

Firefighter Bennett quits department

By VICTOR ASSERSON
Firefighter Dan Bennett quit the Winter Park Fire Department on Wednesday because he still cannot get time off to go to school.

Outlook - Feb. 21, 1985

Bennett, a three-year veteran of the department, was at the center of a storm two weeks ago when Fire Chief Mike Molt-hop told him he would be fired for going to school on his vacation.

Bennett, supported by 16 fire-fighters, including captains and lieutenants, asked the Civil Service Board on Feb. 5 to waive the rule so he could complete studying for his degree in psychology at the University of Central Florida from where he is to graduate on April 29.

Bennett's future was due to be discussed with assistant city manager John Litton on the next Friday but Bennett—who was suspended on full pay—was told by Molt-hop that disciplinary action would be dropped.

Bennett returned to work and put in a request at the beginning of last week for time off so he could go to school.

"I put in a written request to Chief Molt-hop on Monday, February 11 and I asked that he let me use my 18 hours remaining vacation time to go to school, and in order to make it more acceptable for the fire department I said I would come in in the morning to make sure that the shift was up to strength and if coverage was needed I would get someone to cover for me," said Bennett.

Bennett said that on the following Thursday, Feb. 14, he had asked his shift captain about the time off and had been told that no decision had been made because the fire department was "busy."

Bennett had again asked on Sunday for the time off and he added: "I was told that under the circumstances the chief had to approve all vacation time and until this is resolved everyone will have to take a minimum of 24 hours off."

Bennett has only 18 hours vacation time left to him and would not qualify under a rule that 24 hours had to be accumulated before it could be taken off.

"Molt-hop made a public statement that he would work with me on this and he hasn't. Making everyone take 24 hours off at a time isn't handling the situation. He just keeps tightening up," added Bennett.

"I have had enough of this. I can't miss any school, it is very important to me. My last day will be March 13th," said Bennett.

Asked to comment, Molt-hop said that he had not spoken to Bennett, but he had given instructions to his shift captains that there was to be no time off of less than 24 hours until "the matter has been resolved."

"I can't answer any questions at this time," said Molt-hop.

Assistant City Manager John Litton, when asked to comment on Bennett's resigning, said: "You are catching me by complete surprise. I have no knowledge of what you are talking about."

"I am under the impression that this thing was going to be put on the agenda for the next Civil Service Board meeting and the procedure was going to be discussed and some final decision made on how it was to be interpreted," said Litton.