

Fire Dept

Board scotches blame in Hiner fire injury

After hearing charges that he had been found sleeping on duty at the fire-station and possibly misdirected a subordinate to enter the flaming inferno of the high school auditorium at the time it was destroyed, Capt. Tom C. Elliott, of the city fire department, early this week was cleared by the Civil Service Board.

Acting Chief Quincy Smith had asked for demotion of Capt. Elliott to engineer because of alleged inefficiency, but the board with a vote of four to one, decided against demotion. It asked, instead, that a complete efficiency report be presented to the board on Capt. Elliott in three months.

Clyde Hiner, who was injured during the auditorium fire, testified to his own possible misinterpretation when Capt. Elliott called to him to go up a ladder with a hose. Three men on duty during the night with Capt. Elliott in charge, were first at the fire and Elliott and Hiner broke the first window to secure entrance to the burning building.

It was Hiner who went in for the purpose of getting through to open a door for the fire hose. Upon entering the building, water from his hose flew back in a boiling shower

over his face from the force and heat of the flames, which had already enveloped the interior of the structure. Hiner said he got out again immediately being inside the window only some 20 seconds but scalded so that he was taken to the Winter Park Memorial Hospital for emergency treatment.

Capt. Elliott told a very simple but graphic story of the fire, one of the worst in the city's history. It was the three men who first grappled with the fire, attempting to find a way of entry into the building, and to determine through the smoke how much of the structure was burning. He said that he had just held a fire hose at the window which he and Hiner had broken, when he asked Hiner to go up the ladder with a hose. He said that he fully expected Hiner to take his place outside the window pouring water onto the flames inside. Capt. Elliott testified that as he left Hiner he ran down the ladder and went on to join the third member of the fire fighting group until volunteers and the Orlando fire department arrived. He did not know of Hiner's injury until later, he said.

Capt. Elliott admitted to dropping off to sleep in a chair a few times especially when a new baby kept him from getting necessary sleep at night. After four months, he was getting his sleep again he assured the board.

Clark Maxwell, city manager, asked if the board's eligibility list had anyone to replace a fire captain. Joseph Krizek, examiner, stated that the list had expired. E. R. Ballard, ex-officio member of the board and an engineer in the fire department, stated that the list was effective for one year (Engineer Ballard had taken a civil service examination for a captain's rank within the year). The

civil service board chairman, Heskin Whittaker, however, referred to a ruling that lists expired after six months. Ballard gave the one dissenting vote to clearing Capt. Elliott.