Winter Park's Fire Laddies

Members of the Winter Park Fire Department shown above are left to right,)front) Assistant Chief J. Q. Smith, Lt. E. R. Ballard, Lt. W. C. Rice, Jr., Chief Allen Erwin, A. H. Hopcraft, Tommy Elliott. C. C. Ballard is at the driver's seat and James O'Steen is standing.

Fire Chief Erwin Discusses New Methods Of Fire Fighting, Equipment

Fire Chief Allen Erwin, crusading on fire prevention and control, this week announced the department had within the last 60 days, received two nozzles of the latest design, making four for 1½ inch hose, two for smaller hose and one for large hose.

With this equipment, given anything like an even break, the fire department can handle a fire. All members of the department have been trained in the uses of equipment. The training program of the department includes the latest methods of fire control. Chief Layman and Chief Chase, Miami; Chief Heiny, New Haven, many other chiefs, managers, Vincent of the N. B. F. U., Bubgee of the N.F.P.A., Dick Vernor of the Western Actuarial Bureau, and most of the heads of the various state fire training programs are personal friends of Chief Erwin, and he has spent many hours over the years in conferences with these and others discussing various phases of firemanics. Of the 19 full scale fire tests conducted by a committee of the nation's top figures in the fire insurance, fire underwriters, educators, fire chiefs, in the larger cities of 20,000 or over. This shows that the large loss fire problem is problem for the small town as well as the big city.

Fire damaged or destroyed an estimated $903,400,000 worth of property in the United States last year (1953), the National Board of Fire Underwriters reported. This is 15.1 per cent higher than the previous year (1952) when the losses totaled $784,953,000.

According to Lewis A. Vincent, NBU's general manager, 1953's fire losses are the highest on record for the third consecutive year.

What can be done to lower this loss? Obviously, a worthwhile, well planned continuous fire prevention program would reduce the loss.

Since fires do occur, what can be done to hold the loss down after the building is on fire? The first five minutes at a fire are generally worth the next several hours.

In short, what happens immediately after the inception of an outbreak pretty well governs how that incident will end, because onds and 20 gallons of water later the fire was out. The fire mist absorbed the heat, turned to steam, smothered the fire without any water damage.

How did the Parkersburg fire department know this fire could be extinguished by this method? The article in the Digest gives the story in considerable detail and Chief Erwin urges the citizens of Winter Park to read it. But there is much more to the story: Many, many hours of labor, sweat, heart breaking experimentation in trying to establish situations that would have sufficient similarity so the same techniques could be applied to each and get a result that would be somewhat the same time after time.

Perhaps, to get a better understanding of how water fog has so much advantage over the old method of using solid streams of large diameter, Dr. Charles Oysten compared it thusly: "If a huntsman fired a one inch shot into a flock of humming birds with the idea of killing as many as possible, he would be classed as a fool. But were he to recast the shot to a size one thirtieth of an inch in diameter, he would have 30,000 such shot. Then at the proper distance and careful aiming, were he to fire into the flock, the slaughter would be terrific.

So it is in modern fire fighting. A few gallons of water properly broken into fog will produce millions of water particles. These fine particles introduced into a heated atmosphere because the entire surface area, if each droplet is exposed to heat, will have a tremendous heat absorbing and heat reducing effect.

Can the Winter Park fire department attack fires with this method, using devices necessary to divide the water into fine particles? Yes, with certain limitation factors. The equipment and manpower ready to respond at a moment's notice is much less in a smaller city than in a larger one. These items are limited to the size of the annual budget. For that reason it is urgent that the fire department be notified immediately; remember, it is the first five minutes that count.

According to the national average, every city should have one and one-half firemen for each 1,000 population. In Winter Park, with an estimated 15,000 persons, the fire department only has eight firemen—about half a man to each 1,000 population.

fire prevention bureaus, Chief Erwin attended seven.

Fires were set-ups in full size buildings with inside conditions as nearly normal as possible. Fires were started and allowed to burn until the temperature reached 1,000 degree F. before water was applied. A heat record was carefully kept to determine effectiveness of the method being used. This has proven to be the best method for accumulating data on methods. Usually when firemen are engaged in controlling a fire in a house or other building, time and conditions permit very little analysis until the fire is out. The primary concern of the firemen is to hold the loss as low as possible. Post mortems on fires tell firemen many things; among others, no two are like situations. Each fire is studied in detail to determine why the fire started, why it extended a certain way, and how it reacted to the method used to extinguish it. A report from Percy Bugbee, general manager, National Fire Protection Association, stated during 1953 there were 292 fires with an individual loss of $250,000 or more.

Almost as many large loss structural fires occurred in towns of less than 20,000 population as fires often get beyond control in a hurry. For the fire department to have anywhere near an even break in the first inning, early discovery, prompt notification, quick response iwth enough men, equipment and knowhow are the basis upon which lo wlosses are predicated.

Many of you have read the article in the current issue of Reader's Digest "They Stop Fires By Remote Control." You probably were amazed in reading the first paragraph which gives an account of a housewife disregarding the principles of safety by dry-cleaning with gasoline. Shortly after dropping a jug of gasoline the vapors ignited from the pilot light on the water heater. When the fire department arrived the withering heat in the basement prevented them from entering. A small fog nozzle was inserted through one of the cellar windows. Twenty sec-