ALARM

The long awaited sequel to
Turnout – a Firefighters Story

By
Bill Hall

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In Memory of Donald W. Hubbel
Captain, Rescue Company 1
Died in the Line of Duty February 1, 2008

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OTHER BOOKS BY BILL HALL

Turnout-A Firefighters Story

Sykesville

Remember Me in Paradise-The Story of the Thief

They Gave Blood, Sweat and Tears-True Stories of
American Veterans from WW II to Operation Iraqi
Freedom

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FORWARD

Firefighting is considered one of the most dangerous professions in the known world. Every year hundreds of firefighters are killed or maimed while on the job. Yet every year thousands of men and women apply for this dangerous job. They know the consequences can be devastating. To begin with, their family life is thrown into turmoil. Many times, they will miss the little things that mean so much to families such as a child's first step, a good report card brought home with a dose of excitement, seeing your child ready for a prom, or even turning over to say good night to your loved one.

Having been a firefighter in the Baltimore City Fire Department for over thirty years, I have had the misfortune of having missed many of these little things in life that really matter the most. The best that can be done is to make the time with those loved ones memorable and lasting.

Firefighters also know that their physical body will have to go through torturous agony. They will meet fate face-to-face and usually win but they also know that every single call could be their last. At the same time, smoke-eaters understand that each of those calls might be the one where they save a life or help a person in distress.

Finally, firefighters know that they will see the downside of life more than the upbeat side. Deaths, injuries and illnesses will fill their career of responses. This is enough to make an average person quit and go into another field. Yet for men and women born to be firefighters, the drive is there—the job is something they have to do! For those who do not quit, the toll can be catastrophic. Many turn to alcohol or drugs. Marriages fall into jeopardy or divorce.

Homes can break up into a million pieces and health can fail dramatically. Tens of thousands of firefighters in our country alone battle these obstacles every day to be the best they can and survive. These are the men and women who daily dedicate their lives to protecting and serving the cities, towns, and communities around our nation and around the world.

When I wrote my first book, *Turnout — a Firefighter's Story*, I was very self-conscious about how the fire service would receive my work. However, I have been thrilled at the responses to one of the biggest challenges of my life.

Lots of people say that one day they're going to write a book, and I found myself saying the same thing as I thought about the fire service and the dedication of the people in the field. Finally, I just decided to bite the bullet and write one. I wrote most of the manuscript in longhand at the firehouse on night shifts, drawing from my own experience. Occasionally, I would ask one of the men for more details about an incident he was describing. Naturally, he would want to know why I wanted to know. I would then explain that I'd like to put his story in my book. "Oh, sure, you're really writing a book?" was usually the response. I don't think anyone believed me.

Well, when I brought in my first copy, everyone was surprised and amusingly curious about where I included each of them. Before long, some of the men could tell me their individual precise pages and lines. I enjoyed the fact that they were so excited about seeing themselves in print. They also told me that they appreciated my honest account of what the fire service is really like, and I was very pleased that they had accepted and respected my work.

Perhaps the most wonderful tribute to *Turnout — a Firefighter's Story* that I received came from the mother of one of the men in my unit. My wife and I were invited to the wedding of a firefighter assigned to Rescue Company 1, whose brother-in-law was also in the same unit. While

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roaming around during the reception, the brother-in-law of the groom brought his mother over to meet me. She took my hand, held it tightly and looked into my eyes as she said, "You know I read your book and it made me very sad that my son was a firefighter. But it also made me very proud that he was a firefighter!"

To all of those out there in the fire service, *Turnout—Second Alarm* is for you.

Bill Hall

Chapter 1

Close Calls

After many years as a firefighter, the one thing that amazes me about my job is the tenacity of the men and women in my profession. Each day we face the impossible and improbable. Yet each day, we go on with our lives as though the day before never happened. Some of the toughest moments in my life have involved facing the deaths of my comrades. These were men and women I had lived with for half my working life. They had families and friends had gone to work thinking they would return home as usual that night or morning.

Many firefighters have come perilously close to death or injury but lived to talk about the experience, although describing what goes through the mind during those critical moments or seconds is never easy. It is sometimes hard to say just what goes through the mind during these moments or seconds. But those close calls have earned them a special place in the hearts of man.

Responsibility is not something to be taken lightly, causing some people to run away while others embrace the role. Sometimes, though, a person willingly accepts a responsibility and yet everything still goes terribly wrong, despite the noblest intentions. Those can be a harrowing experience, and such is the tale of Lieutenant Stephen Gibson.

The night was relatively calm for the men of Engine 52. They lounged around in their old, two-story brick station most of the evening. The turn-of-the Twentieth Century

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station sat amidst row houses like so many other stations in Baltimore. Their fire engine was the only unit in the station. The apparatus sat surrounded by old brass fire poles and furniture for the firefighters to lounge in when they got the chance. Upstairs, via the spiral staircase was the dormitory where the firefighters slept. A company officer has his bunk in a separate office away from the men.

On an ordinary night they would have had several calls. But such is the fire service. The men never know how busy they are going to be. On this particular evening everyone had their bellies full, and the doldrums began to set in. One by one, the men began their ascent up the spiral stairs to their bunks. One man proceeded to the watch desk, since that was his assigned duty. He rubbed his eyes and lifted the newspaper to the entertainment section, got out his pen, and began working on the crossword puzzle.

The company officer, Lieutenant Gibson, went to his office and turned down the sheets on his bunk. First, he wanted to make sure his paperwork was completed so he sat at his desk and fiddled through the paperwork, one by one, placing them in their appropriate boxes. He walked over to his window and scanned the horizon. It was a quiet evening, he thought. Maybe he would be well rested for his part-time job tomorrow, he thought, seeing that the time on the office clock was just ...1 A.M.

On North Avenue near Charles Street, almost directly in the middle of Baltimore City, sat a nightclub, where inside a capacity crowd enjoyed a party atmosphere filled with music and dancing. As the evening drew to a close, the crowd began to dwindle, eventually leaving only the owner and the workers, who now faced the hard part of the evening cleanup. Waitresses began clearing and wiping tables while the bartender focused on his area. Glasses and dishes were placed in the dishwasher for cleaning, and finally, trash was placed in a larger can in the back storage room for disposal

in the morning. Then, en masse, everyone left to go home while the owner secured the building and left as well.

In the storage room, cigarette butts and hot ashes from the ashtrays that had not been properly disposed began to brew, their concoction festering in the plastic garbage bags. As the ashes began to glow, they burst into flames, totally consuming the plastic that surrounded them. The cheap paneling in the room caught fire in just a matter of minutes and the fire began walking up the wall and extending itself into the drop ceiling. From that point, the blaze took charge of the nightclub. A police officer on patrol noticed smoke pouring out of the first-floor doors and windows and immediately called his dispatcher and told them to notify the fire department.

The Fire Department Dispatchers at 410 East Lexington Street handled the call with precision. The first alarm assignment was dispatched to the incident on North Avenue near Charles Street for a report of a building fire. They informed responding units that police were on the scene. The time was approximately 2:30 A.M.

Lieutenant "Hoot" Gibson tossed and turned in his bunk, unable to get to sleep. Then his ears perked up as he heard the low chatter on the fire department monitor in his office. But when he heard arriving companies scream out, "Heavy fire and smoke showing!" he threw off his covers and proceeded to slide the pole to the first floor. He paced over to the watch desk next to the watchman and listened to the radio chatter from the fire ground. Suddenly a voice over the airways called out, "Heavy fire in a two-story nightclub. It's advancing to exposures! Give me a second alarm!"

As per rules and regulations, any time a second alarm in the city is sounded, members on watch are to turn out their respective companies and notify their company officer. The watchman pulled the toggle switch on the watch desk that sounded the station gong. The loud clang woke the men

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upstairs who slid the pole in their turnout pants and ran over to the watch desk.

The young lieutenant informed the men of the second alarm on North Avenue. They listened as units began setting up operations over the radio. Anticipation was in the air as their ears were acutely aware of what was happening on the east side. They all knew that they would go on the third alarm if one were sounded. Slowly, as if in step with destiny, the men of 52 began putting on their turnout gear. One man even went over and opened the apparatus bay door. They "knew" they were going.

The battalion chief in charge at the nightclub fire scene was having trouble containing the fire. He shifted men and equipment here and there, trying to get the best upper hand on the fire that he could. But nothing seemed to be working right. This was truly a stubborn inferno. The real problem was the exposures on both sides. Smoke was now billowing into them through cracks in the structures and through the upper floors. He realized his dilemma, "Give me a third alarm!" he called through the radio. "Have all units stage."

Gibson and his men mounted their unit and sprang out the station door. Hoot's foot rested on the floor button of the siren as he adjusted his turnout coat and helmet en route. The air horn burst through the night air as Engine 52 headed for the fire.

When they rounded Druid Park Lake, they could see the telltale orange glow to the east. Once they turned onto North Avenue, arcing flames lifted toward the sky, in an attempt to consume the nightclub building and the surrounding structures. As the men of Engine 52 approached the fire ground, they were greeted by a maze of stretched hose lines that looked like a plate of worms. Their radio blurted out their initial orders as they arrived, "All third alarm units stage in the staging area."

Staging at a major fire is not something Hoot took lightly on that night or any other. The process is one that

involves the placing of newly arriving apparatus that might be called upon for use in a temporary reserve status. As pieces of equipment are needed, they are drawn from this nearby pool of vehicles. Being man of action, Hoot didn't like to be left standing around watching and wanted to "get in there."

As he and his men stood by their engine, the adrenaline began to overpower them. One by one they fiddled and fooled with their chinstraps and gloves while Hoot played with the radio. They paced and moved incessantly as the first two alarms fought the blaze. "Engine 52," the call finally came in over the radio, "report to the front of the building and meet the Chief."

The fire was really rolling now. As Hooter neared the Chief with his men, he scanned the carnage. Thick, black smoke intertwined with plumes of orange, yellow and red flames as they billowed out of the dying building. Operations, although massive, seemed futile. The command officer approached the lieutenant and placed his hand on Hooter's shoulder, "Hoot, I want you to get a two-and-a-half-inch hose line," he said, "and take it to the second-floor window. Be careful." "You've got it, Chief," Hoot replied.

The crew of 52 took a hose line off one of the first alarm companies and stretched it to the base of a thirty-five-foot ladder. They then began their ascent. As they reached the window, Gibson led them inside to the base of the opening. There they hugged the floor as superheated gases flowed around them in their protective gear.

Water sprang out of their nozzle and began attempting to quench the inferno. Slowly Hoot and his men advanced to within fifty feet before the call came from the Chief Officer for them to back out of the building. The Chief saw an imminent flashover threat that could endanger everyone inside.

The order was a wise and prudent one. One by one, the men of 52 descended the thirty-five-foot ladder, lugging the

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water-laden hose down with them. As they climbed down, blankets of smoke rolled around them, threatening to overtake the valiant crew. As Hooter stood there, taking a breather, he scanned the fire scene and saw how conditions were deteriorating drastically.

Next door to the nightclub was a storefront property, which was rapidly becoming affected by the nightclub fire. The Chief told Engine 52 and Engine 6 to take their lines into the storefront as heavy smoke began pouring out the front windows. Both companies took their two-and-a-half-inch lines and dragged them slowly into the broken front openings.

As soon as they entered the structure, they could feel the heat pounding their bodies. Their breathing intensified in their air masks as adrenaline filled their veins. They could see no fire, but heavy smoke began rolling around them. They sprayed the hot air, trying to cool the atmosphere down just a little. They were now between twenty-five and fifty feet inside the structure. Then Hoot began to notice something strange.

On a normal fire, firefighters usually yell to each other, especially when wearing air masks because hearing each other is difficult in all of the confusion, but something more was wrong here and he began hearing yelling and screaming. But this yelling had a much greater urgency to it than he'd heard before, and he just had a gut feeling that this was a bad situation. The thick smoke incapacitated his vision but as he advanced forward into the unknown, he was assured by the fact that his men were right behind him. As he led them through the destruction, they could not see their hands in front of their faces and stumbled over debris, furniture and fallen ceiling material. Adding to this scenario was the exhilaration firefighters get when battling a blaze which can result in their getting caught up in the moment.

The screaming and yelling voices could still be heard throughout the chaos, only now the sounds seemed closer.

Hoot yelled to his two men. He received no answer. He screamed for them but there was still no answer. He fed his way back on the hose line to where they should have been, but the men weren't there. A sickly panic began to overtake him. Screams could still be heard in the background. Hoot Gibson could not find his men. They were gone.

He looked toward what he thought was the front of the building just in time to see a ball of fire erupt in front of him and flash toward the outside. At the same time, he continued to hear screaming and hollering from what he felt were several locations now. Hoot's gut feeling told him that the floor had collapsed and swallowed everyone up.

"Oh, my God! My men are dead...they're gone!" he whispered, the horrifying feeling nearly overcoming him. But his tenacity for holding things together was stronger. In the deep darkness, he hugged the floor and felt for the hose line that would lead him to safety outside. Slowly he felt his way forward to the huge open windows and at last saw hand lights peering inside. Hooter scrambled to the outside screaming that he had lost his men, and maybe more were gone inside. When he tells the story now, he recalls feeling like a "basket case." As the Chief approached, all Hoot could say was "Gotta find my men. I've gotta find my men."

"Come on, I'll go with you," said a nearby firefighter, who realized the urgency and grabbed Hooter's arm. The two of them began to advance inside the building when the Chief ordered them to back out. He told them the situation was far too dangerous. "What you saw," the Chief told Hooter, "was a surface fire that was knocked down by outside forces.

"But my men!" Hooter pressed, "They're inside and there might be others."

Disgusted by the order to stay outside for now, Hoot leaned over with his hands on his knees, taking a deep breath through the air mask. Then he stood up and fiddled with the spider straps on the face piece so he could remove the piece

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from his head. Sweat poured down his face as it made traces around the soot-covered wrinkles of worry. Grief was overtaking him. Tears slowly began to well up in his eyes, but then when he noticed something strange.

Across the street, standing next to a pumper and talking to a pump operator, were his two men. A swell of relief overcame him. At the same time a feeling of rage surged through him. He bounced across the maze of hose strewn throughout the street and ran right up into their faces, not knowing whether to kill them or kiss them. “Why were you guys outside when I was inside?” He demanded to know.

“Hey, Lieutenant,” they answered obviously concerned, too, about what had happened. “We heard the order to get out and tugged on the line, signaling you to leave. But because the smoke was so thick, we assumed you were right behind us. When we got outside and didn't see you, the fire flashed over. What seemed like hours were only minutes!”

Hooter told them he just experienced the worse feeling he'd ever had, thinking they were still inside the building and knowing he couldn't go out and leave them in there. If he did, he would either be a hero or a coward. The panic had emotionally drained him.

But the fire was now under control, and the Chief ordered him to sit down for a few minutes before going to the coffee wagon for a drink.

As he sat there, he realized that he never wanted to experience the thought of losing anyone again, especially the people under his command. Within an hour, Engine 52 was packed up and ready to return to quarters with one worn out lieutenant on board and two royally reamed firefighters.



Medic 1 was having a grueling night. But, finally, this was the last night of the shift. In just a few hours, Paramedic Mark Hofmann would be on his way home. This shift had put him to the test. His skills as a paramedic in Baltimore City were put to use several times in the forty-four hours since he had come on duty. The time was 5:00 A.M.

As Medic 1 backed into its station, Mark reached for the Modat communications radio and pushed the IN STATION button, officially placing them off the air. He rolled out of the passenger door as the driver, a detailed firefighter assigned to drive, exited the driver's side. Then the two of them trudged up the long flight of steps to the station kitchen to make a fresh pot of coffee. Mark and the firefighter agreed that there was no sense in trying to go back and lay down this late. Soon they would be on their way home. Mark stretched his arms behind him with a large yawn. Running his fingers through his hair, the firefighter slowly rested his elbows on the table. Weariness took its toll. The coffee was ready at last. They both filled their cups and sat down to take a sip of the hot brew. Again, for the eighteenth time this evening, the intercom blurted out, "Medic 1...Turn out. 734 West Fayette Street...report of a shooting." They put their unfinished cups of coffee down and headed for the medic unit.

The eleven-story public high rise had become a dead-end for poor people in Baltimore. Firefighters were constantly responding to this location for stuck elevators, ADT alarms and trash chute fires. The structure did not present a good atmosphere to raise children or a family. How well did Clara Boone know this?

Clara's marriage was not going very well. Her husband John was heavy into drugs. To him drugs were not profitable but a necessity. He was hooked and knew he was as well as did Clara. Their two children were usually caught in the crossfire of fisticuffs and verbal exchanges that ensued between them. Many times, as they battled, the two children

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ages three and four, would hide behind the sofa in the apartment. After their exchanges Clara would light up a cigarette while her husband walked out slamming the door shut behind him. However, this morning, something totally different happened.

In Medic 1, Mark called in on his mobile radio that they were responding. The dispatcher informed them that police were on the scene and that they had a female victim on the seventh floor. With this news, the firefighter pushed the accelerator pedal a little harder to the floor as Mark turned to look out the window and saw his reflecting yawn through the glass.

Earlier Clara had finally calmed the two children down and had urged them back to sleep. She pulled their bedroom door almost closed and headed to the kitchen to turn the light out. Her nerves had again been shattered from the argument. She had never seen her husband so enraged before, and she'd been so frightened that she began to shake inside.

As she neared the kitchen, her front door burst open. Her hands went up to her chest as her mouth gaped open. She'd immediately recognized the dark silhouette that bounded into her room as her husband. His large hand reached out and grabbed her hair as she tried to get away, her screams seemingly in vain. While running she knocked over the living room lamp, knocking it to the floor. Her husband picked the lamp up and tossed the appliance at her, narrowly missing her head. Then he'd stopped his pursuit suddenly as he'd reached into his back pocket. Clara turned to see what the item was. Her eyes widened in horror.

"No! No!" she cried. "Please, John. Don't do it!"

Then Clara saw him bring around the .22 caliber handgun. The bright, shiny weapon had only one purpose, and John spewed out profanities at the petrified female cowering in the corner of the living room. She'd pleaded with him not to shoot her. However, John had only come back to the apartment for one reason—he was going to blow

her away. As she'd peeked through tear-swollen eyes, John raised the gun with both hands and trained the weapon right at her. Clara knew this was the end. If he was going to shoot her, she wasn't going to give him an easy target. She'd dashed from her spot and headed for the children's room. At first, he'd been startled. But when he got his wits about him, he chased her down the small, narrow hallway with the gun trained on the back of her head. As Clara neared the doorway, he fired. He fired again and again. Three shots struck her in the back of the head. She stumbled in the hallway and went face down on the floor.

Realizing the crime he'd just committed, John panicked. He threw the gun out the seventh story window and looked out into the hallway for possible witnesses. Then he glanced back and looked down at Clara who was lying in a small pool of blood. Fear overcame him as he ran out into the large common hallway of the complex and proceeded down the stairwell. From there, he thought, he didn't know where he would go. He just ran.

Clara remained on the floor for five minutes. The pain thudded in her head. She could feel the warm liquid slowly rolling over her face, grazing her eyes. The sound of the children's voices finally roused her enough to push herself over, where she saw them standing there crying for their mommy.

"It's gonna be all right, babies," she said reaching out to them with her right hand. "Mommie's gonna be all right."

Then she struggled, crawling, to the phone. The four-year-old handed the receiver to her mommy. "Push 9-1-1, sweetie," Clara instructed her.

The child obeyed as Clara propped up against the living room wall. She told the dispatcher that she was shot and needed help. The voice on the other end of the line reassured her that help was on the way.

Medic 1 now pulled up on the scene to the sight of several blue lights flashing and did not indicate a K-Mart

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store special. Mark knew this scene was far more serious than that.

"We have a female, about thirty years old," said the officer who approached them, "She's been shot in the back of the head several times and she's conscious, believe it or not."

Mark and the firefighter immediately went to the back of the unit and began to get the necessary equipment they felt they would need. The police had the stairwell commandeered. Yes, the elevators were out again...both of them. The duo gave each other disgusted looks. Things were bad enough that they had to walk up seven stories at 5:00 A.M. with all their equipment too. But they had a victim up there, and they had to go get her, so they began their trek upward.

As they entered the apartment, a feeling of utter disbelief overcame the medic crew. The police officer in charge of the investigation pointed to the kitchen. There sat their victim at the kitchen table, smoking a cigarette with one hand while the other handheld a bloody kitchen towel to the wounds.

Mark placed his clipboard on the table and walked over to Clara.

"What happened to you, ma'am?" he asked not believing what he was seeing.

"I've been shot in the back of the head," she answered almost matter-of-factly.

Mark had no trouble seeing this fact as he scanned and examined her. Sure enough, there were three small holes that were now bleeding very lightly. But as Mark talked to her, trying to evaluate her mental state, he noticed something strange about the female's face.

As Clara talked, he took more notice of the three small bumps on her forehead. She continued talking, relating what had happened and kept complaining of a terrible headache. The closer Mark examined her, the more he knew why. He

now realized that the three small bumps protruding from the forehead were the three .22 caliber bullets that had hit her. They had entered the skin just around the skull and rode the skull around the top of the head, resting in the area of the forehead. This would later be proven. The paramedic realized that he would need an engine company to respond to bring up more specialized equipment from the medic unit. He immediately put out the call to the dispatcher.

As Mark bandaged the wounds, he could hear Engine 38 pull up to the front of the building. The firefighter took Mark's radio and called to Engine 38 to tell them to bring up a long backboard and neck collar. They acknowledged. As they climbed the steps, Paramedic Hofmann administered an I.V. of Ringers Lactate solution to Clara's left arm. She flinched and pulled back causing the needle to withdraw from the skin. Mark held pressure until the bleeding stopped enough so he could attempt another I.V. This time Clara didn't move, and the I.V. was successful.

Engine 38 had been dispatched to assist the medics. The crew took some equipment to the apartment to assist in extracting Clara to the medic unit waiting on the street below. The long backboard and the neck collar were placed on the middle-aged black female without resistance. A neighbor had come in by now to keep an eye on Clara's children who stood by sobbing for their mommy. On a count of three, the rescuers lifted Clara on the board and began the arduous trek down the narrow stairwell.

After approximately ten minutes, they carefully got her to the first floor where the stretcher waited. The firefighter that worked with Mark climbed in the back of the medic unit with him as another firefighter from Engine 38 drove the unit to University Hospital just a few blocks away. A team of doctors and nurses anxiously awaited them as they arrived at the emergency entrance. Mark, with the I.V. held high, walked beside Clara as he talked to the emergency room personnel, relaying critical information. They transferred her

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to the hospital gurney and backed out of the way as the house staff took over operations.

Mark gathered information for his run ticket while the firefighter cleaned the stretcher and restocked the supplies they had used. Before they could finish, they received another call for yet another shooting on the west side. This eventually turned out to be a false alarm. Mark and the firefighter's interest in Clara's case peaked, so they decided to take a ride back to University to check on her progress.

When they arrived, Clara's x-rays had already come back. Miraculously, there was no damage to her brain or stem. The bullets had carefully entered the skull at such an angle that they not only grazed the skull but rode the inner pocket of the skull and skin around to the forehead where they'd lost their momentum and had come to a stop. Clara would be fine except for a short duration of dizziness. To Mark, this was just another call where someone up there looked out for someone down here. The medics scratched their heads and left the emergency room for a call that would be waiting for them.



During the summer of 1992, I had an experience that again made me realize my finite existence on this earth. It was on a call that should have been "routine." However, for me that day it showed me a side of myself that I do not prefer to dwell on.

The crew of the Superhouse, or officially known as Steadman Fire Station in downtown Baltimore where I was stationed, were busy at housework. The station air conditioning system was out of commission. This made our concrete and block "firehouse" rather unbearable as it had been on several other occasions. Doing simple chores such

as washing and waxing floors, polishing poles and cleaning up apparatus became a taxing job that left many firefighters donning their navy-blue tee shirts instead of their light blue work shirts.

Throughout the tasks of housework in the summer heat, members tried to cool down with fans conveniently placed throughout the upstairs hallways and bunkrooms. Only the offices and kitchen had window units. In fact, on more than one night, members took their mattresses off their bunks and dragged them into the kitchen where it looked like a commune.

Around noon on this particular day, we were in the kitchen eating our lunch. There was a pretty good gamble when anyone went into the kitchen, they would see everyone was sitting close to the window units. So, if you didn't get in there early, you had to sit a good distance away from them.

On the north side of our kitchen/lounge on the second floor is a fire department radio scanner that is left on all the time. If someone would hear something that sounded interesting, they would probably get up and turn up the volume. Many times, other members with such comments as, "They'll call you if they want you" will jeer them.

On this day, they would be called. The "HIGHS" Dairy was a one story, concrete building with a wood frame roof. The structure almost covered an entire city block. The dairy became vacant years before and now stood mostly for vandals to degrade and set small arson fires. Most of the nuisance fires caused little damage. This day would be different. This time, things got out of hand.

The "pot" party ignored the signs of "No Trespassing" and conveniently entered the south side of the yard through holes in the fencing that were already there. From that point, they made sure no one was looking and proceeded into the old dairy. The three white male teens began their never-ending task of seeking the ultimate high. As they partied, they gathered trash that had been left in the building and

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piled it up with some wood pallets near the south side entrance. Through their uncontrolled laughter and "joy," they took their cigarette butts and tossed them into the trash. As a final tribute to their cause, the ringleader lit a match and threw it, too, into the debris. They dashed out the door, hoping never to be seen.

The neighbor across the street from Highs saw the flickering in her window being cast upon her television set. She got up to adjust the set. When the flickering wouldn't go away, she turned to look out the window to see what was causing it. Her eyes widened as she realized what was happening and she hurriedly ran to her phone and dialed 911.

As we sat and ate our lunch, the scanner in the kitchen began a ritual of beeps and sounds. Companies' numbers followed as the dispatcher began calling out units for a reported fire at the "Highs" dairy. The MODAT radio beeps could be heard as units were acknowledging their response on their radios. Within a minute, the first arriving engine company on the scene cried out over the airways, "On the scene, we have a one-story structure with fire showing on the south side. Make this a working fire!"

Well, that got our attention. We didn't seem to be talking quite as loud as we had been, hoping not to miss a message. Next, the battalion chief in charge arrived on the scene and gave basically the same radio message as the first engine company.

Within what seemed like minutes, the message that would affect us came. The chief called for help, "Fire is advancing in the structure. We now have fire throughout the building. We will be unable to hold with the present assignment. Give me a second alarm."

Lieutenant Mitch Fisher, Emergency Vehicle Driver August Bond, Firefighter Jack Townsend and I were on Rescue Company 1 that day. As soon as we heard "second alarm," we jumped from our table and headed for the poles to the first floor. Because Rescue 1 is the only heavy rescue

unit in Baltimore City, we took all second alarms, accidents and emergencies throughout the entire city.

Augie "Gus" Bond led the unit out the door and headed for the fire while Lieutenant Fisher laid on the air horn and siren. Gus is an "old timer," with over thirty years of service. He is a very competent and able driver and firefighter who many rookies look to for direction. If someone wants to know something about the rescue squad, Gus will tell them.

Lieutenant Mitch Fisher is a young officer who wants the best for his men: especially protection. He is usually right there with them in the heat of the battle. The lieutenant is a very serious person and takes a lot of ribbing from the firefighters and officers of the Superhouse. But he takes it and keeps on going which is a survival trait that every firefighter must learn in a firehouse, "Never let them know they can get to you."

Jack Townsend was still fairly new in the company but seemed to be a very aggressive firefighter. Although he was one of the newer members, he had learned the skills of rescue work very quickly.

As we pulled up on the fire ground, things were quite obvious that we would be needed. Heavy smoke rolled out of the openings of the old structure. Firefighters did their occupational dance around the fire ground setting up hose lines and ladder pipes. Already there seemed to be hundreds of civilians coming to the scene to watch our efforts fighting the blaze. Several times, the blankets of black smoke rolled down to near ground level into the curious crowds, disbanding them in chaos, leaving them coughing, hacking, and rubbing their tear-filled eyes.

The chief on the fire ground ordered Lieutenant Fisher to open up the doors and windows on the south side of the building. We proceeded onto the grounds of the old dairy with our hand tools which included pike poles and axes. Fire hoses were being pulled and set up throughout the grounds of the complex. One by one we opened windows with our

Turnout-Second Alarm

tools and proceeded to the rear door. The door was of a heavy-duty metal construction. Jack and I attempted to pry it open with our Halligan Tool and the strength of a butt axe. All we seemed to be doing was bending the edge of the door and frame. We decided to try to go inside the window next to the door. With a boost from me, Jack climbed inside the window halfway.

Something happened then that had never happened in the city fire department before. It happened in outlying counties but never in the city. As Jack was halfway in, air horns from all the apparatus on the fire ground began wailing. Because we had known of the counties doing this before, we knew what was happening. The building was unsafe and in fear of imminent collapse or danger. This was the signal for everyone to clear out of the fire building and meet outside. Just to make sure everyone knew what was happening, Chiefs and officers scurried around to warn everyone. All hands exited safely.

Once we gathered, Rescue 1 received new orders to assist a truck company with hose lines from their aerial ladder. They already had a ladder pipe spewing water, but extra hose lines were a necessary caution. We then took turns going up in pairs and throwing water onto the fire. Smoke rolled around us periodically making us wish we had put on, for the moment, our air masks.

When we ascended the ladder for the first time, it was like looking at a picture of Dante's Inferno. As we crested the roof, spot fires were breaking out throughout the entire expanse. The roof was taking a real beating. Soon it would collapse.

After almost an hour and a half of pouring water on the roof fires, small sections began falling in, throwing millions of sparks and clouds of black, choking smoke into the afternoon air.

Again, the chief found us and ordered us to take a two-and-a-half-inch hose line to the east side of the dairy. Once