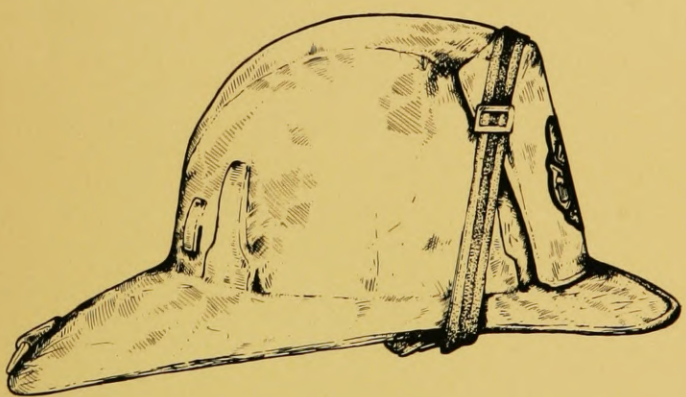
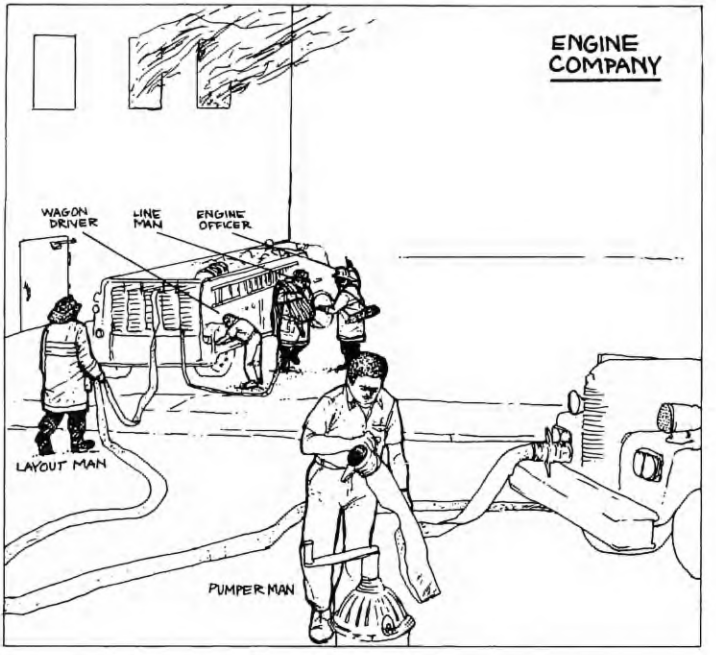
SMITHSONIAN FOLKLIFE STUDIES • NUMBER 4

The District of Columbia Fire Fighters' Project

A Case Study in Occupational Folklife



Robert McCarl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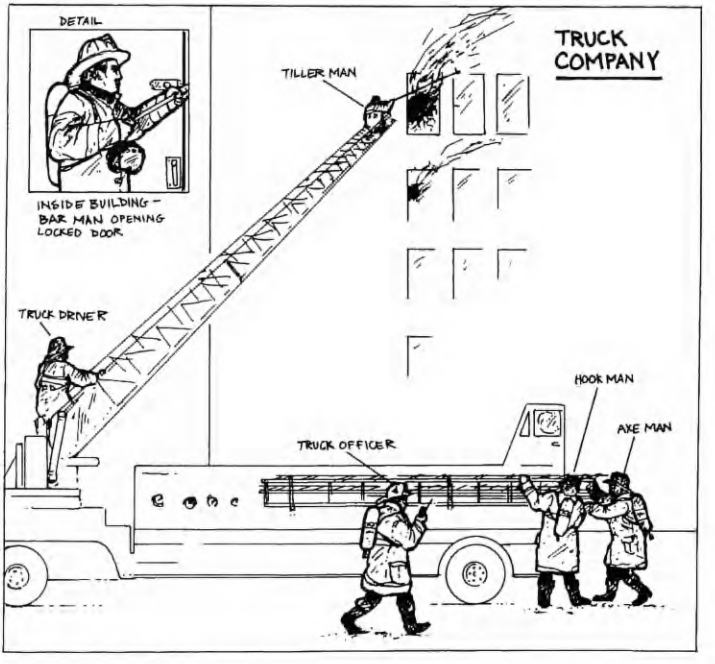
TRUCK COMPANY
DETAIL
INSIDE BUILDING – BAR MAN OPENING LOCKED DOOR
TILLER MAN
TRUCK DRIVER
HOOK MAN
AXE MAN
TRUCK OFFICER

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A Case Study in Occupational Folklife

Robert McCarl

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1985

Abstract

McCarl, Robert S. The District of Columbia Fire Fighters' Project: A Case Study in Occupational Folklife. *Smithsonian Folklife Studies,* number 4, 241 pages, frontispiece, 33 figures, 1985.—This monograph presents the results of an ethnographic study of urban fire fighters in a casebook format. The primary document of the monograph is an ethnography of fire fighting culture that was generated as a result of eighteen months of participant observation of fire fighters in Washington, D.C., from 1978 to 1980. The original design of this research project was to produce an ethnography that would document the fire fighters' inside view of their work culture and then to present the findings to the members of the culture for their use. The ethnography itself (entitled *Good Fire/Bad Night*) is included in virtually its original form. It is preceded by a general introduction and accompanied by a critique of the entire public sector project written by the program coordinator, Captain David A. Ryan, DCFD. In addition to this material, concluding chapters place the ethnography in a theoretical framework, focusing on the way in which the expressive aspects of work culture (techniques, customs, and verbal expressions) comprise an informally controlled body of knowledge (the "canon of technique performance") against which all collective and individual actions are measured in the culture. A glossary and bibliography complete the monograph.

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Preface to the Series

In 1978, the Smithsonian Office of Folklife Programs established *Smithsonian Folklife Studies* to document folkways still practiced (or recreated through memory) in a variety of traditional cultures. This Office has accumulated more than a decade of research accruing from fieldwork conducted for its annual production of the Festival of American Folklife. Against the background of this rich and continually replenished resource, the *Studies* were conceived in a unique format: each consists of a monograph *and* a film that complement each other. The monographs present detailed histories and descriptions of folk technologies, customs, or events, and include information about the background and character of the participants and processes through photographs (historical and contemporary), illustrations, and bibliographies. The films add a living dimension to the monographs by showing events in progress and traditions being practiced, the narrative being provided mostly by the tradition bearers themselves. Thus, while each monograph is planned to permit its use independent of the film (and vice versa), their combined study should enhance the educational and documentary value of each.

The genesis of the *Smithsonian Folklife Studies* dates back to January 1967, when the Institution began plans to convene a group of cultural geographers, architectural historians, and European and American folklore scholars in July of that year. One recommendation of the conference stressed the need for new directions in documentation to keep pace with the ever-broadening scope of the discipline, as it extends from the once limited area of pure folk*lore* research to encompass all aspects of folk*life*. It was further proposed that the Smithsonian establish model folklife studies, although no specific forms were prescribed. The Festival was one form developed to meet this challenge and the publications program was another. *Smithsonian Folklife Studies* were designed to provide new perspectives on earlier research or to investigate areas of folklife previously unexplored.

The topics proposed for the publications range widely from such traditional folklore interests as ballad singing to newer areas of concern such as occupational folklore. Included are studies of "old ways" in music, crafts, and food preparation still practiced in ethnic communities of the New World, centuries-old technologies still remembered by American Indians, and "homemade" utilitarian items still preferred to their "store bought" counterparts. American folklife is the primary (but not exclusive) concentration of the *Studies.*

Nearly all these traditions have been transmitted orally or absorbed through repeated observation, involving several generations. Learning traditions this way, of course, extends beyond childhood. The degree to which oral, even non-verbal, tradition operates, among blue collar workers, is one focus of occupational folklore: imitation and personal instruction are the best vehicles for transmitting the technique and knowledge necessary to do the work. Because mere words cannot always communicate, apprentices must be *shown* the technique.

Many of the activities documented in the *Studies,* however, are practiced in a world apart from that of the factory. By modern standards of mass production, the technologies shown may seem inefficient and imprecise. In some of them the proportions used, arrived at through years of trial and error, are often inexact or employ measuring tools no more precise than the dimensions of the human hand. It is also a world where the craftsman eschews technical terminology, preferring instead to employ names that derive from "what it looks like." Many of the traditions presented in the *Studies* date back to times when the pace of work and passage of time were relatively unimportant. Deliberateness is often commensurate with accomplishment, and, for the folk craftsman, quality of his products is a result of the care and time devoted to their manufacture.

The decline of many folklife traditions has paralleled the general social breakdown of communities, in many instances the result of advances in technology. Concurrent with this social dissolution has been the disappearance of many utilitarian items that the maker traditionally created for himself or his family. Many of the traditions associated with these products are near extinction or alive only in the memories of the oldest members of a community.

Because a major role of the Smithsonian is that of a conserva-

tion institution, the Office of Folklife Programs accepted the obligation to document the traditional folkways it researches, and its early commitment to filming them should be noted. During the 1967 Smithsonian conference, roughly edited film footage of Georgia folk potters was shown to demonstrate a new approach in describing the technology behind artifacts in the Smithsonian's collection of folk material culture. After final editing was done and a soundtrack and supplementary footage were added, this film was issued as *Smithsonian Folklife Study,* No. 1a, to accompany the monograph titled "The Meaders Family: North Georgia Potters." The initial screening of this pottery film took place at a time when film documentation of folklife was a novelty. In fact, in 1967 the American *Encyclopedia Cinematographica* listed a silent film on Amish breadmaking as its single motion picture entry in the category of American folk culture. This dearth of folklife films reflected the fact that, for the most part, folklorists were continuing to document the artifact more than the craftsman.

Folklorists have not been alone, however, in being late to recognize film documentation as a necessary adjunct to verbal descriptions of culture. The late anthropologist, Margaret Mead, whose efforts helped to establish the Smithsonian's National Anthropological Film Center in 1975, took to task her own discipline's continuing refusal to appreciate the value of film documentation:

> Department after department, research project after research project fails to include filming and insists on continuing the hopelessly inadequate note-taking of an earlier age; while before the fieldworkers' eyes the behavior [disappears] which film could have caught and preserved for centuries (preserved for the joy of the descendants of those who dance a ritual for the last time and for the illumination of future generations of human scientists). . . .
>
> — Margaret Mead, [Introduction] "Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words," in *Principles of Visual Anthropology,* ed. Paul Hockings (The Hague and Paris: Mouton Publishers, 1975, pp. 4–5.

In expanding our study of folklife beyond mere artifacts and texts, we have come to recognize that much of what we witness is performance. And though performance can be described verbally

or transcribed in print, only through sound motion picture can we hope to capture the complete flow of events, the character of their performers, their speech patterns, moods, and personalities. Hence, by incorporating artifact, text, and performance in the complementary monograph/film format, these publications bring to readers and viewers, respectively, the immediacy and subtlety within folk culture. The Smithsonian's aim is to document folklife in all its dimensions.

A list of the monographs and films that have been issued in the *Smithsonian Folklife Series* appears at the end of this volume. Regulations governing the submission and acceptance of manuscripts are described inside the front and back covers of this monograph.

Thomas Vennum, Jr.
General Editor
Office of Folklife Programs
July 1984

Acknowledgments

I began the fieldwork for this monograph as an undergraduate folklore student at the University of Oregon in one of Barre Toelken's seminars in 1969. Little did I know that an afternoon and evening of drinking beer with some of my old fire fighting friends would lead to the past eleven years of fieldwork and research as an occupational folklorist. Yet somehow every group I studied, each one of the thousands of workers I have met, and the hundreds I have interviewed and worked with, all this has taught me just a little more about how occupational culture is shaped and passed on from one person to the next. I hope that this document captures those insights while imparting some of the humor and strength of occupational folklife.

A number of people have assisted and supported this project. Barre Toelken (University of Oregon) challenged me to work in contemporary occupational culture and illustrated the need for and feasibility of applied folklore research with his Native American projects and articles. Robert Byington (University of North Carolina), who introduced me into the wider, non-academic field of applied folklore, taught me how to deal with the institutional structures one inevitably confronts in order to achieve the results I was seeking, while lending support and offering critical objectivity when needed. Bess Lomax Hawes of the Folk Arts Program, National Endowment of the Arts, gambled that my idea for an applied folklife project with urban fire fighters could succeed and then fought for and supported the project. Roger Abrahams (Scripps College), Archie Green, and Peter Seitel (Office of Folklife Programs, Smithsonian Institution) have provided thoughtful criticism along the way. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my debt to Captain David A. Ryan of the District of Columbia Fire Department. Without his assistance this research and my ability to organize and present it could never have come to fruition.

I cannot list the names of all of the fire fighters who aided me in this research, but I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the

following: Fire Chief Millard Sutton (retired), Fire Chief Burton Johnson (retired), BFC John Breen (retired), FF James Reilly, and Sergeant Dennis O'Leary. Very special thanks to the following companies for their cooperation: Engine Company 16, Truck 3, number one platoon; Engine Company 30, Truck 17, number three platoon; Engine Company 4, Rescue Squad 2, number one platoon; Engine Company 25, Truck 8, number three platoon; Engine Company 8, Truck 7, number one and two platoons. Additional thanks to BFC Richard Hubscher, BFC Lawrence Eckholm, DFC John P. Devine, FF Michael Smith, FF Kenneth Cox, FF William Hoyle, Lieutenant William Mould, FF Steven Souder, Sergeant Wayne Wyvil, and Sergeant Phillip Pestone. Further gratitude goes to Dolores Vita for so kindly typing and editing the original manuscript.

Portions of this monograph have appeared in the following publications: Robert McCarl, "The Communication of Work Technique: A Newfoundland Example," *Culture and Tradition*, 3(1978):108–117; Robert McCarl, "Occupational Customs of Fire Fighters: An Overview," in Judith McCulloh and Wayland D. Hand, editors, *American Folk Custom* (Washington, D.C.: The Library of Congress), in press; Robert McCarl, *Good Fire/Bad Night: A Cultural Sketch of the District of Columbia Fire Fighters as Seen Through Their Occupational Folklife* (Washington, D.C., 1980); Robert McCarl, "The Meal's On Me: Moving Into, Up and Out of Fire Fighting Culture," *Center for Southern Folklore Magazine*, 4(1981):12; Robert McCarl, "Good Fire/Bad Night: District of Columbia Fire Fighters," in Herbert Applebaum, editor; *Work in Market and Industrial Societies* (New York: State University of New York Press), 1984; and Robert McCarl, "'You've Come a Long Way—And Now This is Your Retirement': An Analysis of Performance in Fire Fighting Culture," *Journal of American Folklore*, 97(1984):393–422.

This work is dedicated to fire fighters everywhere in the hope that through this presentation of their culture, they will become better understood and appreciated by the public they serve.

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Introduction

This monograph is a combination of two separate documents presented in a casebook format. It is organized to illustrate both the methodology and the results of applied folklore research. The original "ethnographic sketch," *Good Fire/Bad Night,* is introduced within a historical and theoretical framework, then presented in its entirety as originally published, and followed by an analysis of the data. A glossary of fire fighting terms (which are noted by an asterisk (*) at first mention in the text), notes, and a bibliography are also included. Gender shifts (he/she) throughout the original text may appear abrupt and arbitrary; they were faithfully recorded to reflect the particular instances in which they occurred. The analytical sections following the original text place the ethnographic material into a broader theoretical and methodological perspective to elucidate the analytical models and verbal dynamics of the workplace.

To understand more fully the context of *Good Fire/Bad Night,* the reader should be acquainted with two basic premises of this project: first, the lore of the workplace is perceived as verbally passed-on knowledge about work techniques; and, second, the fieldwork and the presentation of this material are based on a cultural advocacy intent. *Good Fire/Bad Night* was designed to return cultural information to the fire fighters in a form that suited their needs and spoke to their self-image. In addition, this project reflects a personal perspective toward fieldwork: that cultural material should be returned to the community from which it has been collected.

Genesis of an Occupational Study

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival

The theoretical approach for *Good Fire/Bad Night* grew out of the fieldwork conducted for the 1975 and 1976 festivals of American

Folklife presented by the Office of Folklife Programs at the Smithsonian Institution. After considerable fieldwork and research in a variety of settings, the staff folklorists (including myself) responsible for that segment of the festival devoted to "Working Americans" realized that despite stereotypes about the modern workplace, a craft or skill mentality existed in virtually every occupational context: a "skill mentality" may vary from ways to "fight back at the system" by looking busy while actually doing nothing, to manipulating highly sophisticated machine tools to accomplish complex work goals. We found that the core of any occupational culture lies in the work techniques needed to succeed on the job. Our task was to develop a way to discover these techniques and present them to the public. Thus we developed a holistic approach to occupational folklife, which we defined as "the techniques, gestures, oral expressions and customs of a particular work group."[1]

In brief our research proceeded in the following manner.[2] Once we had received a positive response from union representatives regarding the Working Americans section of the festival, we arranged with the national office to send a fieldworker to a job site where we could get a representative view of the actual work of the trade involved. Rather than trying to present the entire occupational experience at the festival, we sought to identify within the work flow of an occupation those key techniques that could most readily be represented to the public. In the cement industry, for example, we developed an exhibit that demonstrated how "powder monkeys" (explosive experts) set and design explosives on a quarry face. Using a model of a cement kiln, we showed how rock is crushed, heated, turned into clinker, and then crushed into cement. Finally, we set up a small lab manned by an experienced laboratory technician who illustrated the various mixing techniques necessary for several types of cement. Although the union and the more traditional folklorists were skeptical about the effectiveness of this type of presentation, it turned out to be one of the most popular and informative exhibits of the festival.

In March of 1976, as a member of the festival staff, I met with William "Howie" McClennan, president of the International Association of Fire Fighters in Washington, D.C. I told him about our plans for presenting fire fighters at the festival. He introduced me to Kenneth Cox of the District of Columbia Fire Fighters'

Association, Local 36. After riding with a few companies and talking with a number of fire fighters, I wrote up a field report suggesting that, in addition to narrative sessions in which fire fighters could present their experiences, we could construct a simulated row house in which they could exhibit their fire fighting techniques. After much discussion with the folklorists and the unions, we agreed on the basic plan and the presentation went ahead.

Initially the fire fighters were accommodating but not particularly motivated. They liked the idea of public relations but thought that trying to explain and demonstrate real fire fighting techniques would just bore the public. As time went on, however, the numbers of fire fighters asking to volunteer for participation in the demonstration grew rapidly. Toward the end of the two week exhibition period, their presentation was one of the most popular at the festival due to public interest, our ability to keep the demonstration focused on work techniques and narratives, and (perhaps most importantly) the increasing desire on the part of the fire fighters themselves to participate in a postive experience. Festival participation by members of this occupational community had penetrated the culture to the point that members of the group were interested in discussing additional opportunities for presentation of their work culture beyond the actual festival itself.

The Study Plan

In late October 1976, I was invited to a meeting at 17 Engine in northeast Washington to discuss my ideas for additional research and presentation of fire fighting culture with members of the executive board of the local union as well as the union president, Dave Ryan. Based on that discussion, a number of ideas were generated including the following: (1) fire fighters' perceptions of themselves and their belief that the community they serve misunderstands their culture and their social role in the city result from a highly traditional and conservative occupation that remains separated from daily contact with the public; (2) most fire fighters are too proud to ask for help in any situation or to readily admit fear; (3) fire fighters have a self-image unique to their occupational culture; (4) in order for me to understand fire fighters I would have to live and work with them for at least a year; (5) an honest documentation of fire fighting culture would help fire fighters gain

"an expanded insight into who and what they are"; (6) the best vehicle for accomplishing such a documentation would be a book organized into technique, custom, and narrative sections describing the truck and engine companies and squads, as well as a discussion of the officers; and, finally, (7) such a book might be of use in training rookies new to the trade.[3]

In the hope of building on the interest and momentum generated by the festival, I contacted Bess Lomax Hawes, director of the Folk Arts Program at the National Endowment for the Arts, for help in funding such a project. The goal of the project was to publish a book on the culture of fire fighting directed to the fire fighters themselves. Surprisingly, she suggested that the Endowment might fund such a project if it were (1) applied for by the union itself, and (2) if the main purpose of the project was designed to increase community awareness about the occupational experiences and perspectives of the "folk group": the D.C. fire fighters. On 23 September 1977, David A. Ryan, president of Local 36 submitted the proposal to Ms. Hawes.

> The Fire Fighters Association of the District of Columbia was organized in 1901. This Association has strived to improve the lot of the uniformed forces of the Fire Department, has been actively involved in the history and traditions of the Department, and strived to improve the delivery and services to the community. We have been active participants in many community efforts over the years and are long standing members of many community groups and associations in Washington. In 1971 we published a book, *100 Years of Glory,* which is the only compiled history of the D.C. Fire Department. Our goals now, as always, go far beyond those of a more traditional labor organization.
>
> We believe fire fighters comprise the most unusual group of public employees and perhaps a unique group among all occupational pursuits. Although we make up a segment of the professional fire fighting force we are sometimes surprised at the unusual displays and attitudes of our membership. It is not surprising to us that those outside of our profession fail to understand why men choose fire fighting as their profession for this is not an uncommon question for a fire fighter to ask himself.

There are many theories as to why fire fighting has always been a sought after field of endeavor to the extent that even with today's demands on time many men and women actively volunteer their time to serve the community as fire fighters. The varied schools of thought range from job security to dedication to serve others and from a thirst for excitement to contentment in doing nothing, but no one set of motives seems to be consistently applicable to all fire fighters. It is a fact that the fire service is primarily comprised of men that come from some other fields of endeavor to become a fire fighter and often with a significant reduction in tangible benefits. Perhaps the lure is like that attributed to the sea, but even those who made the transition cannot accurately identify the moving force. We consistently find it difficult to portray ourselves to the community in a way which will identify who we really are and thus be better understood and accepted. It is our belief that a more in-depth understanding of fire fighters, by the community and by themselves, would enhance the age old battle of protecting lives and property from the ravages of fire.

One of this Association's more recent endeavors at serving the community was our participation in the Folklife Festival sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution last year. Through this activity we were introduced to the concept of occupational studies by specialists who can objectively analyze an occupational group. One of those specialists, Mr. Bob McCarl, took a particular interest in our profession and several hours of discussion gave birth to new insights into our work. It was here that the concept of an in-depth look at professional fire fighters was born.

The Fire Fighters' Association of the District of Columbia, Local 36, represents the members of the District of Columbia Fire Department, and although its elected representatives respond to the political and economic needs of fire fighters, the actual work experience and its perception by those both within and outside of the fire fighters' community were almost too close for any one member to view objectively. We feel that by employing the services of a specialist in occupational folklife like Bob McCarl, we can accomplish two very important goals: 1) to better understand our occupation and ourselves by opening up our work group to in-depth perception

and documentation by a trained fieldworker, and 2) use the information that is collected to improve internal and external communication in the community. We propose that McCarl be housed in one or more station houses in the District for a period of approximately a year and that he be allowed to participate in and document all aspects of a fire fighter's daily round from cooking and cleaning to riding the apparatus, from night work and rotation of shifts to experiences both on and off of the fireground which might provide him with an in-depth familiarity with our work. At the end of the documentary period, McCarl would write up his findings for presentation to the members of the Association. The scope of this material will be cultural rather than economic, political or statistical, that is we will be perceived and documented through what we do and say, not on the basis of externally derived information although this information may shape and be shaped by our occupational experience. This Association, based upon the results of McCarl's findings, will have a number of options concerning the uses to which this material may be put. Union publications, films, radio programs, skills demonstrations, a series of community workshops or the establishment of a local fire fighters oral history/folklore archive may be employed to use this information to best advantage by replaying it to our membership and the community we serve. The fire fighters of Washington, D.C., like fire fighters elsewhere, are a family—a family with a history and traditions—stories about the good times and the bad, accounts of heroes and clowns coupled with a strong pride in our skills and the work that we do. Like any family, however, we can always improve and benefit from the observations of a professional yet humanistic outsider. We have become convinced that these stories we tell about our behavior as fire fighters, when they're told, how they develop and persist (or fail to) are an important key to the understanding we seek. This is why we are particularly interested in having a specialist, like Bob McCarl, an ex-fire fighter himself and interested in collecting our stories, undertake this study for us.

To this end we are asking you to consider a proposal that the National Endowment for the Arts help us in this effort. We are uncertain of the results of such a study and are not articulate in applying for programs of this nature. We are enclosing a

> proposed budget which we feel would be sufficient to conduct the study. If we may better represent or explain our position we will be pleased to receive your recommenation. Thank you for considering our proposal and we anxiously await your reply.

The project received approval and funding in April 1978 and, upon receiving final administrative clearance from the District of Columbia Fire Department, I began my field work on 22 September 1978.

Research Goals and Methodology

My first methodological objectives were to ascertain the approachability of the fire fighters, the racial balance and amount of fire activity in the fire houses, and the personal responses to me and the project. With these goals in mind I visited as many fire houses as I could during the first month.

By the end of October, I had spent time in four fire houses in different parts of the city, had attended training school to gain some of the basics of fire fighting and the use of equipment (particularly the mask) and then returned to 16 Engine (the downtown company), which I had chosen as my primary base of operations. I chose this house for a number of reasons. I knew a number of the men there from the folk festival experience; the company had a good mixture of older and younger men, and it was a tight "running" company;* the area serviced by this particular house included high rise apartments and businesses to tenements and single-family dwellings; the group seemed comfortable around me and interested in the project; it was accessible by mass transit; and it was a double house (i.e., comprised of an engine and truck company), as well as a chief and deputy's house. It had an almost ideal study situation, except that it lacked representative white/black and male/female ratios. (There was at that time only one black fire fighter in the company and one female fire fighter in the entire department.) These aspects of the culture I decided to investigate after I had worked with this more traditional, homogeneous group.

At this juncture, my research goals had been refined to two specific objectives: (1) write a booklet that would provide an overview of my findings to the fire fighters themselves, and (2)

conduct a presentation of my findings (by showing my photographic documentation and providing a forum in which the fire fighters could assess the project and perhaps suggest future uses of the material). Thus, I began a daily journal to record events and observations as they occurred. To better understand the dynamics of the workplace, I focused on ascertaining the key techniques of each assignment on the fire ground (i.e., technician, officer, bar, hook and axe, layout and line positions). The approach immediately engaged my theory of the centrality of skills in explaining the culture of the workplace (p. 65).

In addition to participating in the cooking and daily housework of the fire house, I rode with either the truck or the engine company during the fire runs, participated in the attack as much as possible (mostly by helping with lights and fans or humping hose* up stairwells), and carried my cameras and a pocket tape recorder wherever I went. I interviewed each individual in the company to compile biographical information and to gain a greater insight into their particular responsibilities on the fire ground; I then gave each an opportunity to question me about my background, motivations, and experiences. This provided me with specific data and allowed me to become personally acquainted with each man and, in a sense, integrate my goals in the project with his point of view. As soon as possible after each interview I would make a log of the tape so that access to the materials would be facilitated.

I had developed a tape log system of classification when I had indexed the Working Americans tapes after the festival in 1976.[4] Faced at that time with the task of providing access to over three hundred hours of tape, I decided that it would be foolish and wasteful to pay someone to transcribe the whole corpus. Therefore, I listened to each tape and jotted down notes and counter numbers as the tape recording progressed. If a fire fighter, for example, was describing his ride to work, a fire they had had the day before, and asking what's for dinner, it would be noted as follows:

WATCH DESK: FF's W, S, P, and Y (their names)
P: (signs in at desk) Talks abt. getting flat on way to work—lucky had spare
S: Asks about second alarm
P: Not much to do on fire—monitored water supply, picked up a lot of pump time—asks what's for dinner

Once the log had been completed for each tape, indexing the material was much easier and selected tapes could be transcribed only where complete transcription was warranted.

It became immediately apparent that I was not photographically qualified. Fire photographers spend years perfecting their technical abilities in photographing fire fighters at work. As long as we were in the house I could photograph at leisure. As soon as we responded on a call, however, the speed with which everything happened, coupled with my desire to stay with the company as they crawled down a smoke-filled hallway, made it impossible for me to photograph the work techniques as they unfolded on the fire ground. Eventually I had to stage many of the techniques in order to record them on film. As I became more familiar with the routines in the fire house (around the watch desk, fire critiques after a fire) and on the fire ground (racking hose, overhauling a burned out ceiling), I could anticipate the occurrence of these significant interactions and more competently photograph them as they occurred.

In the Field

As a newcomer to the fire house, I found it was necessary to explain my presence to the fire fighters. Initially, I attempted to describe the folklife festival, which gave rise to this project, and the theory of occupational culture, etc. I soon found, however, that this approach did little to explain why I was standing among them taking pictures and recording their comments as I racked hose* with them after a fire. Thus, when subsequently asked "What are you doing this for?" I responded as follows.

> I was hired by the union to document how information is passed from one guy to the next, say from an experienced man to a rookie. I try to figure out the tricks of the trade—what you need to know to be successful at any position in the trade. Right now I'm concentrating on stories and skills and just trying to figure out what the stories are about and how the skills are learned. When I'm done, this will go into a report that I then turn over to you guys.[5]

In my attempt to explain the purposes of the project to the fire fighters I soon became aware of how their perceptions of themselves differed from what I was seeing. An incident that occurred in early December illustrates one aspect of this discrepancy:

> 7 December, Thursday: Nothing much going on until about 2:30 AM when we got a run to 12th and T, NW for a large apt. bldg. [apartment building] w/heavy smoke—2nd alarm.... [A lengthy description of the fire is given here. It was a very hot and smokey fire in the stairwell, probably set on purpose. A number of people were injured and taken out of windows, off the fire escapes and led to safety by the fire fighters.] Once the overhauling began in the foyer of the building, Chief Casey started sending people back in.... At about this time a middle-aged black man came hollering down the stairs about the condition of his apartment window. It had been punched out even though (as he said): "There weren't no motherfuckin fire in my room!" He demanded to know what the fire fighters were going to do about it and increased his yelling and hysterics when the news photographer began to shoot the stairwell [with a television camera]. The fire fighters were all very tense and quiet with the exception of a sergeant who told the guy to cool it or he'd give him something to really complain about.[6]

On the way back to the house this incident caused a gripe session about the stupidity and ingratitude of blacks, which continued in the fire house for about half an hour. The fire fighters had just done what they considered an excellent job of putting out a very hot fire in a crowded tenement late at night. They were looking for gratitude, not criticism, even though the man doing the complaining could easily have been the victim of an overzealous truck man. It became apparent to me that not only would I have to document the fire fighting culture both from their perspective and from mine, but I would also have to reflect my perceptions back to them without appearing judgmental.

As my fieldwork progressed, the repetition of daily skills and behavior patterns both on and off the fire ground, and of stories and repertories in the narrative sessions, permitted me to expand my area of research. Having been in the same house with the same group for almost five months, I started interviewing fire fighters' families and retired fire fighters, and attending retirement dinners. I had gained the trust and acceptance of the group to the extent that I was a recognized participant in the fire house and on the fire ground.

It was at this juncture, however, that Captain Ryan suggested that I expand my research to other fire houses. My reluctance to do

so stemmed from my awareness of how long it had taken me to gain the rapport and openness I was only just then experiencing. I was beginning to interact with the fire fighters as a participant, rather than as an observer. Not only was this new relationship a pleasurable experience, it was also giving me a greater insight into the unique cultural view of this group. In spite of my reluctance, it was agreed that I should move to 8 Engine, Truck 7, number three platoon. This I did in the middle of April 1979. In order to maintain contact with 16 Engine (the original company), I returned there at least once a tour.* Although I was still accepted as a friendly observer, this change removed me as a participant within the company. However, the move improved my objectivity by making me less reliant on personal relationships and more professionally independent.

This new fire house was in a different area of the city: a residential, older neighborhood of large single-family dwellings, with a primarily black population. Concomitantly, the new fire house had more black fire fighters,. Both circumstances (the new area and the more heterogeneous occupational population) provided me with a different perspective of the occupational culture. I learned quickly that the black fire fighter has a different orientation toward the fire service than his white colleague, and I witnessed some of the racial conflicts that arose in the house. I also observed the isolation and retreat of individuals who for one reason or another felt alienated from the company or could not adjust to the slower pace of a less active fire house. In comparing my new perspective to that which I had formed at 16 Engine, it became apparent that the majority group of white fire fighters was insulating itself against the environmental changes of the workplace. On the other hand, as their numbers increased, black and (as I later discovered) women fire fighters were bringing with them their own cultural perspectives, which carried over into their occupational experiences.

By the end of September 1979, I had spent an additional two and a half months with a heavy rescue squad, while maintaining contact with the downtown and residential companies. At this time I decided to leave the field and organize my data. I had accumulated almost two hundred hours of tape from recorded informal sessions to dyadic interviews, hundreds of black and white photographs and color slides, field notes, and notebooks, and a dizzying amount of impressions and observations. I also had developed some very close friendships with some of the fire

fighters, and their personal encouragement at this point made possible the completion of the most difficult phase of the project: the organization, conceptualization, and writing of the ethnographic sketch.

Focus of the Report

The urban environment in which I did this study is a rich mosaic made up of a multitude of overlapping cultures (ethnic, regional, familial, occupational, etc.), which are in a constant state of flux and occasional confrontation. The fire service is both a participant in and a product of this mosaic and, as such, it extends into the social fabric of the city and beyond. Since the study was limited as much as possible to the work group itself, other related areas of interest were not considered. These included the historical perspectives of retired fire fighters, the emergency medical service and the ambulance corps, the somewhat neglected field of fire investigation, the mass media's treatment of the fire service, and the political framework in which the fire department operates, to name only a few. It is hoped that this material will encourage others to investigate these aspects of the fire fighting culture.

During the course of this ethnographic study, the political climate in the city was extremely tense. Charges and counter charges of racism concerning promotional exams and the awarding of promotions were continually being voiced; the fire chief was summoned to Capitol Hill to testify about fire code enforcement after a serious nursing home fire; women were entering the fire service in increasing numbers; some of the largest fires in the city's history occurred as did a record snowfall during the winter of 1978–1979. At the same time, an almost steady stream of virtually unnoticed fire fighters made their way to local hospitals for injuries ranging from severe burns to strained backs to amputations.

The opportunity to investigate an occupational group such as this during such a tumultuous period was enlightening, if not a bit intimidating. While it did set in bold relief the various constituencies and minority factions within the fire service, it occurred within a broader socio-political context. However, this more narrowly focused study revealed more clearly the underlying cultural background of the fire service. Change is extremely slow in the fire service. As a big city fire department like that in Washington is increasingly forced to deal with forces of change imposed from

both inside and outside the organization, these deeper cultural backgrounds will shape the responses of those in this work community.

The most difficult part of the project was the composition of the ethnography itself. From the hundreds of hours of taped recordings I was trying to bring to life a collection of cultural materials. The recording, transcription, and presentation of occupational material in full view of the fire fighters themselves (who provided support for me in this effort) was a process of personal and professional discovery. Like other occupational folklorists, I was continually made aware of my preconceptions about the material based on the quality of the documentary evidence I had collected or missed, my ability to present it so an outsider could make some sense of my data, and (most importantly) the reception by fire fighters themselves of the final product. Having been trained as a folklorist, I was continually struggling to overcome any preoccupation with narrative.

Early occupational folklorists were primarily concerned with documenting an indigenous American expressive form—cowboy songs—in order to prove the existence of a unique folk idiom in this country.[7] This concern was pursued by later occupational folklorists, such as George Korson, Horace Beck, Wayland Hand, and Archie Green, who sought to portray the role played by folksong and narrative in expressing the changes, struggles, inequities, and hardships of workers in an emerging industrial milieu.[8] Yet with the exception of Mody Boatright, none of these investigators turned their attention to the work itself, to the processes and techniques upon which these "collectible" expressive forms were based.[9] Even contemporary folklorists like Bruce Nickerson and Michael Bell emphasize the verbal material and minimize the work process.[10]

The primary reason for this concentration on verbal forms is that folklorists are trained to collect examples of cultural expression and then present their collections in a particular context: historical, antiquarian, political, educational, etc. With the embracing of linguistic models advocated by Dell Hymes, Roger Abrahams, Henry Glassie, and Richard Bauman, however, we are becoming more adept at documenting broader ethnographic wholes in an attempt to show how the expressive material is used by the members of a culture.[11] My exposure to the cultural advocacy work with

Native Americans done by Barre Toelken at the University of Oregon in the 1960s, my long-term exposure to fire fighting and fire fighters in the Pacific Northwest, the encouragement and guidance in approaching work groups and labor unions given me by Archie Green, and my own experiences with unions in Oregon, helped me present the data for *Good Fire/Bad Night,* so that it would increase the fire fighters' awareness of both the dynamic and conservative elements of their culture.

Regardless of an individual folklorist's or ethnographer's intent, the material he includes in the description of a culture becomes a public statement about that culture. Caveats about accepting responsibility for misinterpretation, review by members of the occupational community, and comparisons to parallel work by other investigators are all necessary checks and balances. But once a document is published, there it stands. It is therefore incumbent upon the investigator to recognize and make explicit his biases and goals in doing the research.

When we assume the role of cultural liaison, we speak for the members of that culture, and therefore our fabrication of their reality must not only reflect their cultural view, it must in part be based upon it. To publish the "objective" account without regard for its impact on the community is to hide behind academic cant and/or to exploit the very cultures we have sought to understand and advocate.

As stated previously, the purpose of the original report, *Good Fire/Bad Night,* was twofold: to present to the fire fighters a picture of their occupation based primarily on their own words and stories, and, secondly, to provide enough visual and glossarial information to give an outsider a glimpse into this occupational world. This development of a bridge language between not only the occupational and academic cultures, but also between the occupational inside view and the outside world is perhaps the major challenge of applied folklore using the ethnographic approach.

By concentrating on the work techniques of an occupational group, we are isolating a "critical center" of the occupational culture; narratives, joking relationships, nicknames, customary behaviors and activities best comment on and reflect these techniques. The focus of the original report, therefore, required the selection of examples that most provocatively illustrated to the fire fighters themselves the canon of work technique from which they evaluate their own behavior (p. 65). At the same time, the presenta-

tion of more esoteric techniques (that take place farther from the central processes of the work flow) must be carefully considered so that the outsider may also "see into the culture." This dual focus was mitigated somewhat by concentrating on the central modes of expressive behavior, which have been isolated by placing them on a hypothetical linear scale between the polarities of mundane to unusual forms of expression. This organization of data has informed my entire approach to occupational folklife.

Identification of Work Techniques

This occupational folklife study is based on a ranking of forms of cultural expression that emphasize the primary importance of work skills. These skills comprise a framework within which all other expressions of the culture are judged. Therefore, the first task of the folklorist is to ascertain the central elements of the work culture. All behavior patterns, from the most mundane to the most unusual, are ranked according to their importance to the successful accomplishment of recurrent work tasks.[12] Although this ranking is a subjective process, it aids the researcher in discovering the most significant means through which cultural information is being exchanged. For example, if a field worker were to document the work skills of a Halligan bar man, he might record a hundred fire attacks led by the bar man, interview thirty bar men about their job, and collect numerous stories about their experiences "on the bar." Much of this information would be subjective and idiosyncratic, reflecting simply the day-to-day reactions of an individual doing his job. Learned skills, such as manipulating the bar to break locks and gain forcible entry could be viewed as mundane skills, which, over time, are reduced to unconscious reflexes. At the other extreme are skills that are rarely used but are mandatory for an unusual occurrence, such as a single-handed rescue or entrance into an unventilated basement. Between these two extremes are the most common, recurrent incidents and their attendant stories that reveal the most central concerns of this job. Searching a room for victims, going above the fire to search, and locating the seat of the fire, emerge through the documented attacks and narratives as central to this fire fighting specialty. This centrality is established by the folklorist not simply as a result of the frequent demand for these skills in the occupation, but, more importantly, by the relative

importance placed on their evaluation by the members of the culture. These techniques are perceived as being central because in their daily performance and the verbal evaluations of performance, they comprise a focused body of informally held standards that reveal in their detail and specificity what the workers themselves see as most crucial to the successful execution of these tasks.

Each task requires a particular (or "key") skill that must be acquired before a job can be accomplished. How successfully that task is performed becomes a standard by which peer judgment is made. The techniques required to execute a job are based on experience and association with other workers. For example, for one man to properly raise a ground ladder, he must learn to use the leverage of the ladder to swing it into place. The mastery of this technique is necessary for the successful accomplishment of this task. Over time, the critical appraisal of form comprises a canon of shared criteria used to judge all performances in the occupation. The individual is apprised of his performance and standing within the occupational community in a variety of ways: through judgment of his fire ground actions, by verbal critiques at the watch desk, and by the number of people who attend ceremonies in his honor, such as promotional or retirement dinners. Viewed from this perspective, an individual's entire career can be seen as the collective portrait etched in the minds of fellow workers.

Performance in a work setting is not a law, it is a standard. The dynamics of this standard are expressed and received in a variety of ways: joking, job performance, stories, retirement dinners, gestures, oral and written evaluations. So important is this standard that status in the occupational community can be said to depend not only on a person's ability to consistently perform the requisite techniques needed to accomplish a job, but also on his ability to understand the canon upon which he is being judged and learn how to manipulate it.

In the course of his career, an individual has thousands of opportunities to perform in front of his peers; and there are as many varieties of performers as there are members of the culture. The canon is an informally held cultural standard that is rigid enough to perpetuate traditional rules of conduct, but elastic enough to allow for compensation and variation in the group. Not all fire fighters are good at all the techniques demanded by the

work, but each individual establishes a reputation in the culture by anticipating the critical appraisal of fellow workers and developing a niche for himself.

With these insights in mind, I completed the ethnography and prepared it for distribution to the members of the department. Captain Ryan (my supporter, critic, and friend throughout this effort) was given a draft copy for comment and his reactions and the results of this entire process are presented in the following pages to both complete the introduction and provide an insider's view. As I write this introduction four years after the presentation of my findings, it is easier for me to be objective about the results. In retrospect the changes that have occurred in this work culture, from Metro tunnel accidents to high rise building fires, are taking place against a backdrop of continued racial tension and the on-going struggles of women trying to enter the work force. My attempt as the author of *Good Fire/Bad Night* to bring these concerns into the open was never completely met. Yet in many of the fire houses I have visited in my subsequent trips to Washington, younger fire fighters have said that this study provided them with at least a partial introduction to the culture and prepared them for the conservatism that remains. Although the entire effort did not lead to an overt consideration of change, it may continue to exist as a cultural document that depicted the strengths, weaknesses, and positive and negative aspects of this highly traditional, urban culture as I found it. Perhaps, ultimately, that is all we can ask of our ethnographic insights.

Critique by Captain David A. Ryan, DCFD

[The reception of my study by the fire fighters is best summarized by Captain Ryan's critique, which he presented at the first national conference on occupational culture, "Discovering Working Culture in American Society," held at the University of Michigan in 1980.]

It was during my first term as president of the union that I became acquainted with Bob McCarl. It was through his work on the Folklife Festival sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution that we met; but due to what I felt were more pressing matters, I really

didn't bother to focus on the value or objective of his work as a folklorist. As a matter of fact I must have asked him a dozen times what he really did for a living. I still ask myself, "Can you really make a living that way?" The Festival provided good public relations for the union and a significant number of members were very supportive of it. So I, as President, merely went along with the program. The fact that it didn't cost the union money, didn't require any of my time, and made people happy were the main criteria I used to sanction the local's involvement.

The first meaningful conversation I had with Bob came about at Engine Co. No. 17, when he told me how he wanted to do a folklore study of fire fighters. As he explained his plan to me, I felt he had only an illusion of what we really were about; but I could see value in such a study for reasons quite different from his. Bob seemed to envision fire fighters as self-sacrificing public servants that consistently performed above and beyond the call of duty with little or no tangible recognition for their effort. Although there is some validity to this impression, I, as an insider, saw many of the very human characteristics of the group and had a less romantic image of fire fighters in general. I consider myself a blantantly honest person, both with others and myself, to the point that my honesty is often offensive. Although I felt Bob's image of the D.C. fire fighters was idealistic, I thought I could see the opportunity to get answers to some basic questions about the community to which I had dedicated my life. If these answers could be established, there would be wide application in public relations, training, community relations, employee counseling, and even labor relations.

On the other hand, the answers to some of these questions, if my impression was correct, could be detrimental to the community if they were released with an intention to discredit the fire fighters. I therefore became very cautious over the control of the data, because Bob's concept of the group is not unique and I believe it is shared by the general public. This image is a definite asset to those in the profession, and besides helping personnel deal with the paramilitary structure, long hours, working on Christmas Eve, etc., it is a drawing card to quality applicants. The image is positive and not harmful so I had reservations about a negative snowball effect if the human side of the group was not properly presented. To understand my expectations and reservations, you must have some

appreciation for the art of fire fighting and those who make up the fire fighting forces. I say art because there are too many variables in fire fighting to be considered a science; and there is no such thing as a routine fire for those who must try to extinguish them. Like hurricanes, fires frequently occur, are always studied, but are seldom predictable. To some extent this reflects the fire fighting community as a whole.

It is my belief that fire fighters are not understood by those outside their community, nor do they understand themselves. The fiber of the profession is based on many misconceptions. When all human instincts dictate flight from a burning building, fire fighters charge in. Fear is a daily occurrence and control of this emotion is recognized as being essential to success; but it is generally denied as even existing, is not considered in training, and is seldom mentioned except in a passing or joking reference. Neighborhoods that have cheered the exploits of the fire fighters have without any real justification deliberately set fires and then hurled rocks and bottles at the responding apparatus. White and black fire fighters literally risk their lives working with each other, and then return to the fire house where they express their racial prejudices. The group repeatedly condemns the long hours, low pay, and their deteriorating image; and yet they encourage their sons to join the department. The general public puts them in a class with motherhood, apple pie, and the American flag, and yet neither the public nor the elected officials have any real concept whether they do a good or bad job. Quite candidly, some of the most spectacular fires that generate wide public support should have been extinguished in their incipient stage. A fire involving a room and contents fought from the inside is impossible to get on film, due to the smoke and absence of light, and it is extremely demanding both physically and emotionally. Yet the same fire that overcomes the interior attack is a spectacular sight for the photographer's lens and usually covers half of the front page. The list of contradictions could go on and on.

Don't be mistaken that I am some inside whistle-blower on the fire service, but as I said, I try to be honest. I do believe that fire fighters are probably the most dedicated group of public servants in the world, but they definitely are not understood, nor do they objectively see themselves. At any rate, it was a partial explanation of these and other phenomena that I thought would come from Bob McCarl's effort. Thus, I agreed to get involved.

There were many other problems to overcome before the project actually started, but I won't bore you with the details. If anyone here decides to start a similar project, be prepared for the bureaucracy, tax numbers, jealousy, apathy, and other cumbersome obstacles. One significant complication in the D.C. project was the lack of interest by some of Bob's strongest supporters when they found out that the end product was not necessarily going to be a romantic depiction of fearless and sacrificing heroes or that their particular fire company was not one of those to be studied. This was one of the first affirmations that some strong, self-serving motives existed throughout the fire fighting community.

As the project progressed, both Bob and I went through various forms of frustration. The original scope of the project now seemed inadequate, and most time frames were underestimated. The lack of support, for which I must accept my share of the blame, started to add to Bob's frustration, and the closer the group was analyzed the more obvious it became that time would not permit the type of study that was first envisioned (p. 15). The temptation to pursue individual aspects of the group, each of which would be an interesting study by itself, had to be resisted. Petty jealousy and ruffled egos were a small but annoying distraction. The ever-widening area of study and the time limitations posed a constant obstacle to the original goal. Certain expectations did not materialize, and with the limited experience in applied folklore there arose the gnawing questions as to whether much of the work would be in vain. Bob felt that the group at Engine Company Number 16, Truck 3 represented a cross-section of the department, and I was adamant that there was no single group that represented the whole. We decided to study an alternate group, and although Engine Company Number 8 was the same type of unit, the background, attitude, and outlook of the personnel was entirely different. I tried not to become involved in the logistics of the study, in an effort to keep it unbiased and objective from an outsider's viewpoint; but at times I clearly voiced my opinion. My frustrations were minimal compared to Bob's, because it was he who had invested the time and effort and was dealing daily with the groups under study. A lesser man would have given up, but he managed to maintain his enthusiasm. He pressed on, although I think he will admit that sometimes he wasn't sure where he would end up or how he would get there.

After many months the time had come to gather the data and develop the second phase of the project: a written account of Bob's observations. With more logistical and financial problems arising and ultimately being overcome, he finally had the first draft of his work. He dropped it by the fire station where I was working in the late afternoon, and I started my review. By midnight I was so irate I was ready to run him out of town. I recognized that here was over a year of his life that I was ready to pitch in the trash, so I tried to pick my words carefully; but how do you tell someone that he has been spoon-fed selected tall tales that didn't even resemble the real thing? In spite of the deletion of names, I recognized many of the situations and I knew what actually took place. Many of the accounts were gross distortions of the truth, and my worst fears were now becoming a reality. I called Bob, in spite of the hour, and tried to gently voice my concern. To my surprise he agreed and in fact was pleased with my observations, because in large part they correlated well with the original concepts that were discussed back at Engine Company Number 17 when we first envisioned the project.

What I had failed to realize in my review was that this work was not only designed to show fire fighters how we are, but also how we see ourselves. The portions of the book describing each job title and the related tasks were factual and accurate; but some of the stories were absurd, although, to my chagrin, they were recorded as they were told. My initial shock had now become sobering reality. Not only did outsiders have a distorted image of fire fighters, but the men themselves were living one life and apparently believing another. From the stories told, the "wagon driver" was the single most important ingredient to successful fire fighting (p. 68). Officers and others in authority were an obstacle to success, and wagon drivers were second only to the Almighty. Even if the emphasis were properly placed, no human could possess the physical attributes to accomplish some of the feats that were described.

Two other union officials reviewed the draft, as well as four other members of the department from its various subgroups. In spite of some varying degrees of dismay, there was only one section that needed massive review, and that was only because some of the stories selected created an inaccurate reflection of one subgroup. Other stories telling of the same tasks were substituted and, in spite of the tremors, no legitimate objections could be raised. How the

community at large was going to receive the information remained to be seen.

The draft was polished, pictures were added, a glossary was prepared, and after some additional problems the booklet *Good Fire/Bad Night* went to press. I felt the sales volume would be one barometer of the community's acceptance, so sample copies were distributed to the work sites, with individual copies available at a nominal fee of $2.00 each. We were presently in the red by about $500, so any sale was welcome. But optimistically it was decided that any profit that was realized would be donated to the local burn center. The initial flurry of sales was anticipated, but this brisk pace continued over a period of weeks. In short order our bills were paid, and, as of now, a total of 450 copies have been sold within the [fire fighting] community. The burn center will definitely benefit from the effort by virtue of the $900 donation, but the cultural benefit remains to be seen. We became enthused, and now the third and final stage of the project had to be planned.

There were mixed reactions to the booklet; and everyone seemed to have an opinion as to what type of response we would get to the oral presentation. The intent of this phase was to initiate discussion between the participants after presenting the material and hopefully generate more meetings in the future with a focus on specific areas. Some wanted to secure a large hall in anticipation of a mass turn-out, while others had more modest expectations. Due to the various work shifts, the predominance of part-time employment, and the wide area over which the fire fighters reside, it was clear that the day of the week, time of day, available parking, etc., would all affect attendance. Some feelers were put out, and positive vibes were felt. The big day finally came, and Bob presented his audiovisual version of his work.

Unfortunately the attendance was so poor that two fire companies that were working at the time and in the immediate area of the meeting place were dispatched to the meeting and administrative personnel were asked to sit in. Some of the most vocal subgroups were either poorly represented or not represented at all. The department's administration had token representation, the units that were studied were barely visible, some union advocates were conspicuously absent, and even some of Bob's friends forgot about the meeting. It was very disappointing. An optimist could say it was the wrong day, time, etc., but it is my opinion that this com-

munity does not want to see itself as it apparently really is. It is no wonder that there is little or no understanding of the group as a whole, because the group seems to reject its own identity and wants to continue the myth. I am personally more concerned now than I was originally, because at that time I felt I was one of the few that could see a discrepancy between the projected image and reality, but I believed that others were not aware of the variance between the two. Now that it has been documented and presented to them, it seems they still fail to see it or, more disturbing, choose not to do so. In either case, it is obvious that our original goals of the study have not been realized in that we failed to provoke the community to recognize an objective view of itself.

On the other hand, we made some accomplishments that were not originally intended. Many wives, mothers, and friends of fire fighters have told me that through Bob's book they have gained new insights and a better understanding of their fire fighters. In one case, an appreciative critic felt the book provided a perspective that she failed to recognize, although she had both a husband and a son as fire fighters. It also appears that other departments can see themselves through Bob's work. Perhaps because the exposed frailities are not theirs, they are more receptive. We plan on pursuing this concept. At any rate, it is consoling to know that the work has been beneficial, even if the original objectives were not completely realized.

This brings us back to that same gnawing question about what have we really done and where do we go from here? The original hypothesis [p. 17] is as valid now as it was in 1976, and many of the objectives remain obvious. Unfortunately, although we are wiser now than before, there is still no guaranteed tactic that will bring about the desired results. There is one clear conclusion that can be drawn: more time must be allowed if similar projects are to be successful. There are also some observations that can't be stated emphatically but have significant substance to support them. These observations are probably best stated as my personal opinion.

Fire fighters are a mixed group who are relatively accessible to study because they are open to speaking about themselves, are in concentrated areas and groups, and have the time to sit down and talk. I also think they represent an above-normal cross-section of working people with relatively high values and at least high school educations. With this in mind and knowing how their stories do

not seem to reflect a true image of themselves, I cannot help but look with a jaundiced eye at other folklore studies of other occupational groups. I know fire fighters, and I know Bob McCarl's dedication and qualifications. I also know what conscientious effort went into the work with the D.C. fire fighters, and no one can convince me that there was less romance in this research than in other occupational studies. It would appear to me that Bob could have justified his original conception if he chose only to see the romantic episodes, but his objectiveness dictated he modify his impression. The rapture of this type of information is obvious and surely would have created the basis for another book like Dennis Smith's *Report from Engine Company 82,* but it is not representative of the daily life or attitude of the group. I then ask, "How accurate are the accounts that depict other occupations that do not lend themselves to study as well as fire fighters and who do not appear to include the opportunity for romance as readily as the fire fighting community?" I know my dealings with the watermen on Maryland's eastern shore do not coincide with the accounts of their culture; but until now I assumed that I had not met those of that dying breed. I now ask if the breed really died or if they ever existed except in the eyes and stories of those studied and the imaginations of those who recorded the culture. Perhaps the academic community has the answer to this dilemma, or could it be possible that the academic community, like the fire fighters, has an image of itself and its work that may not be the reflection of reality? Perhaps this is turf for another study.

I am well qualified to put out fires but not to postulate on the abstract benefits or accuracy of occupational studies. I feel that there was great value in Bob McCarl's work with the fire fighters, but obviously we were unsuccessful in reaching many of our goals. The data are there to be used, but the technique to apply the data and reap the benefit of this knowledge has, for now, escaped us. The effort was well spent, perhaps a little before its time; but the original hypothesis can be more strongly stated, and the original needs and concerns remain. The practical application of the study may still be viable via an alternative approach, and perhaps more time is all that is necessary for the true image to come into focus.

On the other hand, fire fighters, at least in the District of Columbia, may have their heads in the sand and may choose to keep them there. If that is the case, I contend that they are not

alone; and perhaps it would be better to develop under-sand mirrors rather than trying to make them remove their heads, if we want them to see themselves. This, ladies and gentlemen, I leave for you to decide, and I'll go back to the simple and sedentary task of putting out fires. I also want to add one final note: I have stood before you and exposed some of the frailties of myself and my peers in the fire fighting community, but in spite of the research and my concern, I remain adamant in my belief that fire fighters are the best group of employees that have ever been assembled. Thank you.

Good Fire/Bad Night

Life in the Fire House

The focal point of the fire fighting experience is the fire house itself. The size of the house (whether or not it is a single,* double,* or chief's house*) its location in the city, and the number and types of runs* that are made by the people who work there, all contribute to the attitude of the fire fighters and the character of the fire house. From the time a man or woman first sets foot in a fire house, until they leave, they identify and are identified with that particular station. In the discussion that follows, the day to day life of a fire fighter in the fire house will be explored.

Rookie Experiences

A rookie's* entire fire fighting career can be shaped by his/her† first assignment. If sent to a slow house* or excluded from participation in the aggressiveness and spirit associated with a running company,* it may take a fire fighter years to make up that missing experience. Most fire fighters recall their first day on the job quite vividly, because even though they may have had previous experience, this is the first time they have worked with professionals who use fire fighting techniques unique to the District. The examples cited below provide a glimpse into this initial experience:

> The first day I was lost, you know. You first come in and I thought that when you get a run you just go to the coat room and pick up your coat and go to the fire. I didn't know you're supposed to put it on the truck. But the guys helped me a lot, you know, like this guy on number two platoon* who helped

*See glossary.

†Rather than use the cumbersome "his/her" or "he/she" throughout the manuscript, I have used either the masculine or feminine pronoun as the particular instances warranted.

me out a lot. And I had a nice officer and that was the main thing. I got off on a good first step because a good officer is the main thing. Never had any problems, I guess I just kind of blended right in, you know.[1]

So I assumed duty the first day and I couldn't a been here for more than five minutes and I walked through the door... and Capt. S. said put your stuff on layout* and as soon as we get the group together I'll introduce you. Well I had no more than put my gear on the apparatus* and the vocal* went, "Box Alarm Engine 16," and bam, out the door we went. Well the first thing I noticed was how quick this company gets out. So I get on and I'm struggling with my gear and they're turning corners and I'm thinking to myself, holy mackerel, is there a madman up there behind the wheel or what? So we pull up to the building and there's a five story office building, and I mean this thing is lit up like a Christmas tree. It was about then I started thinking—oh oh—what have I got myself into this time?[2]

As seen in these examples, the first day on the job can be a harrowing experience due to the tremendous amount of informal information that can only be learned in the actual fire fighting situation itself. This forces the new fire fighter to rely even more heavily on his fellow fire fighters, particularly officers and veterans, to guide him through his early career. Unlike the old days, however, when a fire fighter would report directly to the company after having been hired off the street, probationers* today do experience a formal training course at the training school, which imparts to them the basics of the trade. At the training school, the rookie is provided with practical, hands-on experience with the techniques and equipment of fire fighting. This general, objective instruction provides the skeletal background material needed to begin work in the fire house with at least a basic knowledge of terminology and processes, while it also gives the probationer confidence in his ability to grasp and perform the basics. After the first few months in the house and on the fire ground,* however, this formal education has been shaped by the informal culture of the company and the officer, and the rookie has begun to reflect the attitude and techniques of those he has chosen as a model. The following selection provides just a brief glimpse into the way in

which an instructor at the training school works with a rookie class on ladder drills.

> [The scene is a large paved area next to the training tower. The probationers are teamed up with each other and each team is using a twelve foot aluminum ladder (Figure 1).]

Figure 1. *An instructor at the training academy drills probationers in the proper method of raising ground ladders.*

LT.: To start with, turn your ladders over so the fly section* is on top. Yours is O.K. Alright, the next thing I want you to assume is that you are picking it up like you are taking it off of the apparatus. The ladder truck for instance. The way it sits in the back there. Has everbody seen it? What you would do is you would stand there just like the slides and then you would take it off. And then you come to a stop and that's where I want you to stay until the next command, and that's what I want you to do. Now to pick up the ladders. . . . When they're on the ground like this it can be done very simply. If you want to go this way both individuals face the opposite way from

> the way you want to go, pick it up and swing underneath it. Do you know how to do it? Ever done it before? O.K., just watch—everybody just watch me. O.K., now I want to go that way, right? O.K., ready? O.K.? Everybody see it? O.K., we'll do it again and then it will be your turn to try it.[3]

Much of the instruction at the training school is repetitive and learned through rote memorization, because in the excitement of a fire fighting situation it is extremely important that the inexperienced fire fighter be at least moving in the right direction with the correct tool without having to be told to do so. It is for this reason that many rookies assigned to an engine company are put on the line* with the officer, so that they can be guided to the very seat of the fire and get an immediate feel for the pace and evolution of fire fighting attack, while at the same time they are aware of the fact that the officer is right there hanging onto the shoulder of their running coat.*

One of the most important relationships that a rookie can develop is a close working relationship with an officer or technician who takes the time and trouble to show him the ropes. It is in the daily instruction and personalization of experience that the novice fire fighter first begins to learn the trade from the inside. The collective experiences of the group are linked to specific situations encountered by the rookie in the fire house and on the fire ground as he goes through his early career. In the fire critique recounted below we get a glimpse of how this type of information is passed on.

> [Members of an engine company and truck company in the same fire house have just returned from a tough fire on the fourth floor of an office building in the downtown area. The fire was located in a small closet in a corner office and it was difficult to both locate and extinguish due to a lack of ventilation,* which also caused a great deal of poly-vinyl chloride* fumes to fill the hall with that odorless but deadly gas. This critique takes place as the fire fighters are washing out their face pieces* and re-filling their air bottles* at the large compressed air tanks at the rear of the fire house.]
>
> OFFICER TO ROOKIE: Kid you worked your ass off tonight. Turn around here and let's see if it's still on.
>
> 1ST FF: Who ran out of air?

2ND FF: The guy who wouldn't leave when his bell* rang. Had to hang in there and play big bimbo.

1ST FF: When my bell rings man, I get adios.

2ND FF: Hell, I could ring your bell with your mask not even on.

3RD FF: I want to tell you something man [to the rookie], we should a had it buddy; we went right on by that damn fire. But that's what you got all them other guys for is to back you up when you can't find it, but we should a had it.

ROOKIE: I tell you I went into that room and looked around. I thought we were really gonna come into something there on the left.

3RD FF: I hung around there as long as I could. But after the third "Get your ass out of here," by the white hat* over there I couldn't ignore him anymore.

1ST FF: Yeah when it's time to get out you got to get out. Like those fires we caught the other tour* when W. knocked him on his ass trying to get out.

2ND FF: That was on Third Street right? When I was on the pipe?*

1ST FF: The one after that.

2ND FF: No, I wasn't on that.

1ST FF: What fire was it that W. either run out of air or whatever, but he about killed you when he came out of there?

OFFICER: Municipal Building.

2ND FF: Oh Municipal . . . oh man, I hadn't run out of air, I was just scared.

OFFICER: Oh you were? Well then you were the only one. Just because there was live ammunition and tear gas exploding everywhere. . . .

4TH FF: Yeah I wasn't scared at all. I just decided I'd stroll out to the street and lay there on my face for fifteen minutes trying to get my breath. I think I only sucked up about six or seven inches of concrete off of that sidewalk trying to get some air.[4]

This kind of narrative anthology in which the group constructs a story out of its collective experience is both a form of entertainment and (for the rookie) a form of instruction. It is cited here to provide an example of the way in which the members of the

fire fighting company direct their experience to others in the collective memory of the group. During the formative years of his career, these critiques form the foundation for attitudes and inside knowledge that will remain with this fire fighter for the rest of his career.

As a rookie proceeds through his career there are two ways in which he is examined to determine the extent to which the knowledge is sinking in. On a formal level the officer checks the probationer's knowledge of the district* in formal periodic reviews of the probationer's book* and the running routes* in the local alarm* and the box alarm* areas; whereas informally, the lessons learned on the fire ground and the stories told round out a rookie's learning. The following text is taken from a probationer's oral exam, in which a rookie is completing his probationary training by "saying his probation"* to his company officer in one of the study rooms in the fire house (Figure 2). In addition to this exam, the rookie will then be required to "say his probation" to the Battalion Fire Chief and once passed be available for transfer into another company as a fire fighter:

OFFICER: Seventh and P St., N.W.
PROB.: Capitol Wholesalers . . . .

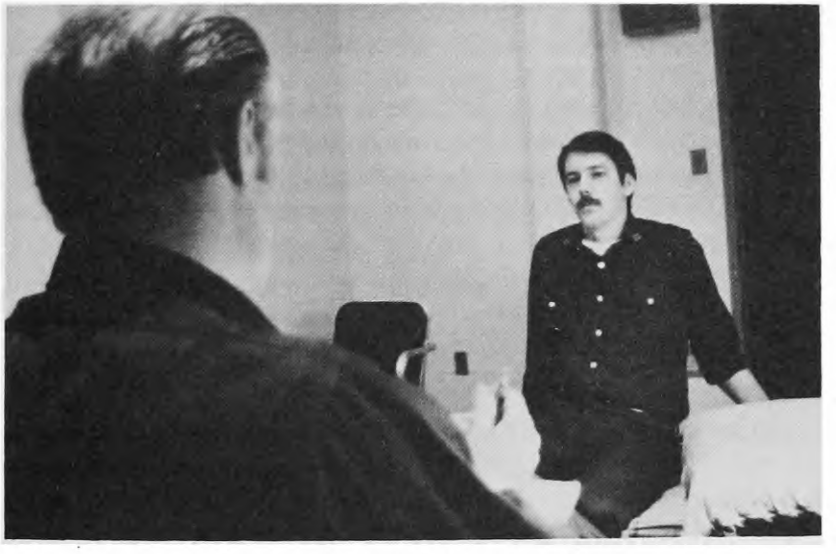

Figure 2. *A rookie "saying" his probation to an officer.*

OFFICER: Riggs National Bank

PROB.: 833 Seventh St., left on 13th to L, right on L to Mass. Avenue . . . .

OFFICER: Seventeenth and P St., N.W.

PROB.: Left on 13th, left on Mass. Avenue to 16th, right on 16th . . . left on Mass. to 17th, right on 17th to box.

OFFICER: Box 255

PROB.: Q between 17th and 18th. Left on 13th to Mass., left on Mass. to 16th, right on 16th to Q, left on Q to box.

OFFICER: 10th and T St., N.W.

PROB.: Left on 13th to Logan Circle, around the circle to Vermont Avenue, Vermont Avenue to 11th St., left on 11th to Mt. Vernon, right on Mt. Vernon to T, right on T to box.

OFFICER: The book has 10th and T St. as left on 13th to the circle, around the circle to Vermont Avenue, right on Vermont Avenue to 11th St., right on 11th St. to Vermont Avenue, right on Vermont Avenue to 10th and box. Now do you have Mt. Vernon Place in there?

PROB.: O.K., yeah now I see.

OFFICER: O.K.[5]

Although much of the preliminary learning about the district is rote memorization of box locations* and running routes, the rookie soon begins to link specific boxes and routes to aspects of the urban landscape. As a member of a company, he not only begins to associate certain buildings and signs with street and box locations, but he also participates in discussions and company drills* in which these locations are linked to experiences that are shared by group members. As the urban landscape is constantly changing through building construction, urban renewal, and street excavation, these routes change, and the stories associated with a particularly tight alley or the loss of a building through a major fire add to the store of knowledge imparted to an interested probationer as illustrated in the following account.

[The members of the truck company are sitting around a table in the sitting room* (Figure 3). The officer is reading locations out of the book and checking on running routes to those locations.]

OFFICER: 11th and K: Right on 13th, left on K. 13th and F, Palace Theater: Right on 13th. 15th and G St . . . .

Figure 3. *An officer conducting a book or "skull" drill in the sitting room.*

1ST FF: Wait a minute Sarge ....
2ND FF: Yeah, the Palace is no longer with us ....
OFFICER: Damn, that's right. Box 1227 .... that's the one they damn near called for a second alarm* on. I was detailed down to 2 Engine and when we got there that son-of-a-bitch was really smokin' .... 13th and F. You couldn't see down to the end of the block.
3RD FF: Is that the one that they almost blew it?
2ND FF: Not to be mistaken with the Palace Hotel ....
3RD FF: Isn't that the one that they knocked the wall down or something?
OFFICER: Yeah, they were in the process of knocking the wall down and it decided to go itself. 15th and G, Keith Theater: right on 13th, right on New York, left on 13th.[6]

Just in this brief drill, the association of an address with a building and then the collective observations that comprise a narrative about what happened to that building suggest once again the importance of group personalization of the landscape. This personalization takes a form that has relevance to their interests and

needs by compressing experience and stressing the most important aspects of the memory.

The most effective method of learning that takes place in the fire house, however, is the one-on-one instruction that occurs when an officer or an experienced fire fighter takes an inexperienced probationer under his wing in an attempt to provide him with an inside perspective (Figure 4). As will be discussed later in some detail, an officer can literally shape a rookie's perception and understanding of the work by creating an environment in which the whole company assists in the educational process. It is important to keep in mind that this type of instruction extends well beyond the communication of facts to an attempt to provide the probationer with a new way of thinking and perceiving both the work of fire fighting and the urban landscape as seen through the eyes of experienced fire fighters. These teaching relationships often develop into close lifelong friendships. Every fire fighter can recall in some detail the helpful stories and tricks of the trade passed on to them by an experienced driver, officer or man on the back step.*

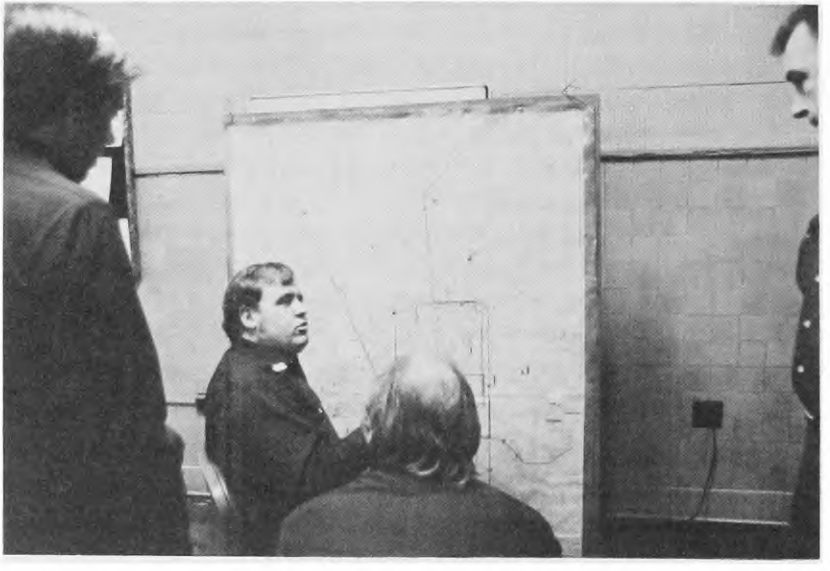

Figure 4. *A wagon driver drilling a rookie in running routes in his district.*

In the following example, a fill-in or second wagon driver* is teaching a rookie how to remember the locations of numbered streets in the city.

WAGON DRIVER: The way you remember your numbered streets is EKPU: E=500, K=1000, P=1500, and U=2000.

PROB.: Let's see if I've got this right, E is 500.

WAGON DRIVER: That's right. What that means is that every numbered street from North Capital to "poh-dunk" between E and F is the 500 block of that numbered street; from F and G is the 600 block; from G and H is the 700 block, and so on. Now do you understand?

PROB.: I think so. It just . . . every block it just increases, right?

WAGON DRIVER: Right, but there's no J St., so you don't allow for it cause there is no J in there. It's counted so you just don't worry about it. So you got I=900, K=1000 so there is no reason to worry about J. Alright, tell me what hundred block Q St. is. Let's say 16 St. between Q and R.

PROB: O.K. Q would be 16, 1600 block. And what'd you say it was between, what hundred block?

WAGON DRIVER: It doesn't matter. Tell me where the 1900 block is?

PROB.: O.K., the 1900 block is between Q and U.

WAGON DRIVER: The 1900 block?

PROB.: O.K., its between Q and U.

WAGON DRIVER: O.K., use that head for something other than a hat rack—the 1900 block. Each street is a letter—1900 block.

PROB.: O.K., the 1900 block. That would be T, I'm sorry.

WAGON DRIVER: 1700 block?

PROB.: 1700 block . . . . between Q and R.

WAGON DRIVER: 1700 block?

PROB.: 1700 block . . . . oh 1700 block, that would be between R and S.

WAGON DRIVER: Now do you understand how it works?

PROB.: Yeah, for every block it just goes up a hundred, but since you don't have a J St., then it just goes up a hundred.

WAGON DRIVER: I'm tellin you man, if they give me a run out of here and I know that I have to turn left on 13th St. If they say

> 1716 13th St. the first thing that I go to is my EKPU—P-Q-R, between R and S. I know its on 13th St., but I'm still trying to picture if I'm going on the wrong side of the street. And the next thing that I picture is where is the dividing line.* It's behind me—odd's on the right, even's on the left. It's on the left hand side of the street. If I turn right and they say its on the 700 block of 13th St., I'm going to do the same thing again. If I'm running down here [pointing to map], I'm going to try to picture exactly where I am when I get down here, try to picture it before I get to it. And the only way you can picture it is if you've seen it before. Remember I told you that, I know that I don't do it anymore, but you should. Remember I told you that every night that you go home you should take a different street home every day.[7]

This single example illustrates the way in which experienced fire fighters retain their unique view of the city and pass it on in a mnemonic form. One of the most deceptive things about urban fire fighting is that the basic techniques and running routes are quite simple to memorize in the abstract, but in a real fire situation when everything is happening in a matter of seconds, there is no time to think, only to react. The more experienced the fire fighter, the more his reactions extend well beyond the immediate problem. As the wagon driver in this example states, once he gets the address, the next step is "to picture exactly where I am when I get down here, try to picture it before I get to it." As will be discussed later in the section on work techniques, this anticipation might even extend to picturing the location of stand-pipe connections in a specific building, the lack of access due to weather conditions in a steep alley-way, or an awareness of a short-cut that will give a third-due company* a better shot at the fire. Knowledge of the district is like a constantly changing three dimensional map that is continually undergoing revisions every time the company leaves the fire house. As illustrated in this example, that knowledge is passed on to a novice in the form of personalized experiences shaped into stories.

Fire House Life

The traditions and customs of fire house life are many and varied and they reflect every aspect of the work experience from clean-up

of the house and maintenance of equipment to standing watch,* and from the cooking and preparation of meals to participation in the joking relationships and status hierarchies in the house (Figure 5).

The clean-up assignments are determined by position on the truck or engine and the day of the week (for example, on Wednesday the bar man does the kitchen floors, the hook man does the upstairs bathroom), with Saturday day work usually reserved for washing the apparatus. In the spring, this activity takes on added significance due to the thoroughness of spring cleaning in preparation for the annual inspection of the house. During this period virtually everything in the fire house is cleaned, repainted, and touched up, even to the point of cleaning and repainting the undercarriages of the apparatus itself. In conjunction with spring cleaning are the "spring rules" that begin the spring/summer season, with water battles that sometimes involve the entire house. Spring rules not only mark the change in season, they also (as seen in the example given below) create or comment on solidarity in the fire

Figure 5. *A fire fighter mopping the sitting room floor.*

house and to a certain extent reflect the camaraderie (or lack of camaraderie) in the group. A typical example of the first water battle of spring is seen in the following.

> We used to sit out in front of the fire house and shoot the bull. And you'd hear this giggle and you'd look up and here's four buckets of water coming down on you. And it'd be W. having to climb up through the hose tower* onto the roof and have to lean out almost two feet over the parapet just to dump the water. But he plotted that.... it was to the point that, o.k. you dry out and you retaliate and you're ready to go home now; it's three o'clock, three fifteen and you're ready to go home. Well all of a sudden there it is—they've gotcha. Or you're under the wagon greasing* and all of a sudden you feel cold water being poured down your pants and somebody giggling. But the thing about those two was that it was never malicious. If you were sick that day you could say, "Look I'm sick," and they wouldn't involve you. But you could see them emerging as the focal point of when spring rites began. Everybody would watch him and say well what do you think, and he'd say no it's a little cold today. But finally the day would come around the end of March or the first of April and the first bucket would fall. And you'd almost feel this sense of relief that we'd made it through another winter together. It's like the first baseball being thrown.[8]

This custom, like many of the others participated in by a fire fighter during his career, is a test for both the individual and the group to see who is "in" and who is "out." As the narrator of this story indicated earlier in the account:

> It may seen immature to someone on the outside, but having a group of people who can act as a cohesive group is really important. So you're sittin down and they're plotting how they're gonna get this guy wet. It's got to be great for morale and if it gets serious, somebody takes it in a bad way, then maybe you have to look at it from the perspective that maybe they're immature. Can they dish it out, but can't handle it? And that's something that they're gonna have to deal with themselves, but at least you've shown them.[9]

The pranks and jokes in the fire house act as a counterpoint to the hours of drill, memorization of street locations and specific

buildings. Without these occasional outlets the pressure of the job would be unbearable.

Being an insider in a fire house is more than knowing the proper techniques and running routes, it is also being a participant in all aspects of fire house life, from cooking and cleaning to water battles and taking a turn in the hose bed.* Refusal to participate on any of these levels may alienate the individual from sharing those aspects of informal instruction and support that she requires to advance up the ranks. This is one of the main arenas of tension between fire fighters who participate in the occupation but who approach the work from very different sexual or racial backgrounds and sets of expectations. This conflict will be amplified in the discussion that follows.

Equipment maintenance, from the checking and greasing of the apparatus to the choice of helmet and what personal gear is carried, is yet another important part of fire house life. Each piece of equipment, whether it is a helmet or a hose wagon, must be thoroughly checked when a fire fighter assumes duty. The idiosyncrasies of each tool and appliance become as familiar to the company as the individual personalities of each member. Also the handling of masks (Scot-Air paks) and the simple courtesy of returning the running gear* of the man you have relieved to the coat room reveal attitudes toward the job. An officer who has a fire fighter who consistently has mask problems, for example, might begin to get the impression that the person isn't suited to the work. Also filling a man's boots with water, putting fish in his helmet, or sponges on the seat of the apparatus reflect a joking relationship between individuals, expressed through this modification of the man's personal equipment, although usually running gear is off limits to this kind of play. Most experienced fire fighters tell stories about fires taken by other companies or mistakes made due to failures to check equipment when you come on duty, as in the following.

> I worked a lot of part-time.* More than I work now. And I used to come in and plop on my ass, and at six o'clock I would check over the apparatus. One day the other shift got a reserve piece* of apparatus while we were off, during the day. I come in, plopped on my ass, didn't check the truck. We had a fire around five o'clock. The generator* didn't work, the tiller

assembly* was stuck, and the reels* were tied in a knot. A real lesson about checking the apparatus. Also on that fire a fireman got hurt, we couldn't ventilate the place; the chief went crazy, everything. Everything went wrong that could go wrong. And the kicker is I'd been on the job for eight years at that time.[10]

The choice of personal equipment from the purchase of a leather helmet* with a custom-made front piece* to carrying special tools like light socket adapters, door chocks,* a hand spliced life line,* a spanner,* and other tools indicates a personal statement toward the work expressed through modification of the issued gear. Some fire fighters become so involved with the equipment that they develop innovations like the junction box* used by District truck companies and the Halligan bar* used by most major fire departments, both invented by fire fighters. These interests have in some cases grown so intense that a particular individual becomes associated with a tool or task related to the equipment, as seen in the following narrative.

And then you got guys like Willy Lump Lump. He was something else. Willy came down here from New York. And this Halligan bar we got now? Well Willy had something called the Lump Lump tool. I don't know where the name came from but it was a Halligan bar, only a smaller version and it looked just like it. And you couldn't pick up his running coat, I mean he had everything they ever gave him. It was just unreal. Wherever Willy went, Willy couldn't drive. He was one of the few guys on the fire department who couldn't drive the apparatus. But he'd get detailed* and he'd have to use the bus. And he took every goddamned thing the fire department ever gave him. He'd have his dress uniform on and he carried every goddamn piece they ever gave him with him. Plus he would eat some of the damndest food: cat food, and you couldn't make it hot enough whatever he was eating. There was no sauce too hot for Willy. He would breathe fire, but he'd never back away from that plate. He was a very talented guy . . . what can I say . . . he could do anything with a rope. That net they've got over at the school for the fire training building? He made that. He used to splice all the ropes and what not that they got down at the boat* and everything. He was a real character, man, I tell you. We used to

> come back from a run and he had a police whistle. And he'd stand out in the street and direct traffic like a cop with that whistle. And if a car came by he'd stop you. Raise hell and everything else. But aim him in the right direction, like, "Willy take out that door" or what have you. And shit, he'd have that whole damn wall knocked out before you could get him stopped.[11]

Standing Watch

Standing watch, like other more formal aspects of fire house life, is determined by rotation, i.e., the man who had the three to four A.M. watch one morning will get the four to five the next (Figure 6). The early morning watches like the three to four to five are sometimes referred to as the "visitors watch" and are reserved for fire fighters from other companies who are detailed to the station for the night. The only consolation a visitor receives from this treatment is that when people are detailed to his station they will be offered the same courtesy.

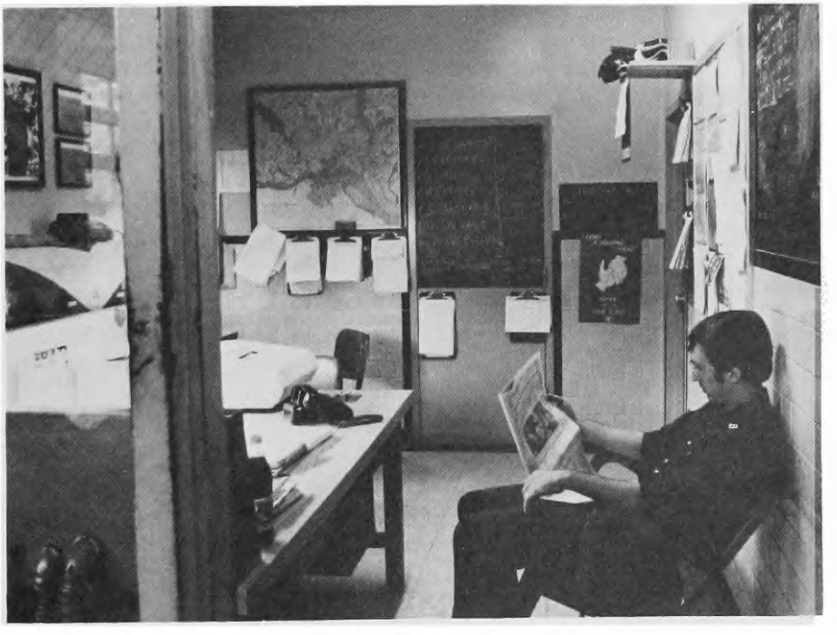

Figure 6. *Standing watch at the watch desk.*

Individual stations have different ways of organizing the watch. Most follow the rotation procedure described above, but in some of the double houses (engine and truck company) the engine company will take the night watches for a tour of duty and then the truck company will take its turn. No matter how it is organized, standing watch in the early morning hours after you have been awakened out of a sound sleep can be an unsettling experience, and it is often an extremely boring one broken only occasionally by the sound of the vocal putting out calls for other companies in the city. Most watch rotations are routine, but a number of the stories about standing watch depict extremes, like runs missed by sleeping watchmen, addresses missed, or in some of the newer houses, cases in which the company turns out and takes off but the watchman can't get to the piece because of the location of the watch desk to the side of the apparatus. Some of the more bizarre stories depict the adventures of the unusual people who seem to be drawn to the fire house in the early hours of the morning. The following narrative session took place around the watch desk one night as three experienced fire fighters relate to a rookie some of the strange things that have happened to them while they were on watch.

W: One night I was on watch and I heard what I thought was the squeal of a pig on the apparatus floor. I look out behind the pumper* and there is this local guy we called Quasimodo getting the shit kicked out of him by this big fat guy. A couple other guys slide the pole and we finally pull this guy off of Quasimodo and get him to the hospital. It turns out that in a bar down the street, Quasimodo had pulled a starter pistol on this guy and shot him full of blanks right in the chest. Needless to say that once the guy realized he wasn't dead he chased Quasimodo into the fire house and beat the shit out of him.

B: Yeah they took him out in the ambulance, he was beat to shit. That's like the time that that guy at 3 Engine answered the buzzer when he was on watch and when he opened the door this woman was standing there who had a hatchet planted in the middle of her skull. They almost had to take the watchman to the hospital too. Man, what a thing to see.

S: Yeah everything used to happen to B. on watch. One time he's sitting at the watch desk and this old drunk is pounding

on the door telling him that there is a fire across the street. B. yells at the guy to get on down the road . . . .

B: Yeah I finally went out and looked across and saw a flicker in the laundromat and turned everybody out and damned if the whole roof wasn't off* in that place—went to a second alarm![12]

Beyond these unusual situations, the watch desk is also the communications hub of the fire house. At the watch desk a fire fighter signs in when he assumes duty, checks the book* to determine leave and work periods, as well as details to other companies. It is also where the company telephone, the newspaper, departmental orders, and mail and notes are located, as well as the vocal alarm receiver, which is the fire house's radio link with headquarters/communications. The watch desk is the heart of the fire house and, along with the kitchen, sitting room, and bunkroom, it is one of the most important areas in which fire fighters congregate, stories are told, and inside information is passed.

The bunkroom of the fire house is, like other areas of fire fighting life, organized according to assignment and position (Figure 7). The truck company sleeps near the poles or doors closest to the truck and the engine company does the same. The

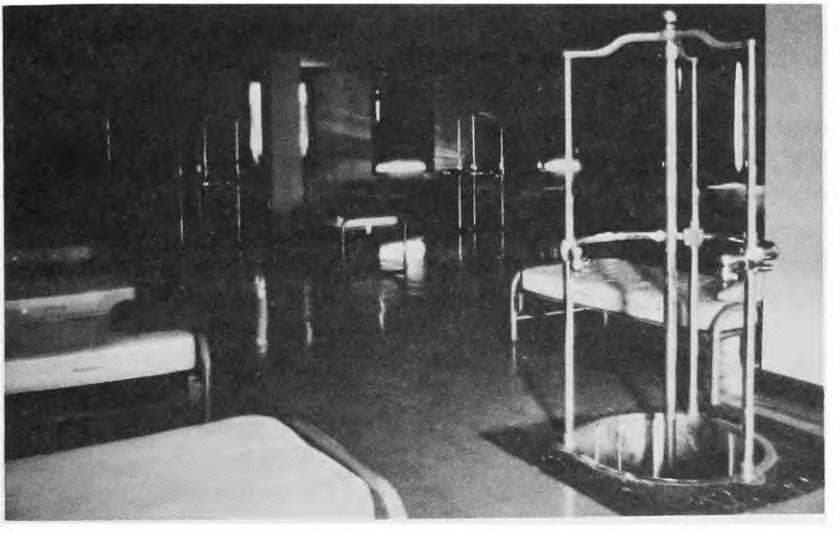

Figure 7. *The bunkroom with brass work and pole hole in the foreground.*

technicians (truck driver, tillerman, wagon driver, and pumper driver) sleep nearest their respective positions on the apparatus since they must be the first to respond when the bells hit in order to start the piece* and also catch the address as they slide the pole or run to the apparatus. There are (understandably) situations late at night after a number of runs when the technician slides the pole half-asleep and either misses the address or makes the run half-asleep, for example.

O: I tell you, some nights, well I guess I usually get up O.K. Well W. and I got a plan. If he gets up first he'll yell my name and I, if I get up first, I'll yell his.

W: About the best sleeper that I ever seen get up that was still asleep was T. and he was acting* on the engine one night. Slid the pole on a box, runs around the engine, looks around and then goes back into the sittin room, takes out a chair, sits down and goes zzzzzzz. You know he was asleep and he didn't know what he was doing. I've gotten behind the wheel and I didn't know how I got there. I didn't even know where I was. So I'd have to ask somebody and say where am I, where is this? That's the truth.[13]

The bunk room is also an area in which many of the pranks in the fire house are played, particularly those that deal with somebody's bed. Most of this harrassment (flour in the sheets, live crabs in the bed, short sheets, overturned beds, and switching beds so the wrong man will be called for watch) are just part of the daily pranking and joking behavior that makes the time pass a little more quickly between runs. Sometimes, however, these pranks are used for specific social controls as in the case below of a fire fighter who has a well-earned reputation for being one of the loudest and most obnoxious snorers in the house.

W: What does your wife say when you're on night work?

O: She says that she gets lots of rest when I work nights. She does man, she really likes it. When I'm home I rip the sheets up. I tell ya the night they slid me out in the hallway and that Deputy Chief came up and tapped me on the shoulder and he said, "Boy you cannot stay out here, you have got to go back in there."

KW: Who was that?

O: Chief M. He said you have got to go back in there. And R. was laughing his ass off. He opened the door and was laughing like shit. The old wrinkled prune face. And then the one day, you know my bed is the only one with wheels on it, I've had it moved from time to time. They moved me out to this center pole one day, put the bed right there. Hit the bell at seven o'clock, [trip] lights* come on. I didn't see shit. Flipped back the covers and boom, my God, fell out of that bed and down the pole and busted my ass on the floor and I said Jeez. I told them that was the worst step I ever took when I got out of bed.[14]

Meals in the Fire House

The kitchen in the fire house is yet another important space in a fire fighter's working life. The purchase of food for meals, decisions concerning what is cooked and who cooks it, as well as the division of labor when clean-up time rolls around are all social occasions that bring the inside cultural view of fire fighters into focus, by identifying relationships and underscoring the closeness of the group. Food preparation, like fire fighting itself and house maintenance, demands that everyone contribute something.

In most houses the same people end up buying the meal either because they live close to a supermarket or pass one on their way to work, because they are the only ones who take the time and trouble to do it regularly, or they prefer this form of contribution to either cooking or cleaning up after the meal is over. In addition to purchasing the food, this person is responsible for dividing the cost of the meal into equal shares (for example a twenty dollar grocery bill would cost ten men two dollars apiece) and collecting the money. In some cases this figure is rounded off to the next highest even number and the remainder is put into the house fund* for special occasions. The choice of what is to be included in the meal is either determined by a special occasion (holiday or promotional dinners* usually result in roast beef, turkey, or ham), by agreement between cook and purchaser, or by the whim of the buyer, who may make a decision based on sales at the supermarket.

Once the ingredients have been purchased (in some chief's houses the chief and his aide will stop for the groceries on their rounds* or the company will stop at a market on its way back from

a run), it is then up to the cook as to how the meal will be prepared. Some fire houses share the cooking chores by having the engine company cook the evening meal for the three nights of a tour, followed by the truck company the next tour. Regardless of which company does the cooking, there are usually specialists who do most of the meal preparation because "they are good cooks," or "they don't mind doing it." A new person in the fire house will often be encouraged to try his hand at cooking to both breathe some new life into the usually predictable round of roast chicken and meatloaf or to once again subject the individual to the critical scrutiny of the group.

Taking a turn at cooking, however, extends beyond just managing to cook the rice or brown the gravy correctly. It is in some houses one of the only ways in which fire fighters from different ethnic or minority backgrounds have an opportunity to share through food preparation an aspect of their cultural heritage. Lavish dinners of rigatone and manicotti prepared by an Italian-American fire fighter, barbecued ribs and black-eyed peas fixed by a black officer from the South, and a secret method for preparing bluefish by a wagon driver from the Eastern Shore of Maryland provide glimpses into the backgrounds of these individuals that would otherwise remain hidden from the rest of the group.

During the preparation of the meal, setting of the table, serving of the meal, clearing and clean-up, and finally washing of the dishes, everyone is expected to either participate or at least offer to help in some way. In many houses a roll of the dice with the two lowest rollers receiving the dishwashing honors decides the division of labor. There is only one other *faux pas* worse than not helping in any way with the meal and that is not to eat it, or "be counted out." Understandably the fewer people eating the meal, the more expensive it is for those who do. But being counted in or out on the meal is much more significant than just the money involved.

The evening meal in the fire house (unlike breakfast or lunch, which are usually considered more optional) is a very important social event similar to getting together after work to have a beer, going to a retirement dinner together, or helping a fellow fire fighter put an addition on his house or install a new transmission—it is evidence of participation in the fire fighting community. To be in on the meal is to be in the group, and to be out is to put yourself in a socially isolated position (Figure 8).

Figure 8. *A promotional dinner in the fire house.*

The strength of the meal tradition in the fire house is possibly so strongly felt because up until the late 1960s when there were only two shifts in the department, the turn around day was every other Saturday, when you had to work twenty-four hours straight. This resulted in at least two meals, with the second usually made up of left-overs from the first. Older fire fighters remember these long Saturdays as some of the best times of their careers and can describe in some detail the quality of the food and the camaraderie of the experience. The current generation of fire fighters, however, views food in a much different way having been raised on both fast foods and an increasing suspicion toward the meat and potatoes fare common at the fire house. A wider variety of religious and ethnic controls on food preparation and consumption also widens the gap of understanding by placing restrictions on diet that are totally inexplicable to the older members of the house. In most cases, however, these individuals participate in the social occasion of the meal by bringing food from home, avoiding certain items, or preparing the food themselves. Even some of the older fire fighters don't eat in the fire house but stand watch during the serving of the meal and then join the group when coffee is being served with desert. In some houses, however, the lack of community feeling or camaraderie has reached the point where everyone cooks his or

her own meal or doesn't eat at all. One of the most frustrating things in the fire service is to be detailed on night work to a fire house "where they don't cook." That is an indication to any fire fighter that there is much more than just diet breaking up the community of that fire house.

The kitchen is also an important space during special occasions, like probationer, promotional, and retirement dinners held in the house (Figure 9). Although retirement dinners are usually lavish affairs held in a meeting hall or volunteer fire house, promotional and probationary dinners mark the passage of a fire fighter as he moves up the promotional ladder. In both situations the promoted fire fighter foots the bill for the meal, which is usually made up of an expensive main dish like steak or roast accompanied by hors d'oeuvres and desert. The promoted fire fighter invites those who have contributed in some way to his advancement, for example, officers, chiefs, friends. The dinner itself, like a first attempt at preparing a meal in the house, makes a statement of appreciation for the support and encouragement given the individual in his career. It also prepares both the fire house community and the promotee for an end to the previous relationship and the beginning of a new one based on a change in status. Like all rites of passage it is both an ending and a beginning.

An additional area for consideration related to the kitchen are the characters whose antics and expertise in the food department

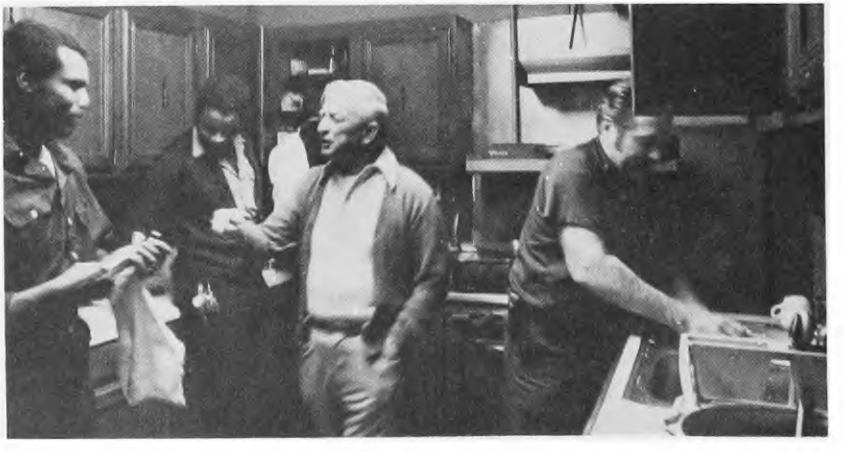

Figure 9. *Clean-up after the meal.*

have kept their stories alive for years. One of the most well known of these older cooks is described in the following passage.

ML: Leo, he's the truck driver that broke me in. There was probably no better truck driver in this city that I've seen. He was the best cook, the son-of-a-bitch. I tell you I almost got divorced. See when I came in every other Saturday you worked 24 hours when you changed over from day work to night work, you had to stay here for 24 hours. And on 24 hour Saturdays you had two big meals. Well L. was the cook on this shift and I mean he'd cook a big ham or something with all the trimmings at lunch time, and then around one o'clock in the afternoon you'd go up and lay down, which everybody did. And then after you got up you'd have a great big roast or something. And I'll tell ya, to this day I have not met anybody who can make a roast beef gravy the way L. can. I don't give a damn who he is, or who she is. They just don't exist. And my wife and other guys' wives too, she said that if I loved his cooking so goddamned much why don't I just go and marry him. They just got tired of us coming home and praising his cooking so much. But he's a good cook and the man can still cook. But a bigger, kinder-hearted person in this world you'll never meet. And a more capable truck driver and fire fighter you'll never meet. He's one of those guys I was telling you about. As rough as a goddamn file, but a heart as big as this whole fire house. Was all fireman through and through and was a truck man through and through.[15]

The Sitting Room

The final area for consideration in the fire house is the sitting room, which also doubles as the dining room and television room in most houses (Figure 10). The sitting room is the most public forum in the fire house and it is here, particularly during change of shifts (7:00 A.M. and 3:30 P.M.) that most of the verbal bantering takes place. A typical interchange between two officers where one is relieving the other sounds like this.

1ST OFFICER: Well it looks like it's physical time again. I see you're carrying around the old man's bottle [a bottle of glucose for blood tests].

Figure 10. *A late night conversation in the sitting room. Note the commissary to the left in the background.*

2ND OFFICER: Hell, I can still run circles around these pansies.

1ST OFFICER: Yeah? I heard that the last time you went to the clinic they had to lead you to the room where they give the eye test.

2ND OFFICER: That's right, that's right. But at least I made it through the door without having to turn sideways.

1ST OFFICER: Shit, I've just matured into my weight. There's still nothing but twisted steel beneath this calm exterior.

2ND OFFICER: Yeah, well it might help if you laid off the fatty cakes while you're waiting for dinner.[16]

There is a saying in the fire service that if people are messing with you (ragging you, giving you a hard time verbally), then you are in; but if they leave you alone, you may be in trouble. There is some truth to this notion, because joking relationships, use of familiar names and nicknames (based on physical features like a

big nose: "The Hawk," or being small of stature: "Short Wheels"), are based on a shared sense of appropriate behavior—how far you can carry verbal dueling without starting a fight. Many of the tensions of the job, the frustrations and the joys of this pressure-cooker existence are eased in the verbal battles, which at the same time provide a common forum for expression and personal statement open to anybody at anytime. But once you throw a verbal "dart" you better be ready to receive one in return without flinching. In the following conversation two fire fighters discuss this kind of joking.

P: Every house seems to have a shit stirrer. Seems as soon as one goes there's another to take his place. The reason that he doesn't recognize a shit stirrer at 2 Engine is because he's it.

ST: I couldn't imagine a fire house without either a shit stirrer or a prankster . . . .

P: Somebody who pulls the little games. And you've got some guys who fall for them day after day after day. There's a guy named Jones on the truck over there and he had two objects [victims] really. But one of them is still there. He's the tillerman on number two platoon, he's still there. This guy Jones would get this guy every day, sometimes three or four times. He would take (this guy worked part-time a lot), he would change his boots. This guy wears a size seven boot. And this other guy named Peters who was there wore a size twelve boot. He would get Peters' boots and put them over there. And we'd go out on a run and it'd turn out this guy had Peters' boots, and its too damn late now. He would change his boots from one side to another. He would change them so this guy would put em on and he'd have them on the wrong feet. He would put water in them in the summer time. So then he got smart. He would run real fast, dump em out, and then put his boots on. So then Jones filled his helmet up with water and set it up there where he always sets it, just like he always sets it. So he run out there, checks his boots, no water in his boots, woosh and he washed himself off with the helmet.[17]

In a small closet adjoining the sitting room, each fire house maintains a commissary, which is a small store run by the entire house for the purchase of cigarettes, candy, and snacks. The money

from this venture, as well as that collected for the house fund (which pays for food, condiments, and coffee), is used to keep the commissary in operation and also augment the house fund itself in case it is necessary to make a major purchase, like a new television or a dishwasher. The fire department does not pay for these items. Injured fire fighters will often be sent flowers or fruit baskets purchased with money from the fund, and in some houses the commissary is run like a cooperative so that at the end of the year everyone gets a rebate based on a percentage of the profits.

Fire fighters are, amongst themselves, generous with their money, providing individuals an opportunity to borrow from the commissary to a certain degree (called "putting it on the wall"), and also chipping in to help fellow fire fighters when financial problems become overwhelming.

> There was a guy who was a fire fighter whose wife and kid got hit in a really bad accident. The kid was killed instantly, but the wife was paralyzed from the neck. Nobody said nothin to this guy, everybody just took up a collection and the next time he came back to work, the chief walked up to him at lineup and handed him the check. There wasn't a dry eye in that house. Sometimes I don't think my wife understands that I know for a fact that if I'm in trouble—any kind of trouble—these guys would bust their ass to help me. And I'd do the same for them.[18]

A fire house, like a family home, is the center of fire fighting culture. Every aspect of fire house life, from cleaning and cooking to maintaining the equipment and drilling, demands collective participation. Yet many of the more experienced fire fighters feel as though the current influx of new recruits is not participating in this culture with the proper attitude, while the younger men and women on the job feel as though both the formal and informal rules of the job are much too restrictive. This tension, in addition to sharp ethnic and personality differences, is evident throughout the department, because in the intense environment of a fire house they stand out in bold relief the minute even the most casual observer walks into the sitting room. Through an understanding of the complexity of fire house life, however, it may be possible to place these conflicts in a more realistic context. The background for these conflicts will be explored in some detail in a subsequent section.

Work Techniques

There are basically two types of fire fighting units that work in concert on the fire ground in order to attack a fire: truck companies and engine companies. The engine company is responsible for getting the hose line to the seat of the fire and extinguishing it; while the truck company is responsible for ventilation, search and rescue, and overhauling the burned area* by removing all burned debris and checking for fire extension* into adjoining buildings. The two companies, however, have to work closely together because if the engine company puts water on the fire before the truck company has had a chance to ventilate, the smoke and gas will come right back on them in the form of superheated steam. At the same time, particularly in a double house in which there is both an engine and a truck company, there is a great deal of good natured rivalry "across the floor" between the two units.

Individual fire fighters have reasons for their preferences of an engine or truck company assignment. It is common for a truck man to remark that "you can stretch hose, but you can't stretch ladders," or "anybody can put water on a fire, the real challenge is in throwing the ladders,* opening up and search and rescue—truck work is more independent." For their part, members of the engine company talk about the excitement of being on the pipe right at the seat of the fire while the truck company has to spend most of its time with ladders and utility tools like lights and fans and often never even gets to see the fire until it is out. Also "truckies" become the utility workers during the overhaul phase of the fire, cleaning up, pulling ceilings* and generally stripping the room or structure of all burned material. This is dirty, back breaking work, and there has been more than one engine company man who has left a fire with a load of hose on his shoulder and a feeling of gratitude for not having to spend the next hour slogging around in waist deep muck or pulling pieces of ceiling down on his head.

Since their assignments and duties on the fire ground are so different, it isn't surprising that these concerns are reflected in the stories that truck or engine company fire fighters tell about their experiences. An observation told from the perspective of a truck man is illustrated in the following:

Some of these things are in the nature of unit or company cus-

toms, for instance this one truck company I was with for nearly four years and still have a great deal of respect and admiration for. And I thought I was pretty good when I went there and I found out that those guys had a very high level of professionalism. One of the little things that they do that I've thoroughly enjoyed is that when they would get to a building they would pitch in, the outside guys would immediately pitch in with the portable ladders. But one of the little things that they did before doing that, the axe man and the hook man would see to it that whatever the first ladder was that they moved with, in their first move toward the building, they'd see that their hook and their axe were leaning beside the front door. And then they went on their way doing the rest of the things that they could do. Now when they got finished putting up the portable ladders and got ready to go in, that's where they would be. They would grab it and go on in. In the meantime, though, if somebody got up there and needed something quick, the engine officer, or the chief or aide—all the different people who went through that door, saw that axe and that hook sittin there and somebody calls for a hook or axe, they could grab it and take it on in there without having to run all the way back to the apparatus. So that was a little piece of efficiency that that company still does to this day.[19]

Engine companies also maintain their own unique customs such as those dictated by the circumstances found in a certain part of the city.

When I was over across the river and running with those guys over there, they do things a little differently because there is only one truck. We used to catch a room and contents* and never even see the second-due company until the whole thing was over. And in some of those apartment complexes over there when you're second due* it can really be a bitch because you have to lay eight or nine hundred feet of hose just to get to the rear. Also the pumper man and wagon driver over there do a hell of a lot more than they do downtown sometimes. Like taking windows out and putting ladders up, as well as doing all of the other things they have to do.[20]

In both of the above accounts the primary concerns of truck and engine company fire fighters are reflected in the kinds of choices each officer and company has to make when they arrive on the scene. In the engine company these choices have more to do with decisions about line length and size as determined by the location or severity of the fire; while the members of the truck company operate much more independently of each other and constantly keep returning to the truck for the next round of operations. In the engine company it is basically a matter of getting location, choosing a line, advancing it into the building and hitting the fire; whereas the truck company searches and opens up, throws the ladders, then returns with lights and fans and in the final step returns with debris buckets, hooks, and shovels to overhaul. In most fire situations during the take-up stage, however, members of either the truck or engine company will lend a hand racking the hose* or washing down the tools. This take-up period is also extremely important as an informal bull session in which members of various companies have an opportunity to compare notes and learn about aspects of the fire they didn't themselves see or experience.

A third type of fire fighting unit in the city is the rescue squad. Usually manned by more experienced fire fighters, the squad has two primary functions: the first is to provide experienced manpower on the fire ground in case additional rescue, line, or ventilation work is necessary. Secondly, the squad is responsible for heavy duty rescue operations like automobile wrecks or industrial accidents in which extractions and emergency medical attention are needed. Until recently, rescue squads were also the only people on the fire ground with hour-long McCaa masks, which provided them with more time in the fire and therefore more opportunities to take the pipe from engine companies whose air supply was much shorter. It isn't surprising, therefore, that there is still a rivalry between rescue squads and engine company men who always think twice before they lay down a pipe to put on their face piece. A squad is sent to all box alarm calls and can also be used to transport injured people if an ambulance isn't available.

In the section which follows, the various positions on the truck, engine, and rescue squad companies will be explained. In each case a brief general explanation will be followed by a story depicting the central concerns of fire fighters who do that type of work.

Engine Company

An engine company is made up of an officer and four fire fighters: a wagon driver, a line man, a layout man and a pumper driver. During a normal attack the officer, line man, and later the layout man advance the hose line into the building, while the wagon driver and pumper man make hose connections, monitor the pumps and insure a proper water supply.

Wagon Driver

The wagon driver (under the direction of the officer) is the pace setter of the engine company. It is his job to take the appropriate running route to the fire, to place the piece as close as he can to the fire building without blocking other companies, and to deliver the water and monitor or alter the water supply to the company when they are inside (Figure 11). From the speed with which the company leaves the house to the pace set over the road and finally the

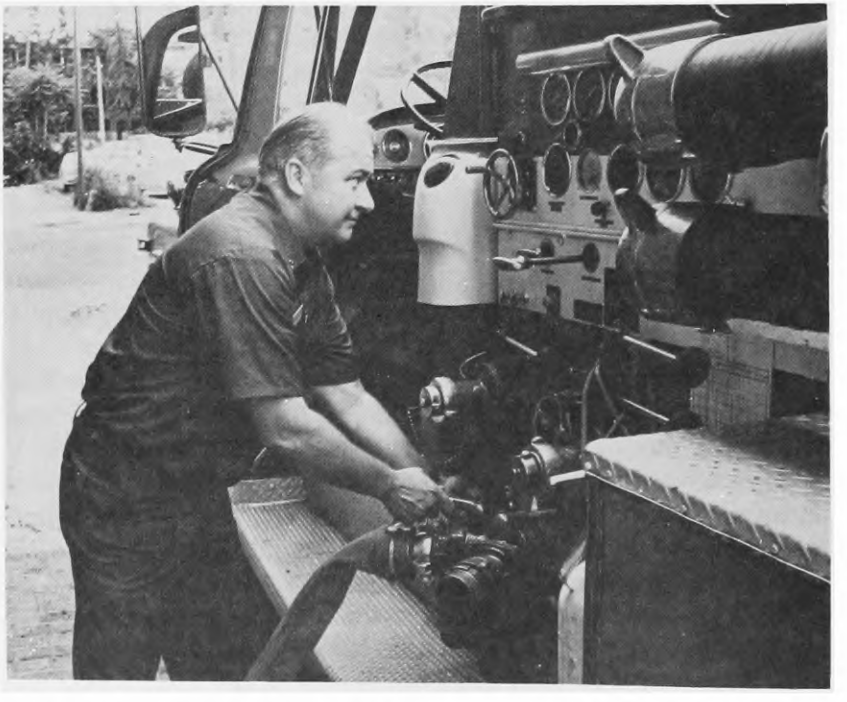

Figure 11. *A wagon driver making his hook-ups at the side of the hose wagon.*

timing of the water to the line man, the wagon driver determines the rhythm and timing of the entire attack. In the following account the most important part of the job, anticipation, is described:

> And I've had other things that I learned about from older guys and never forgot. This was before I was a wagon driver, but it was a lesson that stuck with me even through the times that I was a wagon driver—here's one that I did find several occasions to use. We had a bowling alley fire. We had gone in with a line and I don't know what length the line was; it was probably the longest line we had. And we had to go in and work through the little office spaces that they have in the foyer portion of a bowling alley, and down through, and all the way over to the side and we were working toward the side where the pins were. And I'm on the line. And I get about a third of the way to go, and we've run out of line. So now we're thinkin we better go back and lengthen the line. So we start back but we hadn't gotten fifty feet back and here comes the wagon driver dragging two bags of stand-pipe hose.* And he'd anticipated. Nobody told him to do anything, but he had anticipated that this was a large, deep building and there may be a need. And all he was going to do was just bring them up close so that in case we needed them, there'd they be, and there we were. It looked like something we had drilled for, the most important part was that he had anticipated. So many times after that, you know, as a wagon driver, after a company would go in and I'd make my hook ups,* I would remember that, and if it fit the situation, grab one of those bags and take it in so that it was there if they needed it.[21]

In many companies the wagon driver is also the focal point for the spirit and *esprit de corps* of the company in the fire house. As a more experienced technician, he often is the more active organizer, cook, or central source of information. In some situations officers will confide in technicians in an attempt to solicit their assistance in talking with or teaching a rookie the area or a particular technique.

In addition to speed and anticipation, the wagon driver is probably the one person in the company most familiar with his area. Therefore, when the line man, officer, and layout man choose the hose line and begin to advance it into the building, the wagon driver's advice, based on the color or smell of the smoke, locations

or condition of the standpipe system, or other bits of knowledge about the building, are listened to with considerable attention. At the same time, the wagon driver must be totally familiar with the particular piece of apparatus he is driving, because each piece has its own unique peculiarities that must be anticipated. In addition to first hand experience gained over the road, this familiarity is also reinforced during street drills* and the frequent inspections and maintenance checks, which are also a part of the wagon driver's job.

A wagon driver's impact on the efficiency and morale of a company, however, is a direct result of the officer's administration of the company. To the outsider it may appear that a well-drilled, efficient company could do without the officer because not an order is given or a question asked. This is, however, an indication of the competence of an officer who has created a situation in which the entire company anticipates each other's actions during a response. While it is true that a good wagon driver can "make or break" a company by responding quickly and accurately, the officer must channel that ability and create a work environment in which the group anticipates the work rhythm set by the driver.

On a box alarm response there is competition between first- and third-, and second- and fourth-due companies in the front and rear of the building. This keeps everyone on their toes because a missed plug, bad position or useless stand-pipe riser can cost you first shot at the fire. In some cases this competition has reached the point where one company will block the way to the fire while they wait for their water, or refuse to move even though they don't have enough line to reach the fire. Usually the charged line is passed up or the way is cleared for the other company, but this competitive overreaction, particularly in the downtown companies, has resulted in some extremely crowded stairwells in which the smoke continues to bank lower and lower as the competing companies jockey for first attack. This predicament is illustrated in the following account.

> We wound up at the Chastleton, bogged down at the door and they wouldn't get out of our way. Four men and the hallway so tight you can't see in front of you. And they're bogged down because they ran out of hose and I told them to get out of my way and they wouldn't. So I shut down my line and said we ain't

goin no place until you get out of the way. And then the fire started coming out and I had to open up the line because they couldn't get it. Then I had to fight them around the corner to put out the fire. They were just in the wrong place.[22]

Line Man

The line man is responsible for advancing the hose line into the fire and using the "pipe" or nozzle in the most efficient manner to put the fire out (Figure 12). Upon arrival at the scene of the fire, the line man will usually size up the situation and already have the appropriate line on his shoulder. If, for example, the fire was in the rear on the third story of a three-story row house, the line man may take the 350 foot pre-connected* 1½ inch line, but a report of a fire on the tenth floor of an office building might require the standpipe load of two fifty-foot sections of 1½ inch line with a back-up bag or load carried by the officer. As he advances the line into the structure, the officer helps flake it out and keep it straight so that when it is charged, the hose doesn't kink, either decreasing the pressure or possibly blowing a section of hose. The line man and officer must also make sure that as they advance the line up the stairwell and

Figure 12. *A line man carrying a pre-connected load of 1½" hose.*

down the hall that no doors can swing shut on the line and pinch off the water supply. Here again the cooperation between the engine and truck company will usually result in the bar man from the truck company chocking* the door with a wooden wedge so that it can't swing shut.

Once the line man has reached the fire floor he usually puts the pipe in his lap or hands it to the officer. Then he kneels down to put on his face piece, pull up his boots, and make sure his gloves, collar, and ear flaps are in place. He then follows the Halligan bar man who opens the door and then makes a perimeter search of the room opening up as he goes by opening windows or doors to provide ventilation for the line man. It is extremely important that the line man and officer are aware of the location of the bar man and other companies coming in from the rear because if they were to hit the fire with water and there was another company approaching the fire from the rear, the second-due company could be badly burned when the water turns to steam and blows back on them. These "steamings" are fortunately not frequent occurrences, but they happen often enough to produce a number of narratives that are retained in the collective memory of the group as warnings and documentations of past mistakes. The following story provides an illustration.

> We had this one fire up on K St. and I was running the line and they teach you to hit the fire with a fog stream and this particular fire was in a trash room in the basement and it was pretty hot. So we hit it with the fog stream, but we couldn't get to the seat of the fire and all we were really doing was compressing the air in that basement without really hitting the fire. Finally we pushed stuff to the point that something had to give and just about then these guys from another company opened the stairwell door coming down from above and the fire blew back over them and steamed them bad—they had skin dripping off their hands they were burnt so bad.[23]

Once inside the fire room the job of the line man is to choose the appropriate nozzle opening to hit the fire. Here again there are a variety of options from using a straight stream in an attempt to knock out windows, to bouncing the stream off of the ceiling to cause a downward fog pattern. In most cases the fire will be attacked with the nozzle set on a medium fog pattern while the line

man advances slowly toward the fire on his knees whipping the nozzle in a tight circle in an attempt to get the heat and smoke moving in convection up and out of the room. If the fire is properly vented it usually only takes a minute or two for the smoke to turn to steam and the fire to be extinguished. In some cases, however, like the one cited below, things don't always go as planned and these stories remain in oral circulation as experiences that impart a certain lesson.

> We caught this place, 1105 Valley Avenue. It was March and windy as anything. And the fire was blowin out of this joint, aggravated by the wind. I doubt that it would have been so spectacular without the wind. So I started running the line in and there wasn't anything different about this fire. And apparently the truck wasn't there or the truck was down* or whatever, it was the first thing at the change of shifts. Anyway . . . we were going down the hall and we knocked down the fire going down the living room and the hallway and the fire was still in the kitchen and that was around the corner. And the wind blowin in—the windows kept blowin around it and from here you just couldn't get to it; you had to just be right on it. But we couldn't get any line. So I'm trying to hump some line. And like I said the wind kept blowin and blowin, and finally it lit off the living room again. And I thought ah shit, you're layin flat down; you just can't pull the hose. You've got to get up on your knees and try to do it. So I stood up and I didn't even know I'd been burned until I got out.[24]

Being on the line is perhaps the most desirable job in an engine company early in your fire fighting career, because it puts you right where the action is. At the same time, however, the tremendous amount of energy required to carry a fifty-pound stand-pipe bag or charged hose line up four or five flights of stairs may result in your arriving at the fire door with little or no energy with which to fight the fire. In cases like that you hope that the layout man, the officer, or even a member of another company is there to take the pipe for awhile.

Layout Man

The role of the layout man is to lay out the supply line from the wagon to the pumper and aid the pumper man in making his hookups, so that the wagon will have additional water pressure once the

wagon tank has been pumped out (Figure 13). Usually upon arrival at the fire scene, the pumper man stops at the nearest hydrant and the wagon hesitates for a second while the layout man hops off the back step. At the same time he grabs the supply line and takes it to the pumper at the hydrant to be hooked up. The wagon then proceeds to the fire and the supply line unfolds off the hose bed into the street as it goes. Once the hook-ups have been made, the layout man then returns to the wagon, puts on a mask, and grabs an extra one for the line man should he need it. He then follows the hose line into the building to either help advance the line or relieve the line man on the pipe.

There are, of course, variations in this procedure. If a hydrant is quite a long distance away from the fire, the engine company may "split the layout," which results in the layout man holding and connecting two supply lines—one from the pumper and one from the wagon. He stands in the middle as the pumper lays out to the hydrant and the wagon proceeds to the fire, both trailing supply lines as they go. In another variation, it may be necessary for the engine company to "layout backwards," if, for example, a fire is in the middle of the block and the hydrant is at the opposite end. The

Figure 13. *The layout man holding the supply line for the arrival of the pumper at the hydrant.*

wagon would then stop at the fire allowing the pumper to go past it to the hydrant. The layout man then takes the supply line off of the the back of the pumper and connects it to the wagon as the pumper proceeds to the plug or fire hydrant.

Many of the stories about laying out deal with the concern for hopping off of the back step, particularly in heavy traffic or under icy conditions, and then trying to find your company in the total darkness of the fire building. The following narratives provide examples of these concerns.

1. One time I flipped over, I was laying out. Actually I was told to lay out and the wagon driver ran the wrong place, and he realized what he had done and he took off, and I guess he didn't realize I had the hose in my hand. So I was running and trying to get back on the piece and I couldn't keep up and flipped and that was about the most serious injury that ever happened to me.[25]

2. I had to find an officer after I'd laid out and I had to get a mask. So I put my mask on and asked the wagon driver what to do next, and he said just put your mask on and follow that hose. So I started following the hose and there are about ten thousand other hoses in there, right. So I'm following this hose and there's guys running all over the top of me going to and from the fire. I saw so many white hats I didn't know who my officer was, so I just yelled for the Captain. I heard this mumbling from behind a mask so I got next to this guy and come to find out it was the Captain of the third-due engine company. So when we got back outside the first words out of my Captain's mouth were where the hell were you? And I said I was there, Captain, I was there.[26]

The whole concept of laying out encapsulates one of the most important aspects of fire fighting—the immediate choice and proper use of the correct length of line or type of ladder to handle the specific fire situation. Knowing the appropriate tool or procedure by reading about it or listening to stories about it is extremely important, but being able to perform these techniques and make split-second decisions in the excitement of a fire situation is the true test. Nothing is more embarassing than "laying out short" or making a wrong judgment; and the importance of that

concept is so strong that the phrase is used metaphorically to describe misjudgment of all kinds, from not buying enough food to feed everyone in the house to running out of bed linen before everyone has made his bed.

Pumper Man

Like the wagon driver, the pumper man is a technician who must pass a written and practical examination before he can move into that position. Unlike the wagon driver, however, the pumper man follows the wagon and, once on the fire ground, makes the hookups to the hydrant and the pumper to supply water to the wagon (Figure 14). Once this has been accomplished, the pumper man monitors the pumps and pressure and provides assistance to the wagon driver if necessary. A pumper man must still be completely aware of his district, be able to read traffic well enough to get the piece safely to the fire ground and also be aware of plug locations and the fire situation to place his piece correctly. As described by an

Figure 14. *The pumper man connecting the pumper to the hydrant. Note in the background, the supply line running from the pumper to the hose wagon.*

experienced pumper man, his job consists of the following considerations.

> When a run comes in, I hear the address. And then on my way to the fire I'm thinking what side of the street is it on, the same thing that a wagon driver is thinking. You say the right side or the left side. So then I'm thinking about the location and then I'm saying to myself that's a narrow street or whatever. And then I have to make sure I let the truck get in there, I don't want to block the truck out.* So I tell myself, hey, I'm going to pull up tight on this side and let the truck come on around. And then I'm thinking about how I'm going to get this daggone hydrant open, because on a lot of the hydrants the caps are hard to move. So you're just hoping that you can get that thing open in time so that the wagon doesn't run out of water.* It doesn't happen often, but it does happen, and it's just something that you have to watch. And outside of opening it up and getting the water to the wagon that's about it.[27]

In some companies, particularly those in far Southeast across the Anacostia River, as previously discussed, the long distances between companies may make it necessary for a pumper driver to do a lot more than he might in the more congested downtown area. In addition to making his hook-ups, the pumper driver may also help to throw ground ladders, open-up windows or aid in getting lights or fans in place. Although the basic fire fighting techniques are the same throughout the city, variations by neighborhood (types of residences or businesses) and occupancy (numbers of people in a neighborhood during the daylight or nighttime hours) does result in some differences between the fire fighting styles of different companies. The "suburban" fire department on the other side of the Anacostia River has fewer companies covering a large area and in many cases their layouts are extremely long, due to the great distances between hydrants on the corners and single family dwellings set back away from the street. This situation results in a fire fighting approach that is less hurried and competitive than that found downtown, because the responding company knows that it is going to have this fire either completely to itself or at the very least the second-due company will be a while in getting there. It is this independence and self-sufficiency that requires additional efforts to be made by everyone to pitch in and help. As in any fire fighting

situation these outlying houses attract fire fighters who like this type of running, just as downtown houses have their own appeal.

Engine Officer

In an engine company, the officer stays on the line with the line man and aids him by humping hose, advancing the line, and (if necessary) taking a turn at the pipe. His main job, however, is to administrate the extinguishing of the fire and act as a communications link between the company and other units, as well as the fire chief on the scene (Figure 15). His most useful function is to make necessary decisions and adjustments in the attack when unusual situations or conditions arise. A company's response to these situations, however, is shared by the officer who, through street, house, and individual drills, molds the unit into an efficient fire fighting force.

From the time a company pulls up on the scene, the engine officer is making decisions concerning the length of line, access to the fire, method of attack, and possible escape routes should they be necessary. He is the inside man who (with the line and later

Figure 15. *With masks in place, the engine company officer (white hat) and the line man begin to advance the hose line into the fire room.*

the layout man) has a single responsibility: get the line to the fire and put it out as quickly as possible. Once the engine company officer and the line man have entered the fire room and the bar man has ventilated the room and/or completed his search for victims, the officer must check (usually by radio) that the other responding companies know that the fire is going to be hit with water so that they can get out of the way of the steam that will result. The engine officer will then lead the line man to the seat of the fire and hit it, using the appropriate nozzle opening, shutting the pipe down periodically to check on the progress of their efforts. Once the fire is out, the engine company then works with the truck company at wetting down the smoldering debris and finally taking up and draining the hose lines into a bathtub or sink before carrying them out of the building.

Fire fighters on the back step say that all an engine company officer has to do is blow the siren, carry the radio, and stay out of their way during the fire attack. Although this may be true in some situations (particularly in a well-drilled company), there are times when administrative decision-making is required as revealed in the following account.

> Well a really good officer will often huddle like a team captain on a football team, and withdraw ideas and resources from his men. You know, you can't think of everything and your mind must be covering a thousand, million things. And maybe one Joe Blow on the back step says well how about this Lieutenant, and you say oh yes, that'll work good. Take that into consideration and a good officer will do that . . . pool his resources with his men—drawing on their experiences and time on the job and everything. [Pause.] One time that I think I could relate to that we had one, well it wasn't really a fire but we had a chemical leak. It come in as a report of fire in the basement of the Washington Post. O.K. we went to the Post and as usual we pull up and there's nothing showin. We open the doors, couldn't really smell anything, of course, so we figured it was probably just some pieces of paper shreds caught on fire in the machinery, you know the same routine when we'd been there before. Well as we penetrated deeper into the basement we started smelling this funny stuff, and what they had is they had nitric acid and caustic soda in two big three thousand gallon vats.

Well the valves on both were leakin and had dumped chemical through the floor into the drain and the chemical reaction was sending out a lot of gas. In this particular instance, you don't normally approach this in a regular building, as such, downtown. We did not know at that time, of course, they used this chemical to clean the plates off; we did not know that they had that much stored in the building at that time. So we were really unaware of this and it really took us by surprise. And so the officer we had—I guess through normal routine, we make everybody wear a mask when they go in—at least just have it on their back, not necessarily put on until you get into your area. Well there was lots of civilians down there and all, and apparently they didn't have the proper way to handle this; and there was a reaction building up and there were people running around, and so he did have to start giving commands. To tell us to get these people out of here because this gas was bad, to make sure that we had enough air to get in and out of the building, and we had to get this acid out of there somehow and flush it down the drain some say—take a siphon and get it out of there or find something that would neutralize it altogether. So that was his move and after he had explained the situation to us he did not say anymore. In other words, we did not know the entire situation so he had to give a few orders and commands to explain what he wanted; and then after he told us that he went and talked with the chief and between them, they and the other officers decided how they were going to handle this. But other than that if we normally go into the Washington Post building there wouldn't have been much said. You go in and hook the hose to the riser and take it in where you see the smoke in the machine and that's it, you know. Prepare to spread a little water and put the paper out, but you can see that this was a little different. Where we didn't really have a fire, but we needed the hoses in place.[28]

Truck Company

A truck company is made up of an officer and five fire fighters including a truck driver, tillerman, hook man, axe man, and Halligan bar man. During a normal fire fighting attack, the truck driver and tillerman put the aerial ladder to the roof and ventilate

the structure, while the axe and hook men throw ground ladders and then take in lights and fans and the bar man clears the way for the engine company and searches the fire floor for victims.

Truck Driver

A truck driver, like a wagon driver in an engine company, initially sets the pace of the company response by choosing the route to the fire, anticipating traffic congestion and response (particularly intersections where the long hook-and-ladder truck is most vulnerable), and placing the piece once the company arrives on the fire ground (Figure 16). As soon as the truck company arrives at the fire scene, however, everyone except the truck driver and the tillerman leaves the apparatus to complete their various assignments. The truck driver and tillerman then are responsible for raising the aerial ladder to the roof and ventilating the structure. They open a skylight or roof hatch to let the smoke and heat escape and also provide a means of escape for anyone trapped on the roof or on the upper floors. Once they have completed this task, the two truck

Figure 16. *The truck driver begins to extend the aerial ladder by pulling the jacks* or outrigger supports that keep the turntable* stable while the ladder is extended.*

technicians then work with the men on the side to throw additional ground ladders, if necessary, followed by the carrying of utility tools* into the building; and finally they aid in the overhaul of the fire room. Just as the wagon driver must anticipate the time it takes for the engine company to reach the seat of the fire before he shoots them the water, the truck driver must also develop a rhythm with the company as they perform their various tasks. Once the roof has been ventilated, he then might start the generator, carry in an extra fan, start in with ceiling hooks or salvage covers, aid the tillerman in shutting off electricity or gas, or supply any other equipment that he sees from the outside might be needed.

As in other jobs in the fire service, the truck driver learns his job emulating the techniques of an experienced man. In some cases, however, there is a tendency to try to progress too fast too soon. The following situation illustrates what can happen when a young fire fighter attempts to emulate the techniques of an experienced driver before he is really prepared to do so.

> Years ago when I was filling in, we got a run one day up the street. I was young and here again is where your younger man learns from your older man—you emulate drivers. Anyway we had this run and I went like a bat out of hell up to the circle and I thought it was wide open on the inside lane and I put it to the floor and here was this damn Volkswagen that I didn't see. I hit the brakes and damn near stood that truck on its nose. The officer didn't say nothin but the guys gave me hell when we got back. I was trying to drive like a guy who was just faster and better than me because he was much more experienced.[29]

One of the key techniques in this particular job is establishing a rhythm of driving that matches the driver's response time to the traffic patterns and routes in his district. Some drivers may drive faster than others, while slower drivers may not have to brake so hard at congested intersections. As stated by an experienced truck driver: "You have to constantly be aware of where you are and who's around you . . . a man has got to have enough time to mature to do a good job as a driver."[30]

This maturation process is a combination of practical experience and techniques communicated by an older driver to a fill-in or second driver just learning the job. As described by an experienced truck driver who learned under such a man:

> I learned a lot from this old truck driver who used to work out of this house. He would take you aside and tell you everything he knew. Like we'd be doing something around the house and something would come up, like one of the things that he taught me was about going up on the roof, especially at night. You would go up on the roof and you got fire under you. He told me that you should always test the roof with one foot while you keep a hold of the ladder, because if you go through you don't stand a chance. Just a couple of months ago we had a fire right over here on Bay Street—1800 or 1700 block of Bay. And we had back porches off and I went out to take the hatch off. And it was spongy and I just stuck one foot on the roof to lift that hatch off and the fire come up through it. There wasn't enough to really hold your weight and by the time the second-due truck arrived it was so spongy you could have punched your toe right through it. So those little things come through for you now and then.[31]

The sheer size of the aerial ladder, its weight when extended, and the difficulty of putting it up around trees and power lines makes this aspect of the truck driver's job a challenge in each fire situation. In addition, the city itself is constantly in a state of change through weather conditions, during demonstrations and national celebrations, and as a result of construction. Fire fighters, and particularly technicians, must keep up with these alterations in their running routes as well.

> I try to keep up on changes in my running routes and construction as much as I can, especially when the construction is Metro. They change a lot from day to day and you'll come up on an area that's blocked off that nobody knows about. And we just have to detour a block or two to get around it. But sometimes in the morning when I come in and I've seen things that are different I'll let the other drivers know about it. And usually they'll do the same for me.[32]

Both the truck driver and the wagon driver, next to the officer, are the keystones in fire fighting attack. They both make the response and the approach, give advice about specific buildings or conditions, place the piece and then time the attack either by shooting the water to the engine company or by raising the aerial and ventilating the structure. An accident over the road, loss of water, or

failure to ventilate can cost lives, and that responsibility is considered every time a company leaves the fire house. Stories about men on the side of the truck angered by quick stops or poor position on the fire attest to the scrutiny with which the performance of the truck driver is read.

Tillerman

The tillerman is also a technician and as stated earlier, he works with the truck driver in raising the aerial ladder, ventilating, rescue, and then overhaul. When responding to a fire, the job of the tillerman is to steer the rear axle of the piece and act as the eyes and ears of the driver in the rear (Figure 17). As it is described by an experienced tillerman:

> Basically, tillering I guess there is a skill to it, but it's like anything else, once you have the confidence in yourself, then you can do it. And a lot depends on the driver you have too. If you've got a conservative driver he can make things easier for you. If you've got a wild man who thinks only for himself and doesn't give you the room in the back then you can work your ass off trying to get in there.[33]

Figure 17. *The tillerman steering the rear axle of the truck as he sits in the tillerman's cage.*

This cooperation between tillerman and truck driver is sustained throughout the fire fighting response from anticipating a sharp corner to jockeying for position in a tight alley. A signal system is used to communicate stop, go, forward, and backward based on a set of horn blasts, and the tillerman and truck driver must be particularly aware of each other's moves when they raise the aerial ladder and ascend it to ventilate the structure. This type of teamwork is reflected in the following account.

> We had one over here at this hotel on the corner, must have been a few years ago now. Pulled out of the house in the evening. It was rush hour and black smoke was coming out of the vents and everything. Got over there and there was a room off on the top floor... so I told the driver to try to put the ladder up and let's see what we can do. I figured that if I went through the inside I'd never get up to the roof because all of the smoke was coming through the top floor. So we put the ladder up and I went up the ladder and it was about a foot short. So I pulled myself up on the roof, I guess it was about ten or eleven stories, and I pulled myself up on the roof and looked down and there was a ten foot fence all the way around the roof. So I climbed over the fence and luckily the door to the penthouse was open. So I went down one flight to the fire floor and I opened the door and it was cold black in there. Nothing to hold the door open with, so I went back to the roof because I had seen a broken chair up there. I ran back down and wedged the chair in there and raced the smoke back up to the roof.[34]

Tillering, more than any other job in the fire service, exemplifies the public's complete lack of understanding about the actual day to day work of fire fighters. On a parallel with Smokey Stover stereotypes about fire house life ranging from Sparky the Dalmation mascot to pinochle, red suspenders, and sleeping all day in the fire house, many people are still convinced that the tillerman must learn to drive backwards, so that if the driver turns left around a corner, the tillerman turns right. That is totally untrue, but as the following anecdote illustrates, it is still a widely held notion.

> Most people have the wrong idea about how tillering works. Everybody thinks that you drive backwards. In fact we stopped down here at 13th and Mass. and this little gal yelled out to me "You can't drive a regular car can you? Cause you're always

driving backwards." I guess somebody had told her that's the way it works.[35]

Although this misconception is innocent enough it underscores much of the misinformation and the stereotypical view that the public has about the fire service. Unfortunately, little time or effort is spent by the department or the fire fighters themselves to enlighten the public about what they do and why they do it. For the most part the fire house culture remains a mystery to those on the outside and fire fighters have little daily interaction with the public on a personal basis.

Halligan Bar Man

The bar man is the advance man for the engine company who is responsible for initial search and rescue as well as opening up* doors, locks or any other barrier that might keep the line from reaching the fire. Upon arrival on the fire ground the bar man immediately leaves the truck company, enters the building with the engine company, opens up the doors and breaks the locks if necessary, and then proceeds to search the fire room for victims, while he also opens it up by ventilating as much as possible (Figure 18).

Figure 18. *A halligan bar man and a member of the engine company gain forcible entry with the bar.*

In some cases the bar man will aid the engine company with a line, particularly if they are trying to advance a 2½ inch line into the fire. Once the bar man has made his search of the fire floor he will usually go above the fire and make a search and then return to the truck to help with utility equipment and overhauling. The following fire account related by a bar man illustrates some of his major concerns.

> This fire yesterday was a piece of cake. We got in the elevator and I always gauge, in a high rise or an office building, the intensity of the fire by how many people are coming out. If it's three o'clock in the morning and there's not a sucker at the door, you know its food on the stove, or a trash chute. But if you come up the street and everybody is flying out of the place, you know you got something, even if there is nothing showing.* We got to the elevator and we smelled it and to me it smelled like trash—shows you my nose. And we got off on the third floor and went to the fourth where the fire was and the door was locked. And it's a panic thing with me—a fear to be stuck in the smoke chamber or the hallway and not be able to get in. A recurrent thought for me is to be banging on this metal clad door and the fire is getting hotter and hotter and the door won't give and everybody is behind me. So I always make it a conscious effort when I'm walking through a door to play with it, to see if I can break this lock. But this particular lock was a piece of cake, it had a pin I had to pry back and I had it. So I put the bar in there and popped it, but I lost it once and had to get it again. Meanwhile they were coming up behind me with the line so I chocked the door so that when they got through it wouldn't close on the hose . . . .[36]

Because this position provides the individual with an opportunity to participate in both the truck and engine company attack, it is a desirable job, which either rotates between those who ride the side of the truck as assigned by the officer or is determined by the one who is the first to report for duty that day or night. There are also a large number of stories about bar men who use tricks to confuse unsuspecting line men into turning over their line, like grabbing the line when the line man puts it down to put on his face piece. These pranks and the stories describing them act as reminders to rookies to stay on their toes and keep their wits about them during the excitement and confusion of a fire situation.

Hook Man and Axe Man

The other two positions on the side of the truck are the hook and axe men who usually work as a team on the fire ground; therefore they will be discussed together here. These two positions are the utility jobs of the truck company (Figure 19). Once the truck is placed on the fire ground, the hook and axe men must size up the situation and make a decision concerning what their next step is going to be. This process is described by a truck man in the following manner.

> When I used to ride the side of the truck I used to ride up high for two reasons. I was looking for street signs, I was looking for buildings that I could associate with a specific location. And I was also doing that so that when we came into the block you could get a fairly good overall view of what was going on. And you could make up your own mind before you got there, before

Figure 19. *An axe man prepares to take a fan into the fire.*

you even came to a stop that you were going to need X-ladder—twenty-four, thirty, whatever. If there's people hanging out, well there's my first job right there.[37]

If there are people in the windows who can be reached by ground ladders, then the hook and axe men choose the appropriate length based on the height of the window, throw the ladder to the window, and then assist the victim to the ground and administer first aid (Figure 20). Once that job has been completed, they will return to the apparatus, start the generator, and take the exhaust fans, lights, and electric junction box into the fire to vent the smoke and provide illumination. If they discover once inside that there is furniture, rugs, or other valuable items that could be damaged by water, they may return to the truck once again for heavy canvas salvage covers, which are used to cover and protect these items.

The final stage of their many trips back and forth between the fire and the truck is to get ceiling hooks,* axes, debris buckets, and shovels to overhaul* the fire room and carry out all of the burned

Figure 20. *A member of the truck company and the truck officer enter a room and contents fire from a ground ladder.*

debris. In order to insure that no fire is left smoldering, these two truck men (with the aid of the other members of the truck company) will pull ceilings with long-handled ceiling hooks and check for fire extension between the walls and into adjoining buildings. Compared to the other jobs on the engine and truck, the hook and axe men have a much more diversified work load that requires both quick decisions and sheer physical strength to handle the ladders, utility tools, and overhauling chores one right after the other.

Truck Officer

The truck officer, like the engine officer, is the administrator/communications link on the fire ground. Unlike the engine officer, however, he has a much more varied assignment primarily concerned with the exterior of the building (Figure 21). As described and compared by a battalion fire chief:

> A good truck officer doesn't have his hands in his pockets. It takes six men to do the job and if he's going to put his hands in his pockets and just give orders then he's only got five men working and since his bar man has already gone with the engine company, he's only got four men working. I expected my truck officer to make a quick size up of the building, get around and size up the back, as well as getting ladders up there.

Figure 21. *A truck officer on the roof reports the conditions at the fire.*

> Sometimes you take ladders through the nearest alley, sometimes through the side yard, and I've even taken ladders through the fire building and out back. As a truck officer you get a perspective of the whole fire where as an engine officer you are required to be in one position. You've got to migrate when you are in charge of the truck—up, down, in, out, around and next door. The best training in the world for a battalion chief is to be a truck officer. And a good truck company has to be a team of six men who work as individuals without overlapping, duplicating, or getting in each other's way. Any engine man who has been around for a while can tell you whether or not the truck company is doing a good job by the length of time it takes the heat and smoke to lighten up.[38]

In some cases it is difficult to really read the fire from the outside, particularly if the fire is in a high rise apartment or an office building and there is nothing showing outside. In cases like these, it is extremely important that the truck officer keep moving, because if he gravitates toward the pipe and the fire (which is the natural tendency of every fire fighter) he runs the risk of "just standing in the hallway with a whole row of officers, guys with fans and hooks all jammed between the first- and third-due engine and the squad and nobody going anywhere."[39] If he stays on the move, however, the truck officer cannot only be of more use to the chief by telling him what he sees, he can also help his men accomplish their tasks much more quickly by lending a hand.

The independence of truck men on the fire ground requires that they have a little more experience and the ability to work individually and make their own decisions. In some cases this can work to the advantage of the truck officer who may be new to the truck or district and is assisted by the more experienced company. The following story illustrates how informed "suggestions" like this are made.

> Like say you were a sergeant and look up and see a third floor window that you want to clean out or something and you say to [him] hey, get the thirty. But unbeknownst to you, that might be one of the taller three stories that would take a thirty five. And an experienced company picks up that kind of thing real quick. That happened to me one day. I said hey how about getting a thirty. And they said, naw it's a little bit taller than that Loo—

> they were being polite—a little bit taller than that because its one of those tall three story jobs, a thirty five footer will do it. And sure enough the thirty five is just right where a thirty would have been short. Experienced companies pick that stuff up real quick—well they cover for you because you can stick your foot in your mouth a lot of times.[40]

In a very real sense, then, the truck company is a team working as individuals and the officer operates much more as a participant than a director. Through street and "skull" or book drills he can affect the efficiency and refine the techniques of his company, but on the fire ground they act independently and the officer can only work with them as a working supervisor, responsible for their performance but unable to control it as it unfolds.

Rescue Squad

The rescue squad is basically responsible for providing experienced manpower on the fire ground, as well as conducting heavy duty rescue work ranging from freeing stuck elevators to rescuing people from automobile and industrial accidents (Figure 22).

Figure 22. *Members of the rescue squad prepare to extricate a victim from a wrecked automobile.*

There are usually five members of the squad, which is made up of a squad wagon driver, officer, and three men who ride in the back and usually have individual specialties ranging from locksmithing to welding and from emergency medical experience to a familiarity with hazardous materials. There are currently four rescue squads in the District of Columbia that are organized as combination companies, i.e., they respond as either an engine company or as a rescue squad, as needed.

In a fire situation the squad will break into two teams of two men each, with the officer and one man going to the fire while the second team goes above the fire floor to search and rescue. The wagon driver's job is to remain outside and provide heavy duty lights, fans, set up the first aid station and other utility equipment, and to help out wherever he is needed. The following is an account of a fire from the point of view of a squad wagon driver.

> Here's one that happened to me one time and I guess its one of those things where you're either in the right or the wrong place at the right time, depending on how you look at it. We went up to 14th and Fairmount one time and I was driving the squad wagon. We pulled up and those guys went in and I got everything ready and then saw this ladder up to one of the windows. So I went up to ventilate and when I opened the window I heard a moan. It was one of those things where you wished you hadn't crawled in and its like crawling into hell and I don't care what anybody says, it scares the hell out of you. Anybody who isn't scared is screwed up. Anyway I got the guy out.[41]

This narrative illustrates the importance of rescue as the central function of the squad. Historically, squad men have been more experienced fire fighters who had the ability to stay in the fire building twice as long as other fire fighters due to the rebreathing McCaa masks that they wore. This extra time allowed them to take hose lines and make rescues that were impossible for others to accomplish, while it also generated resentment toward squad men by engine company members who had to hump the hoses to the fire floor only to leave them to the sometimes boastful rescue squad. Today, although there is still some resentment toward the squads, it is viewed more as a source for experienced and reliable manpower on the fire ground. A chief can use the squad as a form of insurance, sending them to search a tricky or uncertain area or ventilate a particular room knowing full well that if the squad can't do it, it can't be

done. Although it is rare that a squad takes a line away from an engine company, in particularly tight situations like basement fires, for example, the squad prides itself on its ability to advance the line and hit a difficult fire. This ability, however, has less to do with being a squad member than it does with being an experienced fire fighter who is given greater opportunity to run a greater number and variety of fires than the average man on the back step.

In automobile wrecks, industrial accidents, and stuck elevators, however, the squad does provide a unique function in the fire service. Upon approaching an accident scene the squad will usually break into two teams, with one team caring for the victims while the second prepares the winches, Hearst cutting tool,* and other appliances to make an extrication. The following is a typical account of an automobile extrication.

> There was a van up in the park by the zoo right up in the woods. And it took us about a half hour to get that girl out. The van was on its side and we had to tie the van off so it wouldn't roll one way or the other—stabilize it so that you could get in there. And the motor—you know how those vans have the motor up front in the seat and all, the motor mounts had come off it—that was the main thing, it not dropping on her. And we just worked on it until we solved the damn thing. And it was just, you know, Jack was inside and he had a way that he had thought out to get her out and we just all worked together on that plan. And that's primarily what we try to do no matter what we do.[42]

In spite of their sometimes controversial role on the fire ground, the rescue squad continues to be an important part of the fire service in the District of Columbia. Just as historical changes in equipment like the McCaa and Scott-Air packs have changed the function of the squads over the years, innovations in rescue equipment like the Hearst cutting tool will continue to make heavy duty rescue a more refined art. At the same time, the squads will continue to provide experienced manpower on the fire ground to be used according to the discretion and fire fighting philosophies of individual chiefs.

Even in this brief survey, it is possible to see the variety and complexity of the various jobs found in engine, truck, and rescue squad work on a fire. In the actual fire fighting situation these various tasks are performed at top speed with each individual fire

fighter relying on others to be performing their assignments so that he will be safe in performing his.

Tour of Duty

Blacks, Whites, and Women[43]

The first day back after three days off is usually the hardest. You get up at five or five-thirty, take a shower, have some breakfast, and head into work. After signing in and putting your gear on the piece you head for the sitting room to have a cup of coffee and check up on what's happening. This morning its a discussion of the promotional exam again and it goes something like this.

LT.: I don't care what you guys say, there were people high on that goddamn list who everybody knows cheated.

WDR: Nobody has ever proved it Loo and they even had that mayor's blue ribbon study....

LT.: We all know how much good that did.

FF: Also, this was the first time that a lot of those guys studied or had enough time on the job to take the test. I mean you can't tell me that Bill didn't study, man. He sat in that damn closet every day and night—it almost cost him his marriage he was studying so much. You can still ask him questions right out of the book and he'll give you the answers.

LT.: Bill's a different story—you know the ones I'm talking about.

WDR: Well nobody ever found any proof cause there isn't any. And when you come right down to it, passing a damn exam and making it as an officer are two different things.[44]

It is a matter of record that a number of black fire fighters scored in the high percentiles on the last competitive sergeants' examination. Allegations of cheating by white fire fighters and counter charges of racism by black fire fighters continue to go on in the department. Yet what is significant for this study are the cultural backgrounds and points of view that reinforce mistrust and misunderstanding between white and black fire fighters and that are brought into the open by some individuals as a result of any

provocation, whether the issue is a promotion, an exam, facial hair or what television program will be viewed. This chapter attempts to portray in a simplified and general way what these points of view are without passing judgment on any one perspective.

Since the turn of the century and before, the father/son nature of the fire service has created an occupation that was dominated by first and second generation immigrants from Western Europe and the British Isles, with a heavy predominance of Italians and Irishmen who gravitated toward the "emergency services" (police and fire fighters) in many major American cities. In Washington this ethnic mix was also supplemented by men who came from the local area and had rural backgrounds in Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas (Figure 23). Used to hard work and self sacrifice, these men epitomized the "fire fighting as a way of life tradition" from a headlong charge into a burning building to the wrestling of a charged* 2½ inch hose line up a narrow flight of stairs. They fought fire with a competitive zeal, challenging each other to greater feats of strength, stamina, and sheer physical punishment. At the same time, they were a big family and they had a recognized and comfortable role in the community. That role began to change as the community itself changed.

The values that these men had were of two kinds. In one respect they maintained a belief in the nuclear family, the need for hard work, and the desire to better their economic condition so that

Figure 23. *Line-up of the members of a company.*

their sons and daughters would have a better life. But they also had values that can best be described as fire fighter's values. These are more difficult to define but are as pervasive as any ethnic, regional, or community cultural view. Stated simply, the predominantly white fire fighting cultural value system is based on ability and performance during a fire. No matter what his background, if a man does his job on the fire ground and pulls his weight in the fire house he was accepted. The following account is a description by an older white fire fighter of the traditional viewpoint.

> It's hard to describe the closeness that you felt with the guys in the fire house. I don't think my wife has ever really understood it. I just used to love to come to work—especially on those long Saturdays when we'd have a big roast or a ham or something and sit around and talk or play cards. At that time there used to be quite a few older guys in the neighborhood who would come and play all afternoon and then get in on the meal too. Firemen then were a great bunch and a rough bunch. I probably wouldn't have trusted my wife around half of them. They played hard and rough. But when the bells hit, nobody would do any more good for you than a fireman. Its a group of men with a unique brotherhood feeling—they'll never let you down.[45]

Once a rookie fire fighter has paid the proper deference and respect to the more experienced men and they have tested him in the fire house and on the fire ground, he is expected to begin to show initiative and aggressiveness on his own. And the more aggressive and competent a fire fighter becomes, the more he is shown respect and affection through joking relationships, being given a nickname and becoming a part of after-work social gatherings, and trading of special skills like carpentry, plumbing, etc., with other fire fighters. Soon the fire fighting tradition and the occupation (with its unique symbols, particularly pieces of equipment like personalized helmets and frontpieces, memorabilia, scrapbooks, stories) become a central part of his entire life. And just as in the life of a hard working doctor, lawyer, or small businessman, the tight family of the fire house and the long, long hours away from home and family create a situation in which a man literally has two families—his fire house family and his nuclear family. For many white fire fighters who have fathers and

brothers in the department even this distinction is blurred. The expression "fire fighting is more than just a job, it is a way of life" is perfectly clear to many fire fighter's wives and children, who must learn to share their spouse or father with a demanding second family.

What kind of person would become involved in an occupation that is considered the most dangerous and taxing on the human body, yet is competitively salaried at a level below less dangerous types of work? This is a job that is uncompromising in its demands on a man's life, taking him away from family and the normal cycle of life so that in a moment's notice he can run into a burning building in order to save a life or put out a fire. Yet for years, fathers, brothers, cousins, and neighborhood friends considered (and continue to consider) becoming a fire fighter a privilege. This tradition is described in the following narrative.

> I grew up in the city and my father was a fire fighter here. I used to go to the fire house and get my haircut and buy candy from the commissary on my way home from school. I got to know the men and the life and I guess I just grew up in it; and when the time came I decided I'd join the department too. It's been a great job and I still enjoy the camaraderie of the fire house. A lot of the younger guys now, though, come in with a bad attitude and it has changed things. I don't know if that old camaraderie will ever be the same.[46]

As depicted in this account, the tradition of fire fighting is a balance between technique, experience, and guts. Know-how will take you a long way, but there comes a time when no matter what your experience, it is just you and your ability to push yourself beyond normal human limits. The tradition carries with it a hundred years of knowledge illustrating tricks, techniques, and precautions in narrative form, while it also makes value judgments about those who correctly or incorrectly perform those techniques. As in any cultural situation this is a dynamic process that is constantly being shaped by technical and social factors and, as such, it is variously interpreted by those individuals who come in contact with and borrow from it to a lesser or greater degree. White fire fighters, particularly those from fire fighting families or who have been volunteers from an early age, seem to participate in the tradi-

tion most completely, while black fire fighters participate in and borrow from it those elements and techniques that are necessary to do the work. To the whites, fighting fire is a culture—a way of thinking and doing that has a cultural value system all of its own. Blacks view the fire fighting culture as a white tradition and, although they do the same work, they only occasionally tap it for inside knowledge because they identify more strongly with an ethnic rather than an occupational way of life.

The typical white fire fighter who is "in the tradition" joined the department when they had tremendous pride in their work and assumed that their families and the members of their community respected what they did. But things began to change quickly, and in the past few years the white fire fighter has been attacked for not living in the District of Columbia or close enough to it; for not being open to minority needs of both blacks and women, who whites feel are being given special considerations to increase their numbers in the still predominantly white male department; for not explaining their work to a consumer-minded public who demands to know why things are done the way they are in a fire; and finally for not being able to rely any longer on a housewife who is content to take care of the family and home during the long nights because she too must work. The white fire fighter has had the rug pulled out from under him, and even though the challenge and the excitement of the fire continues to exist, he sees the tradition waning, and with it passes a part of his soul: "Not soon, but someday this is just going to be another eight to five job. I just hope I'm long gone by the time that happens."[47]

Since the early part of the century, there have been black fire fighters in the department (Figure 24). But for many of them the fire service wasn't a way of life; it was "the best paying government job outside of the post office and the police department that I could find" or that was available to blacks in a segregated society. And for many blacks just getting into the department, once you had been placed on the eligibility rolls, was tough due to the arbitrary way in which physicals were conducted by unsupervised physicians. Many black fire fighters have "appointment physical stories" ranging from disqualifications due to flat feet to diagnoses of "misshapen skulls." One of the most common forms of harassment was for dental and bite problems, as the following narrative illustrates.

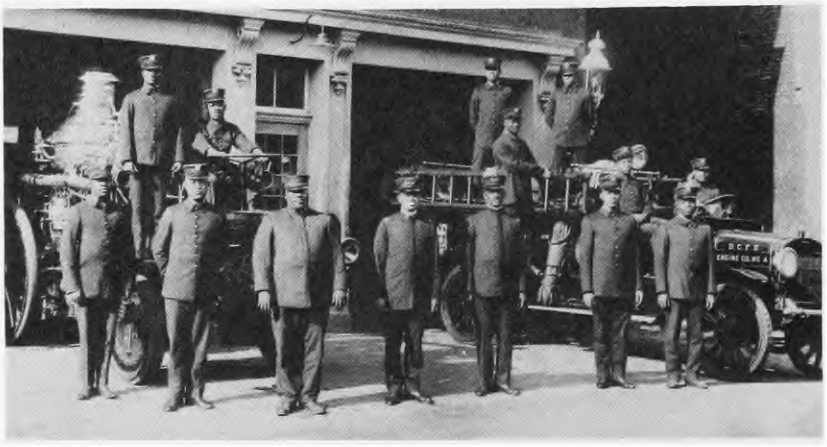

Figure 24. *Members of an old 4 Engine, an all black company, circa 1928.*

> It's like black firemen getting on the job. They would turn you down right and left. They turned me down. The only thing that saved me—to show you how tough things were when I came along. I was working as a skilled laborer at the Post Office, the city Post Office. And there was a dentist, a black dentist, who was running the elevator down there. That's how tough things were in those days. He was running the elevator. So this doctor turned me down on teeth. So this guy at the Post Office he looked at my teeth and looked around in my mouth and he said that I had fine teeth. So I said would he go down there with me? And he said that he would. So I said well I'm going back. I never will forget that doctors name, it was B. He was on crutches. I went down to civil service and went into his office. And he said that there was no way that I was getting in with teeth like that. And I said before we go any further, you should know that I got a dentist right here with me. And I got to the door to go out and get this guy and this doctor said come back here a minute and let me take another look. And he looked in my mouth and then looked up at me and said, well you got it. And that's how I got on.[48]

Once a black fire fighter did make it into a fire house, however, he found that he was in a tight group of professional black fire fighters who demanded a great deal of him during his probationary

year. Once that year was over, however, he was accepted in the culture of the black fire house. Reconstructing life in these segregated houses like 4, 13, and 27 Engines would require more space than is available here, but for the most part it was a close fire house camaraderie coupled with an intense feeling of competition with the white companies in neighboring districts. The competitions were enjoyed by white and black fire fighters alike, as illustrated in the story that follows.

> We used to really try to beat 13 Engine because that was another black house. But if we were going across town on a box and maybe coming in after say 16 Engine or 2 Engine we really had to try to move. The problem was that we usually got some really slow pieces. I remember that we used to have an old piece called a Brockway, and one day they sent over a new piece called a McCann that looked like it was pretty fast. So a call came in for a fire up on D Street somewhere and man we snatched up* on everybody because we finally had something that would run. The only trouble with it was that every time you blew the whistle it'd slow the piece down because it was hooked to the exhaust.[49]

The black fire fighting experience also differed from the white cultural tradition, such as in off-duty dress, music, dialect, and religion. Yet at the same time black fire fighters adopted the responsibilities and techniques of fire fighting while they felt no need to adopt the white values that came along with the job. There were many black fire fighters who were respected for their performance on the fire ground and hard work in the house; but rarely did fire fighting become a way of life to black fire fighters as it had to whites. During the era of the black houses there were two separate (except that there were only a handful of black officers and no chiefs) black and white fire departments—each doing the same work using the same techniques. But to most of the blacks it was a job, while to many of the whites it was work that carried with it a commitment to a very special way of life. Both white and black fire fighters enjoyed the satisfaction of making a rescue, being first-due on a box and hitting the fire; but their perception of the role of fire fighting as it affected their off-duty lives was much different from the beginning. When the segregated houses broke up in the early fifties and integration was begun, these two cultural views

came into sharp and sometimes violent conflict. This was a nationwide tension that eventually led to the riots of the sixties and one that continues to smolder and rekindle in the department today.

After the integration of the department in the early sixties and the riots in the late sixties, black fire fighters began to slowly move up the promotional ladder. Blacks were still a small minority in the department and the resistance to their advancement was sometimes strong, as illustrated in the following account.

> Just after they decided to integrate I was sent over to 28 Engine and the officer there wasn't too pleased at having blacks in his company and he let me know it right away. I had been the pumper driver over at 4 Engine and had eighteen years on the job at the time; so I put in for second driver on my shift because I knew that I'd never become first driver over the white guy who had the job. But this officer didn't like the idea of my driving at all, even though I had more experience than almost all the guys in the company put together. So at line-up* he makes the announcement that after this in his company there wasn't going to be a designated second driver, because he wanted everyone to get the experience. I just had to laugh.[50]

The experiences of the first blacks integrated into the previously all white houses were not pleasant. Having lived in a totally segregated, basically Southern society, some of the white fire fighters expressed their hostilities toward blacks by breaking the plates and cups used by black fire fighters, refusing to eat or sleep in the same room with blacks, and even cutting television cords so that blacks couldn't watch television with whites. Segregated masks and beds were also maintained for a while as evidence of a strong racist response to the introduction of blacks into the fire service. The most damaging response, however, came in the form of silence. And in a work culture based on the passage of information by word of mouth, that was an extremely difficult barrier to overcome, as illustrated in the following.

> I'll tell you how it was—how would you feel if you walked into a fire house at seven in the morning, put your gear on the apparatus and walked into the sitting room to get a cup of coffee in total silence? The sitting room is full of white guys who say nothing to you—they act like you aren't even there. You do your house work, you fix your lunch and you take your turn at

watch—nobody has said a word to you all day. Finally the day is over, you get up and leave, and you do that tour after tour. And yet when the bell hits you are expected to put your life on the line for them and you wonder what would they do for you?[51]

One of the strongest weapons that the black fire fighters had to overcome the racism in the department was to work by the book and work to the letter of the rules, while at the same time they effectively pulled their weight on the fire ground and in the fire house. Because they were a minority in a situation in which job turnover was traditionally very slow anyway, it took blacks a long time to become officers. Eventually, however, the time came when a few black officers were put in charge of integrated companies, and for a while it looked as though things were about ready to stabilize. The following story illustrates one black officer's way of handling his new role.

I was the officer on the truck and the only black in the company, so things were a little shakey at first. We got a run to GWU and when we got there we put the ladder to the floor below the fire; and when we saw that the engine company had hit the fire, we also saw that water was seeping down into the lower apartment. So the driver suggested that we put up salvage covers, which we did in such a way that they formed a trough, and all the water ran out the window. Just as we finished the chief came down and told me I'd done a good job. I told him that these guys had done the job and came up with the idea, not me. On the way back the truck driver told me that in twenty years he had never seen an officer give a private that kind of respect. After that I got along with that company fine.[52]

Then in the late sixties the riots occurred. It is hard to gauge the tremendous impact that the riots had on the community and particularly the fire fighters who were right in the middle of things. In what for many of them had been a fairly lazy D.C. spring—Washington turned into a nightmare of conflagrations, gun shots, booby trapped streets, and lawlessness. Yet even though everyone was frightened by the experience and numbed by the looting and destruction, there were basically two different reactions to these events that illustrate differing points of view toward the community, as seen in the following accounts.

1. The riots left me with an eerie feeling, and I can remember going up Seventh Street and we were sitting on top of the MB5* and we were relieving the day platoon and we were the night platoon. This was the second night, I think, but I remember riding up Seventh Street. Seeing the hose laying on the street, buildings burning, smoke, tear gas .... I felt like a soldier coming in like an occupying force. I felt like everybody around was hostile, which they were. And I felt like I was an enemy, which I probably was because I came to put the fires out. It was weird, it was the strangest experience of my life. And it was right tough, I mean everybody had to extend themselves, because if they didn't we were afraid that the whole damn city was going to burn down. But generally I just remember it as being weird, something that you would think could never happen around here. I really felt like I was in a foreign country and I was raised right here not too far from where all of that was going on.[53]
2. The riots were the greatest time of all—I mean outside of the damage and personal injury an all—it was really fun because for the first time and the only time the fire department was operating without bureaucracy, and during the riots we just operated without it. Like I kept a little notebook and a lot of the officers worked this way. I had this notebook and we would go into a block and have a block on fire. And virtually be the only one there. And the fires got put out and there was no big reports put in. We would just call headquarters and tell them the address and go on to the next one. And we did a superlative job. All of the fires were put out. And the city went on and the fire department went on. And as a matter of fact it was probably the most glorious time for the fire department, because there was more fire than I had ever seen in my whole life and probably more fires than I will see in my whole life. And everything clicked. They were bringing hamburgers to us on the fire ground or in some cases people would just open up their stores and let us go in and cook up something and then come back around and like that. And it was great. Yet the paperwork was just minimal and yet the fire department survived. And it was grand and glorious.[54]

In the first account the feeling of a loss of familiar surroundings and a loss of the old neighborhoods and a community is

expressed, while in the latter the most important element is the opportunity to fight fire unencumbered with the usual bureaucratic red tape. Although both reactions were expressed by both white and black fire fighters, the second account was most often expressed by white fire fighters who stressed fire fighting opportunity over the effect of this cataclysm on the community. In a very real sense the riots were seen by these individuals as the best of times and the worst of times. It is ironic that these events also marked a shift in momentum in the community away from white control and toward home rule and majority black self-government. This shift did not go unnoticed by the older white fire fighters who sensed the impact that it would have on the fire service and in some cases retired because of it.

Almost immediately after the riots an aggressive recruiting campaign was begun to bring blacks into the department. A number of those recruited (both black and white) were Vietnam veterans or shared with these veterans many of the values of those who were college age during this era. This large influx of post-sixties youth had an immediate effect, particularly in the area of rules and regulations regarding dress, hair length, and lateness. Rather than attempt a compromise, those in power chose to enforce the rules to the letter, thus adding to the anti-authoritarian frustrations of this new group of fire fighters. The reaction of the more experienced fire fighters to this group was more mixed and, although they disliked the lack of respect for rules and authority that they had always followed (particularly the hair length and the lateness issue), they admired this generation for having participated in a thankless war. They also came to respect the general quickness and skill with which they picked up the basics of fire fighting. Although irreverent toward some of the traditions, this new generation for the most part passed the test on the fire ground.

Blacks continued to rise among the ranks until 1973 when the District of Columbia acquired its first black fire chief. By this time there were basically five general types of fire fighters in the department. First, the older blacks who had started out in the segregated houses and gone through integration and the riots by rolling with the punches and staying close to the rules, using the books and the system as much as they could to their advantage while they also remained firmly outside the white tradition. Secondly, the older

whites who were still in the majority and who had stayed firmly in the mainstream of the tradition while at the same time they were becoming increasingly aware of a shift of momentum in the city with home rule and a sharp increase in the numbers and assertiveness of blacks in the department. Third, the younger blacks who were more outspoken and independent and less awed by authority, while they weren't drawn to either the traditions of the old black houses (now gone), the approach taken by the older black fire fighters, or the white tradition. Some of these young fire fighters eventually formed their own association of black fire fighters because they felt strongly that their needs weren't being met by any group or organization in the department. Fourth, the younger whites who participated in the tradition when it suited them but who also shared with the younger blacks a confirmed dislike for authority and what they considered arbitrary enforcement of militaristic rules and regulations. And finally the moderates, a large group of individuals both white and black who have the most flexible point of view of all of these general groups. Moderates participate in the life of the house and the joking relationships (a good deal of it based on racial slurs and jokes), as well as having a strong sense of accomplishment for doing a good job on the fire ground when the bells hit. Promotional exams, hair length hassles, and a hundred other issues come and go every month, but it is these middle-of-the-road fire fighters who keep things moving forward by greasing the skids with humor, fair thinking, and a commitment to the group. There is a sixth group of semi-disaffiliated individuals who put in their hours and spend more time working on a part-time job or other outside interests; but these fire fighters usually gravitate to the slower houses and take one of the more extreme positions if they take a position at all. More frequently they just couldn't care less what happens in the fire service as long as they put in their time and receive their checks.

Most recently the promotional exam* brought into relief these various factions and revealed in sharp contrast their differing points of view. The black establishment now in power in the fire department is extremely conservative. Having lived by the rule and the book, it has few other models to follow, so it continues to enforce the same rigid approach to both the fire fighters themselves and the role of the fire service in the city. The younger more radical blacks seeking advancement would appear to want to

remain separated from the fire fighting tradition without having had the experiential advantages and practical knowledge that the tradition provides white fire fighters. Gradually a black fire fighting tradition may be developed; but the role of fire fighting in black culture is so new and so different than it has been in white culture that until that occurs the young black fire fighters must rely on the books and rules like their predecessors while they also begin to flex a political power in this emerging black city not available to any other group.

The older whites—the conservative bearers of the white tradition—have at this point been taken back. The days of the leather lunged smoke-eater and all that he stood for are radically changed, if not already gone. The tradition itself, however, is being carried on by a large number of younger white fire fighters, who see the fire service and its culture as a central part of their lives. But they temper that feeling with an educated awareness of how much more quickly technology and the role of the fire service can and will change. Moderates on all sides borrow from the tradition those elements of technique, community feeling, and pride that are still very much a part of the fire fighting culture, while at the same time they appear to be open to change as long as it isn't unilaterally forced on them and as long as it is based on a generally fair set of rules.

The newest group to join the fire service is women, and their role in the fire fighting culture is still being defined (Figure 25). The first hurdle was somewhat of a red herring—the lack of accommodations for women in the fire house and the male atmosphere of fire house life. This turned out to be a minimal problem. Although some women expressed a feeling of intimidation about sleeping arrangements and bathroom facilities, that aspect of women's introduction to the fire service has been comparatively easy to deal with. The bigger hurdle is physical ability to do the work. It is in this area that most men express doubt and the women ask for a chance to prove themselves.

As stated earlier, the main criteria for acceptance into the fire fighting culture is aggressive performance on the fire ground. In many situations this requires a tremendous amount of strength and stamina to put the proper technique into effect. As one female probationer put it:

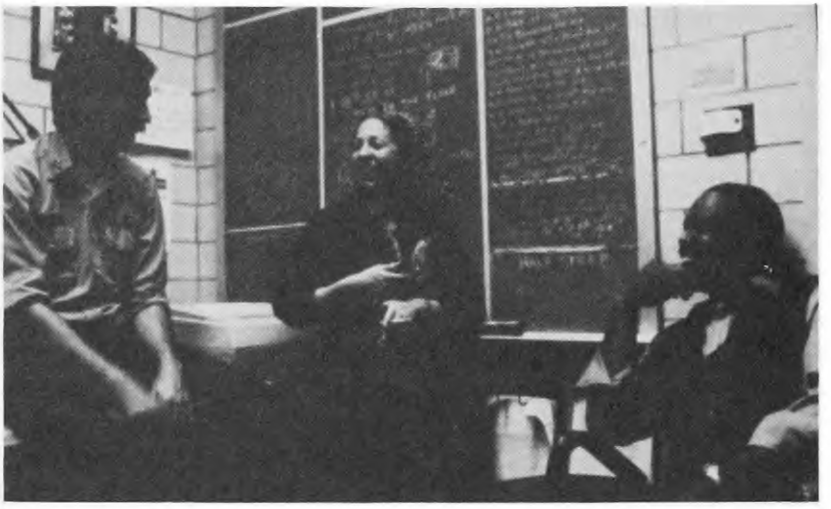

Figure 25. *"Shooting the breeze" at the watch desk.*

> One of the toughest things for a woman to learn about doing this job is to keep on going. I don't know what it is, but a lot of women, even strong women it seems give it one big push and figure they've done it. Maybe its being raised as a girl and girls aren't supposed to do things like that or something. But if you can keep going after you are tired, then that determination can get you through.[55]

Although all of the women admitted that they weren't as strong as the men, they also pointed out that by gaining experience and working out with weights, they were beginning to develop new ways to use leverage and body strength to best advantage.

> We had a fire in the old Post Office building and we had to go up these long flights of stairs with all of our gear. It was hard and I got tired and had to get my breath. But I wasn't the only one who got tired—a lot of men were stopping too. I might have pushed a little harder, but I did increase my squats to build up my legs and next time I'll do a little better.[56]

The men in the fire service, white and black, are dubious about the ability of women to physically handle the job. The most typical response is: "I think that women should be given a chance to do the work, but I really don't think they can do it. If they want to come in

here and try it with no special privileges or accommodations then they should get the chance."[57] Unfortunately the Fire Department has neglected to institute a physical stress test for all recruits and this measure of doubt about the ability of the new recruits (men and women) to do the work in a real fire, places additional pressures on everybody. In any physical type of work (letter carrying, construction work, or cement work) there are minimum weights and activities that an individual must be able to handle if she is going to be a part of the work force. In a physically demanding occupation like fire fighting it is even more necessary, and not just for women alone.

There are a large number of fire fighters in the city who are overweight and/or have potential heart problems due to smoking and overeating. The fire service is in some respects a heart attack incubator, in that fire fighters spend many sedentary hours eating foods high in cholesterol and carbohydrates and then in a matter of seconds they are pushing their bodies beyond the limits of a professional football player in the midst of a playoff game. Incredibly, there has been to date no exercise or dietary program suggested or implemented. Although many fire fighters readily admit they would participate in such a program (some officers have legitimate reservations about a mandatory program, but at the very least a voluntary isometric-type regimen could be tested), nothing has been done. If a basic physical stress test were implemented to test the abilities of new recruits, both male and female, it would be only fair to apply these same criteria to those already on the job. If they can't meet these basic requirements then a mandatory program of exercise and diet should be administered.

In some of the houses to which women have been assigned, sympathetic officers and experienced men can and have made things easier by meeting the women halfway. The men attempt to give them a fair chance at a job that they realize is not easy to learn.

> The guys in this house have been really good and the officer here has met me more than halfway. They help me with the book, knots, whatever and we've even gone out for a couple of beers together. The main thing that I learned is to just keep trying and not give up—I pitch in wherever I can help and I think they appreciate it. I am damn lucky to get this house and at the next one—who knows.[58]

One of the main things that women must deal with in this almost all-male occupation is the sexism, which makes being a rookie in this quasi-military organization even more difficult. Even when she does something that is technically correct, this attitude can backfire on her.

> We had a run up to I St., a vacant house with a little fire, not much. And we had a good time squirting water. Well part of the floor was gone and this guy stepped in the hole and started to fall so I helped him up with some other guys. Afterward he was going around complaining about why did they let me help pull him up.[59]

A basic tenet of the fire fighting tradition is the strength of the male group; it is difficult for the men to conceive of women as equals in the work place. As one female fire fighter put it: "Our being here takes away from their pride in their job—their egos are deflated having a woman on the job."[60] The women who go into the fire service see it as uncharted territory, offering financial and personal rewards not available elsewhere, while the men see them as affirmative action beneficiaries who have gotten on the job due to special treatment. One way to change this attitude is a one-to-one daily process of education and communication that eases the level of tension between men and women fire fighters by giving them an opportunity to work together rather than relying on the hazy rumors and sexual stereotypes that fly around the department: "Most of these guys don't know me and so they believe a lot of the crap that is being said. As I get detailed around I'll get to know more of them and them me, and some will change their minds and others won't. But at least they'll know who and what I am.[61]

The ultimate role of women in the fire service is just being defined. As the days of fire fighting brawn give way to a more intellectual approach to fire fighting, much of this resistance might begin to diminish just as it has amongst forest fire crews on the west coast. But it is early yet in the development of the female role in the urban fire service; as one female fire fighter states:

> As a woman in the fire service I think I and other women coming in will make changes just by being there. Somebody will look at me and say, "Gosh she's a little tiny thing. If she can do it maybe I'll give it a try too." And maybe one out of those five

women who go into it will stick with it. And that's going to be the test—time. Ten years from now—then you can make an opinion about women in fire fighting. What I look like, where I'm at, what I feel—in ten years. That's going to be the interesting part. And I think you're going to find a lot of them dropping out. Because it is not a profession that is conducive to a family. It's hard on a man with a woman taking care of children at home as it is. Because of shift work and all. But it's even harder on a woman, because I not only have to be a fire fighter, but I also have to be a woman, go to the grocery store, do the housecleaning, change the oil in the car—see, I do two roles. I come here and can't really act like a girl and I try to keep my voice down to a minimal squeak. And I can't help the way I laugh and all that. But when there's work to be done I like to get in there and help them. There is a certain amount of comradeship that women are open to now that they weren't ten years ago. I know for a fact that ten years ago I couldn't have gotten on this job. There is no doubt in my mind. Even if I could have gotten to the training academy I couldn't have gotten through it. It's just that people are more open to it now and they're just opening to it. There are still a lot of people and places in this department who resent me without even knowing me. I could go to some other city and walk into a fire station and say I'm a fire fighter from the District of Columbia and they would probably laugh at me. There's a lot that has to be changed, but it won't happen overnight. Ten years from now . . . .[62]

The fire department today compared to the way it was ten or even five years ago is much different due to the types of people involved and their various attachments to the work. Although white male fire fighters are still in the majority, they feel threatened by a black administration, which they see as discriminating against them because they are white. The blacks feel as though even with the strides that they have made toward integration in the last two decades, there are still not enough black officers and technicians in the department and that (as some blacks see it) there should be more compensatory action to redress the years of past segregation and discrimination. At the same time, both black and white men continue to exert great pressure on the women to perform on the

fire ground, while they also deny their ability to do so. The women feel as though they are basically untried on the fire ground and overpressured and ask for nothing more than an opportunity to do the job.

The primary conclusion to be drawn from this apparently insoluble situation is that the fire service is basically a closed system based on fire house life, performance on the fire ground, and formal fire fighting education. In an ideal situation these aspects of the job feed into each other through a sharing of knowledge and performance that brings the individuals in a company closer together. Yet in many companies throughout the city today, rather than a sharing of ideas there is a thinly veiled level of formal cooperation barely covering a tremendous amount of hostility and frustration felt by everyone.

Although it is still basically true that "when the bells hit, all that crap goes out the window," there is some evidence that these tensions have surfaced on the fire ground even to the point that intentional injury was allegedly inflicted by a fire fighter of one race upon another.[63] Regardless of the specific details, even the existence of stories claiming such an event took place (or might take place) indicates the presence of hostilities that appear to be increasing rather than decreasing in intensity, because there is never a release of tension, only periodic cooling and simmering periods. The longer these tensions and their resulting destruction of morale are allowed to continue, the more likely it will be that performance on the fire ground, the effectiveness of the fire fighting force and the basic fiber and cohesiveness of the occupation will gradually be eroded.

Officers, Chiefs, and Aides

On a typical summer afternoon, the engine company responds on a reported stabbing in one of the seedier row-house sections of southeast Washington. The residents of the building are clustered around the doorway leading to one of the basement apartments. When the fire fighters enter the apartment, a middle aged man is laying on the floor with a butcher knife protruding from his chest, just above the left breast. He has lost a great deal of blood and is obviously close to death. The apartment is filled with gawking onlookers, and a woman is shouting to the fire fighters to do something. The man who committed the crime is sitting on the couch

right in front of them. A heavy, middle-aged man sits glaring stonily at the victim and says nothing. Neither do the fire fighters. The line and layout man begin to try to stop the bleeding while the officer, a young sergeant, calls into headquarters that they have a man with a knife in his chest and they need ambulance assistance as soon as possible. Meanwhile the line man, who is an experienced Emergency Medical Technician, goes to the door of the apartment and shouts to the wagon driver to call a code* to D.C. General. The ambulance arrives and the line man goes with the victim to maintain care to the hospital. By the time they arrive, the victim has died.

When he returns to the station, the line man is summarily chewed out by the officer for yelling orders for a code to the wagon driver and not to him, the officer. The line man explains that that is the way that he and the wagon driver have always worked in the past, that the previous officer encouraged them to act as quickly and decisively as they could, and finally that the last time he didn't call in a code before they left to the hospital the doctors told him that he might have caused the victim's death because the fire department had failed to warn them what was coming. The young officer responded by stating that although that might have been the way it was done before, after this he would give all of the orders concerning what transmissions are made by the company. This incident created such tension in the company (particularly because the line man was black and the officer was white) that the normal verbal bantering and good natured conversation of the house was disrupted for the remainder of the tour.

This incident illustrates the frustrations of both fire fighters and officers, which are felt as a result of the way in which companies develop work habits that may or may not conform to the philosophies of officers who—particularly at the sergeant level—spend most of their time moving from company to company. There are also questions of tact and sensitivity in administration and the treatment of a new officer by a seasoned company that will be explored in some detail in the material that follows.

An officer in the fire service is in an unusual position in the culture because of his ambivalent role in the house and on the fire ground (Figure 26). Unlike other occupations in which the supervisor often finds him or herself separated from the workers by physical or status differences, the fire fighting officer maintains a

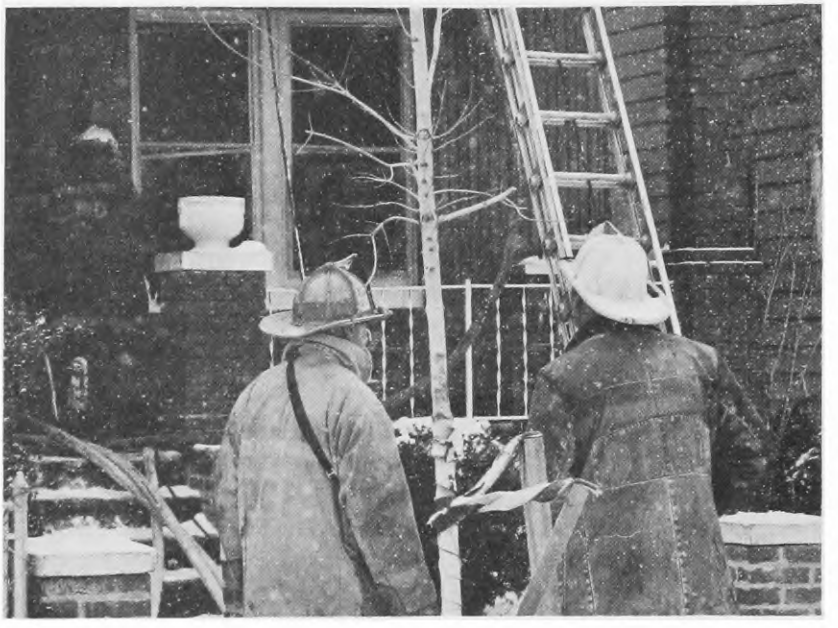

Figure 26. *A chief and his aide direct a fire from the street.*

close working relationship with those riding the back step. He not only eats and participates in fire house life with the rest of the fire fighters, he also operates on the line or with the truck company as an active member of the fire fighting team during the attack. Once a man has made chief, however, this role changes and he often will remain outside the building and direct the attack from the front, while the aide covers the rear and the interior.

It is difficult to define what makes a good officer, but most fire fighters agree that someone who listens to them as individuals, who is interested in the job, and who shares rather than tries to constantly direct the work of the company, has the potential to be a good officer. The following description illustrates some of these points.

> This officer was like my idol, he was just always thinking. He listened to what you had to say, which is a problem in the fire service in my opinion. Because a very few officers would listen to you—but he would take your opinion even though he wouldn't always agree with it and he wouldn't always go along

with it, but he would always give you the opportunity. So that way on the fire ground you never questioned him, because you had that much respect for him. And there's different styles of officers. Like you've got your macho types who are like your Marines (I'm stereotyping now) who want to take San Juan Hill and Iwo Jima. And then you have your thinkers who think well I've got a vacant building and I don't want to get anybody hurt, but then they can do the Marine thing when somebody is in there. That's the kind of officer that I like—one who is aggressive when it's time to be aggressive, but they weren't aggressive just because its the macho thing to do. I had a real embarrassing situation one night when one of these officers was in charge. We had a vacant building and I didn't like being up on the tip of the ladder and the smoke was coming up and everything. And I thought Jesus Christ, a big blast of air is going to come up here and blow me off of this thing, and I was really scared so I came down. And when I got down there he asked me what was wrong and I said that the smoke was really thick up there. And about that time the chief in charge of the fire walked by and chewed my ass out for not being on the tip of the ladder. And this officer said, "Wait a minute chief, you go through me, that's my man. Besides, this is a vacant building and we got it knocked down. . . ." But the chief told him that he wanted somebody on the tip of the ladder away from the smoke and we went back up. But that's just an example of the kind of officer that he is.[64]

A good officer is both a teacher and a listener who combines his practical experience with that of the company plus whatever theoretical or educational knowledge he may command to shape the positive attitude of all the company members. He also has a certain calmness and style on the fire ground that is extremely important to the rookie fire fighter during the more tense moments of the fire fighting attack.

Well I look up to the captain a lot. When I first got here he impressed me a lot. He's the kind of guy who you read about in books, like in Dennis Smith's books or Hamilton's books. And there he was—it was just so cool. First fire we had was my first day, and it was just around the block. I got sort of excited, but he was so relaxed that he relaxed me and everything came right

> back to me. He said get the line and I got it and we got to the top of the stairs and we hit it and everything worked out great. There was another fire around the block over on 15th St. and we got to the door and we got ready and knocked the door down, and it was really cool and impressed me a lot. Very impressive—my ideal fireman that was him and he was my captain on my first appointment, you know. But that's how it was—it was just like something out of the movies or something, you know. I even called up my brother and told him, you know. I don't know, I guess I just got lucky.[65]

Perhaps the most important single element that determines the success or failure of an officer in a company is his ability to negotiate his philosophy and needs with that of the company itself. As in the stabbing example cited above and other illustrations that follow, this ability is not easily learned. It is an aspect of interpersonal relations that few officers in the fire service have been trained to deal with adequately. Most officers make a strong effort to get in step with the technicians in the company, because "You have to rely on the technicians .... if a company has good technicians, you'll usually have a good company."[66] In some houses, however, morale has reached such a low ebb due to the way in which an officer misuses his power that the following can occur.

> Some guys are taking the position that we're not going to move until the guys tell us what to do. Talking to some of the guys in this battalion it has already gotten to that point. The chief would be always telling the officer what to do on the fire ground, so finally the whole company just sits on the apparatus and the place is burning and they say okay chief, what do you want us to do? Everything we do on our own you criticize so now whatever we do you are going to have to give us the direct order. Okay engine take the line, truck get the ladder up. I think you are going to see it before too long all over this department. And with some of these new officers the thing that has saved them so far is the men. There are two ways of looking at it: the men are as good as the officer, or the officer is as good as the men. It can work both ways, the men can break an officer or an officer can break the spirit of a company or make the spirit of a company. You are definitely going to see that in this battalion.[67]

Becoming an officer, as seen in this illustration, is much more than knowing the NFPA* handbook and the pump manuals. It is the ability to develop forms of communication with a variety of people in a way that isn't necessary when the officer himself is on the back step. But to date the department has not begun any program in interpersonal communications, decision making, or any other form of officer's training that begins to address this need. The following example illustrates the current examination system in the department.

> In the exam process you aren't tested on your ability to outthink a fire. You're just tested on your ability to know how many miles you have to go before you change oil, or rotate the hose, that kind of thing. In reading the NFPA material there is a lot there that is good background material; but there is still very little in terms of strategy or tactics. Like the pump manual, they just take out of the pump manual what they want to use and throw the original source away. You don't even know where they get some of the information because they don't give you references or anything. If you have an officer who has read and knows everything that has been written in this department and that's all he knows, he couldn't stand up against professional fire fighters who have been educated in fire science. Which is a real shame, because this department has so much potential. I think the best officer would be sort of fifty-fifty, based on experience on the fire ground and education—but a fairly broad education, not one limited to just the rules and regulations of this department.[68]

Regardless of their formal or informal training and experience, there are three main types of fire ground officers in the department. The first has been referred to as the macho, Marine, or gung-ho officer who, like the leather lunged smoke-eaters of yesterday, is constantly shouting orders and exhorting his men with shouts and shoves of encouragement. Most experienced fire fighters dislike this approach because the more experienced the company the less verbal interaction is necessary. In some situations, particularly with inexperienced fire fighters, however this type of "encouragement" and aggressiveness is useful in allaying preliminary fears.

A second type of officer is known as a thinker or cool or relaxed officer. One of the main virtues on the fire ground is calmness in the face of what from the outside might appear to be mind-boggling confusion. Often the company that gets the fire is led by this type of officer who may appear to be less aggressive when in fact his deliberation and calmness may provide him with an opportunity to figure out a different approach to the fire than a headlong push up the stairs.

The final general category of officer includes those who are referred to as flakey, shakey, or just plain lazy when it comes to fire ground administration. In some cases these individuals are carried by the abilities of the company. In others they have earned reputations for poor performance on the fire ground that often results in their being shuttled from one company, battalion, or platoon to another as various chiefs seek to rid themselves of these uninspired officers. Fortunately they constitute a small minority in the department.

In the fire service there are four ranks of officers: sergeant, lieutenant, captain, and chief. For the purposes of discussion, the ranks above battalion fire chief will not be discussed due to the unique nature of those political/administrative positions. The first rank, that of sergeant, is in many respects the journeyman professional in his trade. He is, as described by an experienced captain, the "roving critic of the fire service." Although he is assigned to a specific company, the sergeant often finds himself detailed to companies throughout a battalion to fill in for other officers. Although this transition from fire fighter to officer may seem easy, once an individual has taken the exam and scored well, as his name begins to move up the list and it looks as though he will get promoted, the enormity of the change about to occur looms very large on the horizon.

> But the change itself I guess its like a psychological change, because it's a big change in your life. And you take the test and sometimes its a year or even two years before you get promoted and it almost seems that there is no relation between taking the test* and getting promoted. And you've worked with a bunch of guys for a long time and you're very close and then all of a sudden boom, you're working with a bunch of strangers. And it may seem like a small point, but they don't even call you by your name anymore. So not only does your position change

> and your job change, but also your name changes. They don't call you Harry anymore, you're just sergeant.[69]

Once he has his new job, the sergeant must negotiate his position with each company he works with, making sure that he doesn't step on anybody's toes. At the same time he gives orders when necessary, yet remains open to new methods and techniques he may not have experienced up to this point.

> As a sergeant in a company its better to keep your mouth shut unless they ask you, or if maybe there is a company made up of mostly detailed people, then you might have to say something. The reason being that certain buildings are worked differently. If you did them all by the book you'd never get inside the damn thing. Especially in an engine company—advancing lines and things. And lengths of line—a lot of them will fool you. Take some of those buildings uptown, they'll show you three stories up front but the time you get around back you might be seeing four or five. And you can't see it from the street. So a lot of times they'll just say to the sergeant to blow the siren and when they get to the fire they'll take the line, select the proper line, and advance it in the building; and the sergeant ends up just going along for the ride or helping with the line or whatever. And that's one of the good things about the department, it's structured with a very solid little base. And in spite of what happens up top, unless they start making major changes in the order books and what have you, they really can't hurt the basic structure of the department. They can make some bad decisions, but they can't really hurt the department.[70]

In summary, the sergeant is an experienced fire fighter with practical and theoretical training, while he is at the same time a novice administrator who may have little or no experience dealing with people in a leadership capacity. Since the department provides no training, the result is that each new sergeant must make his way through the diverse companies in the department on a trial and error basis. In a homogeneous department, that would have been difficult enough due to the differences in company districts and techniques; but in an increasingly heterogeneous department it is almost impossible to do so successfully.

The next rank of officer is lieutenant and many people in the fire service see this as the most desirable position because a lieutenant is assigned to one company where he spends most of his time, while he isn't usually responsible for administrating the day to day business of the fire house—that is the captain's responsibility. As described by an individual currently a lieutenant in the department:

> As a sergeant you just get the feeling that you're just hanging on, you know, and just basically trying to keep track of everybody and that's hard to do just seeing the guys for the first time. But as a lieutenant you should be more familiar with the guys, how they operate, who you have to look out for, who you don't have to look out for. And try to keep track of everybody so if things get really out of hand you can gather everybody around and not be caught in the position of not knowing where everybody is. Just don't do things like you used to when you were on the line years back. Because then you were working by yourself and now you're working with five other guys. And things just don't work out that way. You have to make the transition from doing the crazy things that you used to do when you were running the line or running the bar to thinking about other people. It's not that you weren't thinking about other people in those days, it was just that you weren't responsible for them then.[71]

A lieutenant has more authority with the company while he also has the luxury of shaping that company through drill, fire ground experiences, and personal daily interaction in the direction of his choice. The following example illustrates a shaping in which a new lieutenant successfully changes a company by sticking to his demand for at least minimal preparedness on the fire ground.

> One of the fires that sticks out in my mind was when I was a lieutenant newly assigned to this engine company. And I had quite an adjustment period with the troops because I had come in after a very lazy officer, and they were very slipshod. They were good people, but they had bad habits, fire ground habits particularly. And I was changing things considerably, like we lay out now, we take masks in every time, you wear your running coat even though it's false. Needless to say, the whole

thing was going over like a lead balloon. Nobody likes someone to come in and start upsetting their whole routine. It can get lonely for a long time. Well one night we ran second-due on a double local and we laid out going in, which by this time they were getting used to doing. And we pulled up and the small line man looked at me like oh no, not the preconnect again. So I told him 350, so he starts in with the 350, and we got to the basement steps and there was nothing showin and there was a line going down there from the other engine company, but it wasn't charged. And there was a sergeant coming up the steps and the sergeant said that there was nothing down there, we don't need you. And by this time I had been there long enough that they were convinced I was crazy. So the small line man looked at me, and I looked at him and he knew that he was going down those steps with that line. So he was humoring me by this point, and we got to the landing. And that first-due engine company came by us like a pack of rats, they were abandoning ship. And we kept on going and we went down there and we put the fire out. And I thought to myself, well maybe—I felt good about it because I knew that I was doing what I should have been doing. But I needed that because it's kind of hard to be the Captain Queeg of the ship all the time. So that is one that always sticks in my mind because although it wasn't much of a fire, it was a real turning point with that company. After that those guys started to think that maybe there was something to this.[72]

The lieutenant's position seems to be the most solid in the fire service because, unlike the sergeant or captain positions, the lieutenant is not in transition or "acting" in any capacity. Because of this the lieutenant can be a real part of the company without loosing his administrative muscle should he need to exercise it. In addition, the lieutenant is responsible for his company in both the fire house and on the fire ground. As he spends more time with his company members, they either conform more to his philosophy or begin to look for a way to leave the company.

When an officer moves into the rank of captain, he has reached the limit of fire line administration prior to becoming chief. He is in charge of a fire house, as well as his individual company on the fire ground. At the same time he begins to groom himself for the battalion fire chief's position by acting as a fill-in chief when called

upon to do so. Earlier in this century the length of time that all officers spent in a certain rank was due to an extremely slow turnover rate. Therefore, captains used to wield much more control over their individual fire houses and companies. With the more rapid turnover of officers since the late 1960's, however, a large number of younger men have moved into these positions. The result has been a decrease in autonomy by captains and an increase in the control exerted by battalion chiefs over manning* and personnel. Also, since many of these battalion chiefs came up in the more traditional department, their views are much more conservative than those of the younger officers under them. This conflict has continued to frustrate any efforts toward innovation coming from the line officers upward or from the fire department administration down to the fire fighting personnel. This situation has also resulted in a blurring of the ranks of lieutenant and captain, at least until the captain begins to assume the duties of a chief. This transitional period while a captain can become confusing due to the need to think sometimes as a chief and other times as a captain.

> You have to always think about what job you are going to be doing that particular night. Like maybe you're the captain one night and the next you're worrying about your ladders or something. It sounds funny, but you can find yourself thinking the wrong way. You pull up and you start thinking about what you are going to do with the fourth-due engine company and then remember that you better start thinking about something else because that's somebody else's problem.[73]

Although captains may no longer be able to build companies by recruiting individual fire fighters the way they used to, a captain can have a major impact on changing the relationships and morale of a particular house.

> As a captain I have been given certain responsibilities that I never thought I would have—particularly in the area of discipline. You have to develop a way to be consistent and fair with everybody and to stick to it all of the time. When I first came here the officer before me let these guys do whatever they wanted. But if somebody screwed up he would come down on that person to make himself look good. With me everybody knows the limits and as long as we all stay within them, things

> are fine. So along with the forms and paper you've got to push, as an officer you have to sometimes be real tough on people. That isn't easy for me, but I try to be fair to everybody and I think that the men respect that.[74]

There are also some officers who feel that the step from captain to chief is too easily made and that in some cases an individual should remain at the level at which he functions best.

> My theory is that this job is just like any other type job as far as promotions go. Certain individuals are qualified to go to a certain level and then once they reach that certain level, they should stop. They are not qualified to rise that much higher in the command structure—they just can't handle it. And although there really isn't that much difference on the fire ground between a captain and a lieutenant—say the captain of Engine 8 is in charge of 8 Engine and that doesn't mean that he would have the whole fire ground and I would have the truck, for example. But some men have just reached their limit and yet the promotional system has passed them along, and unfortunately there are some people in command positions who just can't handle it—they would have been happier and it would probably have been better that they stay at the lower rank. But prestige and egos being what they are, very few guys could live with that—particularly when they know that they can get promoted. That probably is the weakest part of the promotional system—we can't weed out those who should stay at a certain level. I'm not saying they are incompetent, just that everybody has a limit. I mean I can say that I really want to be battalion chief or I've read every book that has ever been written, but that doesn't mean that I'd be a good one. And the only way that you could get a person out of that position once they are in would be to fire them—and that is just not going to happen.[75]

It would be extremely difficult for a group of peers who had been in the fire service for a number of years to deny promotion to one of their fellow officers without a very serious reason. The only possibility for an impartial review would be if it came from an outside source and that is a decision-making resource that virtually all fire fighters vehemently oppose due to the outsider's misunderstanding of the workings and culture of the fire service.

The rank of captain is not only a stepping stone to the chief's position, it also provides an officer with the opportunity to affect the morale and performance of the company (or companies) in the fire house. He is still, however, subjected to the same scrutiny and review by the company members (as illustrated below) and must gain their cooperation and respect prior to implementing his own philosophy.

> One of the best things about this fire department is the ability of the technicians. And a smart officer listens to the technicians who have usually been in a company a lot longer than the officer. Like this new captain we just got here. He's got seventeen years on the department and he knows a lot of stuff. I've got damn near twenty and what we have to do is figure out our approaches and then work together. Each officer and each company has its own approach to fighting fire and you just have to go through that feeling-out process to find out what you're working with.[76]

The position of battalion fire chief is perhaps the most independent and potentially creative job in the fire service. Although directly answerable to the deputy fire chief and those above him, a battalion chief and his aide exert wide ranging controls over all of those in their battalion. On the fire ground the chief is the main administrator who controls the fire fighting attack, while his aide assists him by relaying orders, providing him with information, and keeping him up to date on what is occurring. In the fire house, the chief and his aide grant leaves and assign overtime and "WDOs" (working days off), as well as make special assignments and transfers for their battalion. An aide is an extension of a chief and as such he exercises power that often exceeds that of officers below the rank of chief. Although an effort is made to distribute additional work throughout the battalion, many a fire fighter has bemoaned his alienation of an aide or accused one of showing special favors to his friends. The chief's aide is also the source of many of the rumors and bits of information and misinformation because of his unique position.

One chief described the relationship between a chief and his aide as "the closest bond that two men can have between them . . . . You pick that man for his attitude and experience, his ability to keep his mouth shut. You should be able to send him anywhere in the

city—he should know all of the districts."[77] Sometimes, however, a chief and his aide will be called upon to respond to a call that takes them out of their district to an unfamiliar location. As the following story illustrates, not only is it impossible to know every location in the city, but most significantly, the chief and his aide feel comfortable enough with each other to admit their ignorance.

> There was this one chief who I really used to enjoy driving for. We were down here around 14th and I Street one day and they gave us a box way the hell up in Northwest somewhere. And he said let's respond on up there. And I said alright chief, how would you like to go? And he said it didn't make any difference, take any route that I wanted. Well I didn't know where the hell I was at, so I didn't want to say that, so I said well Chief, what route would you prefer? And he said that he didn't give a damn, just get on up there. So I'm going up 14th, and up Mass., and by this time I was really beginning to wonder how I was going to find this place. So I said Chief, what route do you think would be the best to get there. He said do you know where in the hell you're going? And I said no. And he said, neither do I.[78]

On the fire ground there are basically two techniques used by chiefs to administrate the fire fighting attack: running the fire from the inside or running it from the outside There are advantages to both and they merit closer examination. The chief that goes inside the building has the advantage of being right where the action is, while the chief who remains outside can rely on his aide or officers inside to give him information about the fire while he stands out in front and controls the overall picture. The following observations were made by a young chief stating his reasons for taking the position on the fire ground that he does.

> A lot of the older chiefs tend to be inside more and a lot of your younger chiefs tend to be outside more, but that's just a kind of weak generalization. I think its a question of efficiency, myself. I'm outside and if I can possibly be outside that's where I can tell what's happening far easier from the outside than I can from the inside. It is just more efficient, because if you are on the inside there is a tendency for inside chiefs to become super captains. You're in the hallways and pushing people this way and that telling them what to do and get the door and pull the

> ceiling here. And there's a lot of people doing it. As a matter of fact that's one of the things that makes me think maybe I'm the one who is doing things wrong, because there are so many chiefs who do it. But basically I do think that it is better to be outside. You can't think overall when you go inside. I've done it myself, got sucked into a hallway. And the next thing you know they're trying to get the door and I'm telling them to take the hinges off and I'm thinking about the hinges. I'm not thinking about the floor above. I'm not thinking about the big picture. I'm thinking about hinges. The second thing is that outside you can see what is happening to the whole building. You can see where the fire is, if its being hit, if its not being hit, if its moving from one floor to another, and generally considering things like special units, like maybe the mask unit or something, and if you're pushing around in the halls you don't think about those things.[79]

Being chief on the fire ground requires that you think in a certain way—that you anticipate not only the behavior of the fire and its particular method of spread or attack, but that you also adjust your personal approach to the companies you are administering. As one chief suggests:

> We are very fast and very aggressive and it works very well if the fire is cooperative and you hit it soon enough. Yet if you have problems, this free wheel type of operation can grind to a halt and you can wind up with real problems on your hands .... You have to be aggressive in this job. But in some cases aggressiveness coupled with lack of direction or specific direction can actually be inefficient, as far as a company operation. If you've got something and it was the type of deal where you're saying okay I'm the chief and you don't do anything until I tell you, then we'd burn down a hell of a lot more buildings in D.C. But on the free wheel system companies do what they are supposed to on their own, and it generally works pretty well. The problem is that within that system we sow the seeds for chaos on bigger operations. Because you can't have many companies on a big fire—maybe thirty or forty companies and let everybody do what they want to do. You just can't operate that way. Unfortunately you set the stage for the big operations with the little operations. When it works, which is most of the time, it

works very well. But when it doesn't work you've got sixteen companies free wheeling and then you've got twenty-four companies free wheeling, and after a while you might just as well hire a band.[80]

This aggressiveness and competition between companies can also become a problem. Fire fighters who have spent their whole careers under this system and become officers occasionally make unnecessary or potentially dangerous demands on those they are commanding. As one officer put it:

One thing that does surprise me, and fortunately we don't have many chiefs who are like this, but that is the chiefs who don't think too much about the safety of the men. Not that he wants to kill anybody—we don't have anybody like that. But most people feel that they have an obligation that nobody get messed up—particularly because of your actions or decisions. And I find it hard when I see people putting the troops in positions that they have no business being in. The thing is that these guys would do it themselves, it's this go go go thing. And its okay to do it yourself, but you can't do that to other people. Even though its probably questionable whether or not you should do it yourself. But as the superior, to demand that others take that unnecessary risk, I can't see that at all. And another good thing is the built-in protection that fire fighters have against this kind of dangerous decision. They usually just wouldn't hear the order or in some other way see that they weren't put in a situation of obvious danger.[81]

Each battalion chief has the autonomy and experience to have developed a unique style of handling his job. Some chiefs go by the book—following rigidly the deployment of personnel and their use on the fire ground; while others keep a very low profile on the fire ground, preferring to let companies and junior officers find their own solutions; while still others use unorthodox methods to regain control over fire ground situations that sometimes get out of hand.

There was a tremendous warehouse fire and the particular truck company on the fire was having one of those nights where nothing went their way. The whole thing was screwed when the chief arrived on the scene. He watched all of this for

> a little while and finally ordered everybody out of the building and got them together in a football-like huddle. He then told them to try to work the fire in a different way because as it was they couldn't screw it up any more than they already had.[82]

This same chief during another botched-up attack was asked over the radio what his progress was on the fire. He responded by reporting simply that "I respectfully advise that we are making no progress on this fire whatsoever."[83]

Although more and more fire fighters and officers are enrolling in fire science and education courses, there is no established program for preparing officers outside of the experience of being an officer itself. Seminars or training sessions in which the experiences of other officers and the designation of areas that require special training or ability might not only improve the performance and satisfaction of the officers, it might also improve the morale and performance of the companies they administer. In addition to learning more about human motivation and psychology, potential officers should also be sensitized to the needs of specific minority and ethnic groups, generational differences in attitudes toward work and regimentation, as well as be exposed to types of communication and interaction that could be used to increase understanding in the fire house, on the fire ground and in the community.

Occupational Stereotypes

It is a quiet weekday afternoon and the doors of the fire house are open as four fire fighters sit out on the bench in front of the fire house and watch people passing by. The oldest man in the group is a tillerman who has almost twenty-five years on the job, and he is discussing the changes that he has seen in the neighborhood and in the fire service during his career:

> When I was appointed here this neighborhood was all white, and then it was all black, and now it's changing again and the whites are moving back in and buying up all of these older homes. It's funny. You come to work here and sit out here and you can see changes in families, kids growing up . . . like that woman and her kids across the street there. She raised all of those kids by herself and you got to hand it to her, they all seem to be doing okay. But we sit here watching and yet they don't

> really have the slightest idea what the hell we do. I've had kids from the street ask me why we never work and just sit around all day doing nothing. In fact, one year they made us take the benches away from the front of the fire house and put them around back. I guess this politican used to drive by and see guys sitting out here when he went to work and when he came home and he complained to the fire chief and so we had to take the benches out. Its weird that people don't have any idea what the hell we're doing here until something happens.[84]

The fire service has a unique role in our society. We pay a group of people to live in our neighborhood twenty-four hours a day to protect us from the threat of fire (Figure 27). In a moment's notice they may be laying their lives on the line for us; yet we really have no idea what they do, why they do it, or what they as people are really like. The fire fighters, as illustrated in the quote above, are frustrated by this lack of public understanding, while at the same time there is little that they as individuals can do to remedy the situation. The only way that an individual fire fighter relates to the community he or she serves (outside of family and friends) is by doing

Figure 27. *Two fire fighters having a conversation in front of the fire house doors.*

the best possible job on the fire ground. Unfortunately this just perpetuates a situation in which fire fighters provide, and the public expects, a service that, like garbage collection or street repair, is impersonal and taken for granted. But fire itself and the effect that it has on the lives of both fire fighters and the victims of a fire can be catastrophic. As fire departments become more sophisticated in their attempt to educate the public about fire prevention, this impersonal service will be forced to change, not only its traditional role in society but also its perception of itself as a separate entity in the community.

Historically the fire house was more closely tied to the neighborhood it served by being a more open gathering place, as well as an active participant in parades and community events. A retired chief who joined the department during these horse-and-steam years recalls:

> We used to take the horses out and whistle for them to go at 7 A.M. every morning and while they were out, somebody would clean their stalls and put down fresh hay. Often people would come and watch us drill with the horses or just come in in the afternoon and sit for a while and talk. During the war years we had a lot of civilians in the fire houses, because there was an auxiliary. We had a nice time during that period.[85]

This community feeling between fire fighters and the people in the neighborhood continued until about the mid-fifties when the white flight to the suburbs began and the demography of the city changed radically. As a retired officer remembers:

> When I first came on the department, this neighborhood over here was a lot closer knit. There was a family that lived right across the street from the fire house and they had a son on the department. And every Christmas or holiday they would send their kids over with cakes and cookies or invite us to come in after our shift was over for a drink. But in fifty-five things began to change and the neighborhoods and fire houses weren't the same. When you cut off the fire fighters from the community then the fire fighting is just a job, not a way of life. When I joined, it was a way of life.[86]

During the mid-fifties period the composition of the neighborhoods and the fire fighters began to change. Men who had

grown up in predominantly all-white neighborhoods, like Anacostia or on the hill over by Eastern High School, saw those neighborhoods change quickly, as did black fire fighters who had grown up in old Southwest before it was razed for urban renewal. At the same time that these changes were occurring, the fire fighters themselves were able to afford homes in suburban Maryland and Virginia that would be totally unavailable in the city at a comparable price. The result today is an absentee work force that is only peripherally involved in the life of the city. Demands by city government that city residency be a requirement of employment may gradually have an impact on young recruits who can afford to live in the city; but it is impractical and financially impossible for a fire fighter with a family to consider moving into the District of Columbia with house and apartment costs being what they are today. What is more important than residency is an awareness on the part of all fire fighters who work in the city that, in addition to putting the fires out, an increasing amount of their time will be spent educating the public so that fires don't occur in the first place.

Most fire fighters believe that "the public doesn't understand fire fighters. They think that we just sit around all day and play cards and sleep"; or "as long as we do our job who gives a damn what the public thinks." However it is defined, this feeling of a lack of understanding may go deeper than just a lack of awareness about fire fighting techniques and culture. It may reflect society's head-in-the-sand approach to the dangers of fire itself and a general fear of fire, which is not confronted but ignored. Like lung cancer, drunk driving, and drug abuse, fire deaths and property loss are preventable. But as one fire fighter explains:

> This isn't like a job where you close it up at four o'clock and there's nobody there. There is always somebody there. And people just don't understand that. It's just a very difficult thing for people to understand. You can tell people about it, but unless they actually ride with a company, they really can't understand it. You can sit down and tell them, well fires are tough and fun, and everybody gets wet and you break a lot of windows and kick in doors. You can tell them that stuff, but unless they get out and see what's going on, they will never really understand the job. One of the most frequent questions they ask you is why did you break that window? Do you enjoy

> breaking windows? I say that yeah, I enjoy breaking windows, but it's also very necessary to break windows. Fire in this country has one of the highest death rates—injuries from fire. Yet we still don't take fire seriously in this country. We take it for granted like the sunset or sunrise: sun's coming up tomorrow, we're going to have fires and people will die. They really don't take the thing seriously. Basically firemen, or people related to firemen, are the only ones who take fire seriously in the country. The average person just doesn't think about it until it happens to them. You can listen to the comments of people when they see a room that's been totally burned out, or while they watch a place burn. Their reactions are amazing. They can't believe what they're seeing—melted glass and all that. And like backdrafts—like what made that room explode? And even after all of the media campaigns against it, just drive down ninety-five here one night and see the number of people still tossing their cigarettes right out the window. They just don't care.[87]

It is understandable that specialists in an occupation would be on a much more familiar footing with elements that play a part in their work. Yet in fire fighting, this familiarity with fire generates a kind of thinking unique to people in the trade and comparable in some respects to the way in which fishermen think about the sea. It is a natural force that can be fascinating and docile one moment and ruthless the next. To a fire fighter, a good fire is a hot, working fire that is a challenge to put out, and the more unique the fire situation, the more of a challenge the attack becomes. At the same time, however, fire fighters read the sights, smells, and temperatures in a fire with a close scrutiny, because a thick, swirling mustard smoke or the thin filmy haze of chemical fumes may be the only warning given before a room lights off or polyvinyl chloride fumes begin to take deadly effect. These perceptions about fire become so esoteric that it is extremely difficult for the public to understand the point of view of fire fighters regarding fire. Yet the fire fighter must also maintain the view of him or herself as surrounded by an envelope of safety made up of equipment, experience, and camaraderie because these elements are the only real protection he or she has in a burning building. The fire fighting culture reinforces this type of thinking and, while it acts as a support and comfort to the individual fire fighter, it also sets him apart from the rest of society.

One of the reasons that fire fighters feel that the public doesn't really appreciate their work (except when they make a rescue) is that they expect to be judged by criteria that only they as professionals have the knowledge to weigh. To the casual observer witnessing a fire scene, by far the most interesting situation would be one in which a large building was ablaze and all kinds of heavy duty apparatus was squirting water from various ladder pipes,* wagon pipes,* and aerial towers.* But to the fire fighter the tight room and contents in a downtown flea-bag or a dangerous basement fire are by far more challenging and therefore more interesting. The media, hampered by the speed with which most house and apartment fires are put out, reinforces this stereotype by concentrating on the more spectacular fires, while the real challenges go essentially unnoticed.

Because of the role that they have traditionally played in the community and also due to their own feelings of pride and accomplishment, most fire fighters are surprised when outsiders are critical of them either on the fire ground or in the fire house. Because they respect each other for the sacrifices they have to make, they expect others to do the same; and when they don't, it usually provokes a strong reaction. The following story illustrates in a somewhat dramatic way a young fire fighter's frustration in just such a predicament.

> We were all out front one day just shooting the breeze and up the street comes this bitch and she gets up about as far as the hydrant and this guy goes "Hey baby, what's happening . . . ." She turns around and she thinks that I said it. She comes back and stands in front of me and says, "Hey punk. I'm gonna spit in your face." And I thought oh great, here we go. And I said, "Look lady I'm gonna tell you right now just so you'll know where we stand. If you spit in my face, I'm gonna deck you right here." And the next thing I know she's jumped on these two and I can't remember what she was going to do to you guys. And at one point she said "Do you think I'm ugly?" Well we all looked at each other and looked back at her and said yeah, you are kind of ugly. Well what had happened, it was kinda cruel, she had been in a fire and had been burned, you could tell that by looking at her. And she thought it was us, that our company had been there and that we had burned her up. And she

> thought it was because of us that she looked like that. Well we weren't giving her any sympathy because she was giving us a hard time. So anyway she goes on down the street and the phone rings and she talks to the captain. I don't know what she told him. But he called us in and wouldn't let us sit outside anymore for a while. And that's the kind of stuff you have to put up with in this city.[88]

This story also illuminates the mutual lack of communication and understanding between fire fighters and the general public. In order to narrow that gap, fire fighters must (as a group) make a greater effort to educate the public about their work and cultural outlook in the city. If they choose to continue to let their work on the fire ground speak for them, they should continue to expect public misunderstanding about everything from broken windows to damaged roofs. The public only knows what it sees during a fire, and if no effort is made to explain what has occurred, then they can't be expected to react any differently than they do.

On the other hand, public apathy and ignorance about the fire service isn't surprising. Even within their own families most fire fighters bring home very little about their work, preferring to keep the fire house talk and the blood and guts back on the job. In addition, part of the code of behavior in fire fighting culture lampoons self-glorification and exerts a strong influence on the individual fire fighter to be self-effacing and quiet about a particular event. This functions well in the fire house because it reinforces the cohesiveness of the group. Outside of the fire house it makes it difficult for others, sometimes even those very close to the fire fighter, to really know what his or her experiences or feelings are. The following narrative illustrates the stereotypes maintained by people about the fire service, and how, like other forms of discrimination, they can be overcome with the most minimal amount of accurate information.

> When my wife and I first got married, her mother thought she was making a real big mistake marrying a fire fighter because she thought that all fire fighters were big, dumb animals. After she got to know me and some of the guys I work with, she's come around to thinking that we're just like everyone else. I think that she's even kind of proud of me and she introduces me to everyone as her son-in-law the fire fighter . . . . I had an

> experience not too long ago that also illustrates this. I went back to my reunion and this priest who I had gotten to know pretty well came up to me and asked me what I was doing, you know. And I told him that I was a fire fighter in the District. He shook his head and said what a waste, a young man with a fine mind like yours . . . .[89]

It is not surprising that the image of the fire fighter has changed so little in the last hundred years, because this basically homogeneous group has been providing the same service in the same way all of that time. What is surprising is that even though they are proud of what they do and the unique skills that they perform, many fire fighters still feel as though they are stereotyped by outsiders as being unnecessarily destructive, brutish types who sleep all the time or play cards all day. In reality, most people respect and romanticize the actual rescue and suppression work of the fire service (aided by shows like "Emergency"), while they rarely consider the day to day life of a fire fighter at all. Most of the paranoia felt by fire fighters about what they see as a lack of public understanding is primarily based on guilt, because the fire fighters do sleep during the day and sometimes play cards. They also, however, drill, study, maintain the house and apparatus, and fix their own meals. What members of the fire service have to realize is that if they want public understanding rather than romanticized respect based on some vague idea of what a fire fighter does, then it is up to them as professionals to make more of an effort to educate the public about what they really do and why they do it. As long as they maintain this strong, silent-type facade, that message will never get across.

There is one final area of major frustration felt by fire fighters about the sacrifices they make for their work, and that is the toll that the work schedule, tension, and double-life led by a fire fighter takes on an individual's family. The following narrative by the wife of a fire fighter illustrates this frustration.

> Being the wife of a fire fighter you've got to realize that even though he may not want to—the job comes first. It took me a long time to get used to that—the damn fire department running your life, telling you when and when not to work, or when you can take a vacation. I know a lot of women who just couldn't handle it and a lot of them just gave up. It was even

worse when he was studying for his exams; sometimes I wouldn't even see him for three days because he was just staying at the fire house studying with his group. A lot of people don't know it, but fire fighting is a hard life and I'm not even thinking about the dangers he faces on the job.[90]

Fire fighters are members of an occupation that is emerging from the romance of its heroic past to take its place alongside other urban service occupations. In order to make that transition from the card playing Smokey Stover in red suspenders to the trained professional involved in education, as well as fire suppression, it will be necessary to open the doors of the fire house and make a concentrated effort to educate the people in a given district about who fire fighters are and what they really do. If this effort isn't made then fire fighters have no right to expect public understanding of the self-sacrifice and time away from family that is a part of the job. Like the horse drawn steamer, the wet sponge, and the joker system, the days of the impersonal, isolated fire department vis à vis the community are rapidly disappearing.

Stories of the Workplace

Everyday Occurrences

It is a cold winter night and the streets outside the fire house are deserted as the wind cuts between the empty office buildings and swirls papers in the vacant lots. Inside the fire house a group of fire fighters is sitting around a table in the sitting room drinking coffee and only half-watching a situation comedy on television. The conversation flows as follows:

1ST FF: Where are you going?
ROOKIE: I guess up to Truck 20.
1ST FF: Who's up there on this shift?
ROOKIE: Don't know any of the guys up there.
OFFICER: When I first came on the job there was a guy up there who used to always get in trouble about the meals. He wouldn't get in on the meals, but would raid the refrigerator and eat the leftovers from what they had had for dinner. And as far as the guys there were concerned, hey, you're either in

or you're out. But this same guy would take the leftovers from the night before and take them home.

2ND FF: Geez, I've never heard anything like that before. You mean those guys used to stand for that? They should have told him to forget it . . . .

OFFICER: Well they did. One night they cooked and ate the meal and put the leftovers in the refrigerator. About ten o'clock, when this guy usually ate the leftovers, they went in and asked if anybody wanted a snack and since nobody did, they threw the rest in the trash.

2ND FF: There used to be another guy over there who was the cheapest s.o.b. in the department. He not only never got in meals, he didn't spend a nickel on anything. He's probably one of the richest fire fighters around, but that guy was cheap.

3RD FF: Billy, you gotta tiller tomorrow night, okay?

4TH FF: Alright, no sweat.

3RD FF: Think you can handle that alright?

OFFICER: I don't know, he's kind of shaky.

2ND FF: Did you hear about that new sergeant over there across the river? Apparently he decided he was going to clean up their act, really change things over there.

2ND OFFICER: What do you mean, "change it?" If its on this shift, he's got one of the best companies in the damn department over there. Most of those guys have been over there forever—that's one of the most experienced crews around.

2ND FF: I was detailed over there one night and we had this fire in one of the row houses over there in Southeast somewhere, and I took a hook upstairs and here was this guy laying under the bed, just burnt to shit. We carted him downstairs and by the time I got him down there, there must have been ten guys holding onto him. It's a wonder he didn't die from lack of oxygen from all the guys around him.[91]

Storytelling in the fire department is as much a part of the fire fighting experience as the color of the apparatus and the brass work. In many cases storytelling sessions like the one quoted above are serial accounts in which a group of fire fighters will begin with one topic that will suggest another and another with each person giving a personal example (Figure 28). To the rookie fire fighter this

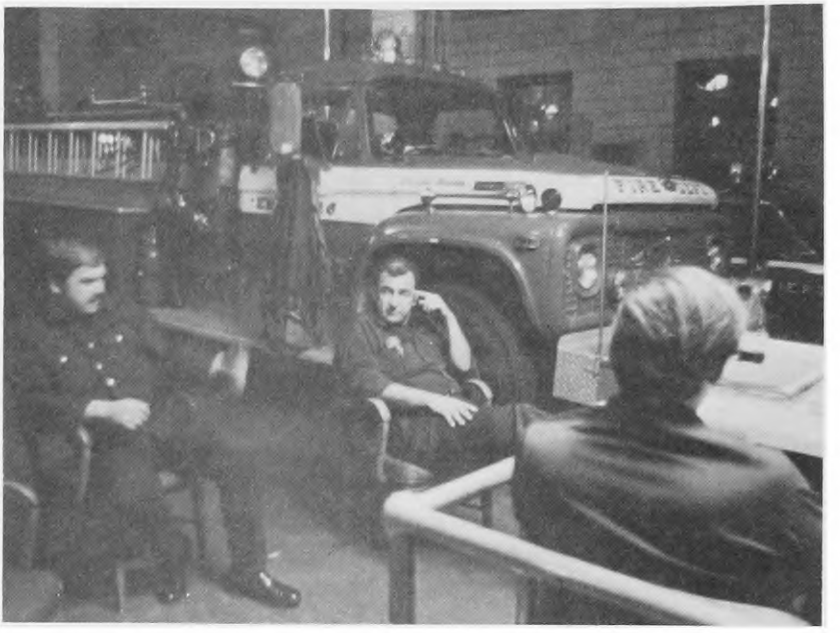

Figure 28. *Telling stories at the watch desk.*

not only provides him with information about the people and events of fire fighting, it also communicates attitudes and feelings that shape the young fire fighter's view of the occupation. In the above case; the proper etiquette toward meals—you are either in or you are out.

As one fire fighter phrased it, "You learn a lot by listening to the stories that the guys tell in the fire house. The more you hear about things, the more that that stuff flashes in your mind when you have similar experiences on the fire ground—particularly things about timing like when or when not to do something."[92] A person recalls and tells a story because it in some way captures an element of experience that is important to that individual. Whether it is a flat tire on the way to work, a good working fire, or an unusual situation like an explosion, fire fighters retain and pass on a tremendous amount of their information in story form. For the most part these stories fall into three general categories: the first includes events and concerns, such as days off, individual conflicts between people, second job concerns, "bullshitting," and the normal give and take that is woven into conversation and daily interaction. The

second category includes stories that reflect central or primary concerns of the group like issues about race and sex (previously discussed) or the events that are most significant like accidents and recurrent injuries, food and eating, specific fires or work techniques, changes in running routes, particular buildings or the important issues of the day like promotions, retirement benefits, or a controversial order. The third category includes stories that deal with the unusual, like serious accidents or fatalities, strange or bizarre things that occur on the fire ground and close calls that could have had dire consequences. Accident and accident accounts, since they are such an important part of the protection mechanism passed by word of mouth from one fire fighter to the next, are dealt with separatively in the following section.

In the narrative session provided above, the daily concerns in a fire house are discussed as each person adds his or her personal experience to the collective pool of knowledge. This is primarily a group dialogue in which a mood or topic is set and the individual provides an account that carries the mood and discussion while it also adds a personal comment. On this level occupational dialogue helps define the perimeter of occupational knowledge.[93] It is as if each aspect of the fire fighting experience from work on the fire ground to fire house, fire department and community, and family life extends from the central tasks of the job—putting out fires and protecting human life—to the daily dialogue or the rare occurrence of something unusual, like a rescue. In the example cited above, the rookie is being transferred after his probationary year, which is a normal occurrence. But the members of the group do have some information about at least two of the people who used to work in his new house, and that is what they offer as information. The intelligent rookie would take this information with a grain of salt, because that particular fire house might be very different than the way in which it is depicted in the stories. These narratives depict the boundary of knowledge about a particular subject as it is collectively known by the group, and they are interpreted by the cautious listener based on who is telling the tale, how it is told, and how it is received. Bull sessions, use of nicknames, and joking relationships parallel these narrative sessions by defining boundaries and rules concerning who is being listened to or joked with and who isn't. As any rookie who has tried to joke with an experienced fire fighter in too familiar a tone or tried to give a detailed account of what a great

job he did on the fire ground can attest—the story must be appropriate in length, content, style, and wit, as well as be told at the proper time to the right people.

There is a humorous side to this level of storytelling and it is often revealed to outsiders when fire fighters are leaving the scene of a fire or are taking up* after the fire is over. As one veteran tells it:

> Well, there was this officer who was really great to be with on a fire because he was always cracking jokes. And anyway, they were on this fire in a big apartment building, and there was a lot of smoke and everything. But these guys had all gotten on the elevator and gone up. And when they found out it wasn't up there they came back down to go to the basement. Well, here the place is filling up with smoke and the elevator door opens and here's this little old lady trying to get on the elevator and all these goddam fire fighters trying to get off. She asks if its O.K. to go back to her room and this officer says, "It's O.K. with me lady, but it's so bad up there we're leavin."[94]

To a fire fighter this story has a couple of levels that reflect their unique perspective. Usually in a high-rise or apartment building, the severity of the fire can be determined by the number and disposition of the people leaving it. If there are a number of people running out of the building shouting and screaming, it usually means a working fire. To have the fire fighters themselves say that they are leaving means that it must be really bad; but the officer undercuts this by stating sarcastically that as far as he's concerned she can go back to her room. This particular incident also illustrates the inability or reluctance of fire fighters to deal seriously with outsiders when there is a fire situation. The fire fighting culture is a tight, closed group and the phrase "It's so bad in there we're leaving," has come to reflect, if not an arrogant then an amused, intolerance toward the public's gullibility and misunderstanding of their work.

The central or primary narratives reflect the recurrent concerns of the occupation. Since much of this information deals with the techniques of fire fighting, it is often passed on in the form of stories with object lessons about a particular recurrent problem, as in the following narrative that took place one morning in the officers room.

1ST FF: I learned a lot just by listening, you know to those old war stories. Because they would say that we had this or did that, and I'd say but how the hell did you get to the fire? And they'd say well we took this in and took the pipe and put it in this way. And just like one of the things that I learned was to search a room with a straight stream* about three feet off the floor to look for a window; to bust the window first and then open the wide fog,* because if you open that wide fog you're going to get your ass burnt right there at the door; no two ways about it.

2ND FF: But you also got to be careful once you do get in there to not get too close to the window, because when the truck company comes in there you can get yourself cut up real bad. You're crawling around in there maybe above a window and boom—there's glass all over the place.

1ST FF: I broke a window out one time and I had a lawsuit going. I didn't know but we were in there and the chief said open this place up—and crash, out went the glass and there was a guy standing right underneath it and it got his arm. It was just hanging there by a thread. But he had no business being right where he was anyway—it was supposed to be a blocked off area.

2ND FF: That door we had tonight was a piece of cake. Just slipped the bar in there and it came right out. Some of those dead locks can be a bitch.

1ST FF: That's another thing that is passed on. Like in these garden type apartments they have these metal fire doors that with the frame and everything are just build right into the wall. Well if there's something in there and you got to get in instead of tearing out the door—because sometimes it's hard to tear out the door—you just take the bar and smack the corner brick right above where the door knob is and punch it through the wall and then reach around and unlock the door.[95]

These more polished narratives have their origins in the bull sessions that follow each fire. After the company returns to the house, these narrative exchanges provide everyone with an opportunity to compare notes and declare his contribution to the effort. Unusual, humorous, or particularly instructive incidents would then be retained by an individual, based on the group's reaction to

the story and its communication of fresh information. As seen below a chief's aide and fire fighters of the engine and truck companies discuss a fire they have just fought together.

AIDE: When the truck started pulling the ceilings, everywhere they pulled the ceiling fire was coming out. So I told him that they probably would need another truck. He was outside and I was inside. And while we were discussing it, the second floor started to mushroom in and out and in and out, and then it blew while we were talking. And then he asked for a task force.* And then when the deputy pulled up he asked for a task force.

LAYOUT MAN: Yeah, because when we pulled up, we just pulled up and laid out and they were ordering everybody out of the building.

AIDE: Yeah, it was really rocking and they were trying to get everybody out.

LAYOUT MAN: Yeah, when we pulled up you could see that it had gotten to the second story ceiling and it was just getting ready to go.

AIDE: Yeah, it went down real quick because it was just an old frame building and it got in between the walls and attic everywhere. It was really well involved; it just wasn't showing. When we first got there it was just showing in that one room. And 6 Engine hit it and it went right down and we were all inside and we thought that was it. But when they started pulling the ceiling you could see that there was a lot more fire in it and they started opening it up good, it really took off.

BAR MAN: That rear was really bad—nothing but cyclone fences and dogs to climb over to get back there and then there was hardly enough room to get the ladders up because of the damn brush.

AIDE: Yeah and then once you guys got up there it was damn slippery. I don't think anybody realized how cold it was, just cold enough to make it slick.

LAYOUT MAN: I saw this one officer go over to the deputy to see what he wanted him to do. So he walked over to the deputy and fell right on his ass. The only thing that would have made it better would have been if he'd reached out and grabbed that white coat on his way down.[96]

The final story, that of the falling officer has been retained in the group as a humorous account at the expense of the officer. But in addition, the difficult attack on the rear portion of the building by the truck company has also been retained due to the unique and interesting way in which the company met the challenge.

> We were having a pretty quiet night until this call came in around twelve for a task force. We were second-due and we took the rear, and the first yard that we tried when we arrived had an eight foot cyclone fence; so we drove down the street to a vacant lot to where one of the row houses had been cleared away. The captain and the hook man took the thirty foot and the axe and bar men went in to see what they could do. The approach to the rear of the place was cluttered with snarling dogs, garbage and a six foot cyclone fence surrounded by old tires that somebody had dumped out there. We finally stumbled onto the rear and raised the ladders to the back of the building. The axe man went up and tested the roof and just as he was about to climb up onto it, the order came for everybody to clear out and the side of the building lit off beneath the false brick siding. One of the engine companies hit it and we moved back into position.[97]

These central narratives describe the center of occupational concerns, while they also describe the specific techniques used to deal with recurrent situations. Humourous events like half-asleep drivers taking wrong turns or attempts to rescue overweight people also are retained for their entertainment, as well as their instructional value.

> CHIEF: I followed this line in on this one fire and this woman was coming out and there wasn't anything in the world that was going to keep her in there. She was a big woman and as she came out she just rolled right over the top of me like a tank. She flattened me and just kept right on going.
>
> TRUCK DRIVER: We had one over here on the 1400 block of 10th. We rolled up and there was an old woman in the second story of a two story row, and Willy put the ladder up and went up to get her and she was a huge woman. Anyway he got her out on the ladder and then she started to slip and I grabbed her by the ankles and started to guide her down. Well she kept slipping and pretty soon zip, she knocked my

> hat off and we both ended up on the ground. And we were talking about her when things started to cool down a little and her husband said you should have seen her when she was a young girl—she was even bigger then. I said I didn't see how that was physically possible.[98]

The final general category of narrative deals with the unusual: stories about manhole covers being heated cherry red by exploding gas and shooting up in the air, rescue stories that demanded a special effort, and the hundreds of other incredible emergency and non-emergency situations experienced by fire fighters.

Rescue stories are usually told about someone, rarely by the fire fighter himself. Some people feel strange about receiving awards for doing their job, particularly when (as many fire fighters consider it) they just happened to be in the "right place at the right time." The following is a typical account.

> I've had several injuries . . . I don't even remember them; it seems like every time there is a fire, it injures a fireman. But I've been in the hospital two or three times. And then December the eighth was a big moment, 1969 at 969 P St. We had a second alarm up there and we had a father—the father threw about four kids out of the window and then jumped out himself. The place was well off from top to bottom. He got down there . . . after he got them all up he started screaming about a baby that they had left in there. So we were in the back yard. The truck company and I were back there and the chief was up front. It turned out that they had burned up two people up in the front. So we found an old ladder in the back. It wasn't one of our ladders though; it was an old painter's ladder. So we put it up to the third floor and it wouldn't quite reach. And I went up there and went in the third floor—searched around and found this kid. Brought the kid out and handed him to the lieutenant who was in charge of the truck and then got out myself. And the lieutenant wrote me up for that one and I ended up gettin the gold medal. So as I say, that was a big moment on that one. I was just the one that happened to get to the ladder first, that's all.[99]

Herosim is a word rarely if ever used in a fire fighting story told in the fire house. More often the event is described as a situation in which an individual "beat his brains out on the fire," or "did a

helluva job," that is, he went beyond the normal performance expected of an individual. Each fire fighter knows his limits and fears. Therefore, it is the personal triumphs over the fear of crawling down a tight, hot hallway to locate a victim or just find and hit a fire that are recalled as individual narratives. And sometimes circumstances make it impossible for a fire fighter to claim credit for a situation in which he did what he thought was something beyond the call of duty.

> I saw a rescue one night when these two guys went into a house that was completely off—I mean you couldn't even stand across the street it was so hot. These guys went in and got two people out and then they got out. Later it turned out that they weren't with the first-due company, which screwed up, and didn't make it to the fire until the whole thing was over. Well they couldn't write it up because that would have screwed the first-due engine company.[100]

Many of the stories about the unusual, however, are of a lighter vein, depicting the strange or unusual situations or individuals encountered by fire fighters in the course of their work. The following narrative session took place one night as a group of fire fighters sat around the watch desk shooting the breeze.

> CHIEF: We had a fire one night and it was right after one of those ice storms, and the whole city was covered in ice. We pulled up on this place and started to take the line in and people were rolling out of this place and just as we got to the porch somebody yelled, "Look out for grandma, here she comes," and this old woman came running out of the door, hit that icy porch and sailed right through the air to cars on the street just like she'd been off a ski jump.
>
> TRUCK DRIVER: Went to this one place up on Columbia Road one night. Smokier than hell and it was a mattress, an obvious mattress fire. And there was this guy laying on the bed. And one of the guys asked him, "Did you light that bed on fire?" And he said, "No sir." Well we looked all over that room and couldn't find a thing. And finally the officer says "bullshit," and he grabbed that mattress and flipped it and dumped the guy on the floor. And sure enough it was smoldering like hell. But the best I ever heard, were you down there that night we had the box down there at the annex?

That flop house on 9th Street. And it used to piss me off that you used to bust your ass going in there and your nose is running and your gagging and the goddam drunks are standing in there and it doesn't seem to bother them that much. And they had this mattress and this guy is sitting on the end of the bed. And they asked him if he had been smoking in bed and he said, "No sir." Then they asked if he had used matches or a lighter in the bed, and again he said, "No sir." So they said well what the hell happened. And he said, "Hell I don't know. I was just sittin here and the goddamned thing exploded." I thought I've heard em all now—the goddam thing exploded.

CHIEF: We had a fire up here on Seventh Street, I think it was. Burned up a room and this guy died sitting in this overstuffed chair. So we were in there overhauling and homicide was in there and a guy came in and the officer said, "Who are you?" And the guy said, "This is my room." So he said, "Good, you can tell us who this guy is." He said, "I don't know who he is." He said, "What do you mean you don't know, you just said it's your room didn't you?" He said, "Well he lives there . . . ." "What do you mean he lives there?" And this guy says "He lives there—in that chair. He pays me twenty-five cents a night to live in that chair." And the cop says, "Well what's his name?" And the guy says, "I don't know, I never asked."[101]

To the outsider these "humorous" stories about unusual fire situations might seem macabre because they involve injury and death. Although fire fighters never get used to this part of their job, they do learn to put it in perspective, and part of that process is being able to talk and joke about situations that otherwise might evoke feelings of depression or grief. Fire fighters aren't callous; they are, like doctors, burn technicians or morticians, conditioned to their work. Without stories like these they would lose their necessary objectivity.

As a final illustration of the unusual event narrative, the following story reveals a great deal about those people who admire fire fighters and hang around the fire houses, as much as it does about the fire fighters themselves.

We had a run one time on Christmas Eve that I'll never forget. This man lived in a large house down off the end of King and

South Capitol Street. He was a retired policeman who had been retired for some time. He was a nice old man who used to hang around the fire house a lot—and he got along with everybody pretty well. So on December 24 we get a fire at this address on King Avenue and we go racing down there, and he's out on the front lawn and he's flagging us down as we roll up. He's all excited cause his house is on fire. So we run a line up there and he says, "Its a chair that caught on fire and I got it back of the house," and it was a jalousy porch and the chair was still smoldering and smoking. So we pulled the chair out on the lawn and we put it out and then took a knife and cut out the burned place on the chair. And we told him not to . . . . he had a beautiful home, beautiful home but we told him not to put it back in the house because it may continue to smolder and if he left it out back for the rest of the day then it should be alright. So he asked us, "Why don't you-all come on in for a minute," and like that. And we told him that we had to get on back to the firehouse and all. And he said, "Well come on in just for one second." So we all walked in and he had a dining room table that was all set with food. He had ham, cheese, turkey, salami. I mean you name it, he had it. He had a punchbowl at the end of the table, sodas on ice, bottles of whiskey (which of course, we're not allowed to drink on the job), and he told us all a Merry Christmas. The fact being that the man was so lonesome that he set that chair on fire just to get us there. And being a policeman, retired, he knew that it was illegal to call the fire department without a fire. So he took the oldest chair he could find and he set fire to it so that he knew we would have to come to his house. So the captain we had at the time, he was pretty strict, but he knew what was happening and he put two and two together. I mean the man had Christmas music playing, and, man, I mean it was a real tear jerker. So anyway, we ended up sitting around there for the rest of the afternoon. We just stayed in service and sat there with the guy. That was something, you know, I think about that on Christmas Eve.[102]

As in any field, there are individuals who have the ability to capture in narrative form the essence of an experience. It is rare, however, to find someone who can both perform and describe a performance in a way that provides the listener with a proper feeling of participation and understanding of what occurred. The

following account accomplishes this function very well, and it is all the more remarkable due to the incredibly demanding situation which the narrator experienced.

> It was night work and I was detailed to another house and we got a street alarm. And this house doesn't do that much running, so being as it was a street alarm nobody put on a mask or anything. I always did just for the hell of it in case we caught something. So as it turned out as we were going over the road I heard that they had a fire and they were filling out the box.* We pulled up in front of this house and there was a man lying out on the porch who was clearly burned, an older man. And there was fire blowin out of the front bottom of the house. Nice neighborhood, nice houses. This was a two story row—townhouse. It was the library that was off and I think it originated in the basement, but it had gotten in the library; and as you went in, the doorway led directly to the stairs and up the stairs the library was entered through a big archway—it wasn't a door, but a big archway—and the fire was blowing out that archway and the fire had burned through the front door. The grandfather was the one that was burned, he had been watching a seven month old infant who was upstairs and that was how he had gotten burned when he tried to get upstairs. Well when we got there the old man was on the porch and the door was ajar and it was on fire. Well these guys . . . and this is something that really gripes me—some of these guys have to spend their time at a station that doesn't run, and a lot of times it's not of their own volition, but somebody has to do it. And it's tough to do this job if you don't have the experience, because you can read all of the books you want, but if you don't have the experience then forget it. Well for some reason we couldn't get water. I was on the truck company on the side* and I was not the claw bar man, and I was the only one with a mask on. And everybody's yelling and screaming that there is a baby in there. My officer went to the engine, because for some reason the wagon driver couldn't get water. Turned out later that the water we did get was off of the supply line off of the pumper, and the only pressure we were getting was from the pumper for some reason. Me and this other guy—can't remember his name but he was a sergeant then, helluva a fireman and a real nice guy—anyway I was kind of undecided because I was pretty high up

on the list and was waiting to get made, and I didn't want to make any mistakes. I was supposed to be on the side, I guess I had the hook or something. But this fire was a circus and so I just said the hell with it, the main thing is to get the baby out and I knew that that wasn't my job, but I'd take the blame for it. So the sergeant from the engine company and I start to take this line in and we didn't have much pressure. I told him that if he could knock it down a little, maybe I could get the baby out. Well something happened as we were jockeying around up there and he dropped the pipe and it blew back a little and he got burned on his hands and face and I got burned on my neck a little. So I finally made the stairway and you couldn't see a damn thing. It was hot as hell—it was really hot as hell. And there were a hell of a lot of things going through my mind. One of the things going through my mind was the Scott mask [Scott-Air Pak*]—it's supposed to be around 1950 when its full and this one had only about 1600, so I didn't have as much air as I usually did. So I figured that I better crawl up to the front part right over the fire because that will be the hottest and if anybody's there, they will be the ones most in trouble. So I crawl along and I feel something on the floor—hair, it's a dog. And that was a bedroom. And I crawled into the next room and I could feel the smoothness of the floor and I could tell it was a ceramic tile. It was hot, but I could tell that was the bathroom. And there I found a cat. I didn't know what these things were till later on, but as far as I was concerned it was an animal. So I crawled back down the hall into another room that turned out to be the studio. I didn't know any of this at the time, but I figured it all out later when I saw it. Now I'm spending a considerable amount of time and yet nobody had come up to help with the search. I didn't know what the hell was going on. It seemed to me like it was eons of time because I knew that the bell was going to ring at any time. So I go into the last room that was at the head of the stairs—if I had started there I would have been better off—and I feel around and feel a bathinette and then I felt a humidifier and things were really going click click click through my mind. I thought about my son who had had asthma and he needed a humidifier, so this must be the nursery or whatever that the baby is in. I felt the bars on the crib, reached in and took the baby out. Then I took my mask off and

started giving the baby mouth to mouth. I ran down the stairs and just as I got down the stairs the squad was coming up. Again not to down anybody, but it was a helluva long time for anybody to get up there and then have the squad that had to come from clear across town be the first ones in there. So I went out with the baby on the front lawn and somebody slipped off my mask as I went out. I was giving closed chest* and mouth to mouth. Meanwhile somebody checked the eyes with a flashlight and the pupils were dilated and carotid pulse—no response. The baby was dead technically but I kept up with the mouth to mouth. They called for the ambulance and the ambulance got there, but they couldn't get into the block, so we had to carry the baby down to the end of the block. So the sergeant said to go ahead since I had the rhythm to go ahead and keep it up and stay with the baby to the hospital. So I got in the ambulance and they called Georgetown on our way and told them what we had and they supposedly were going to have a code blue team waiting, which they didn't. But on the way I'm still trying to give this kid mouth to mouth and we got there and put the kid on a stretcher and the nurse asked me to continue until the team got there. And so I kept it up but I was exhausted. You wouldn't believe how tired I was with all of the excitement and trying to give mouth to mouth; even though it was a baby, it was tough. So I sat down in a chair and they started working on my ears and stuff. And I thought to myself—I had a child at the time just a little bit older than that one—I thought geez what a helluva way for a kid to go. And . . . the man upstairs . . . just saw fit to put life back into that baby . . . and it started crying. It was really something. I never saw anything like it. So then I saw that they had brought in the grandfather and he was lying on a stretcher covered with sterile sheets. He was burned really bad—it was terrible, terrible. So I went over and told him that the baby was alright, it was going to make it. And he said good. He died the next day. The baby—they didn't know if it had been without oxygen long enough to cause brain damage—but I guess I just happened in there during that gray area and as it turned out the esophagus was burned. But the parents were there and of course they were concerned and everything, but that's the way that one worked out.[103]

In its tone, style, and pace, this story reveals a great deal about the way in which a fire fighter perceives a fire situation, particularly his thoughts and feelings as he gradually moves through the house trying to locate the bedroom and the infant. The dangers faced in this rescue are implicit in the story and even though almost everything went wrong that could, the lack of water, lack of quick relief coming up to aid in the search, and the inability of the ambulance to arrive close to the scene, the narrator manages to keep his criticism to a minimum. Perhaps the most revealing aspect of this story is the emotional level that peaks when the baby cries. It is this fine balance between emotional involvement with the action and spare but informative description about the events of the fire that make this a revealing and significant narrative.

The stories told by fire fighters provide a revealing insight into the way in which they perceive the world through a unique cultural perspective. From discussions of fire house personalities, to detailed descriptions about techniques used on a particular fire and finally rescue stories and comments on the unusual, fire fighters reveal a world unlike any other. It is a world with strict boundaries that define who is accepted, what are the correct techniques, and what is important. These stories define these boundaries by retaining past events that are periodically relived to inform or entertain the present and prepare for the future.

Exceptional Events

In the late afternoon on a gray weekday in February, the engine and truck companies respond on a task force to a downtown high rise office building (Figure 29). When they pull up, heavy yellow smoke is billowing out of the windows on the ninth floor. The units begin to run up the stairs carrying stand-pipe bags, masks, fans, axes, bars, and hooks. By the time the seat of the fire is finally located (in a corner storage room off of the stage in a large old auditorium), the truck company begins to open up by taking out the windows, and the engine company begins to move in on the smoldering fire and wet it down. The room is filled with fire fighters squinting through the dissipating smoke and steam, when suddenly a sickening thump is heard. Immediately people descend on the spot where the noise was heard, and lying beneath the rubble of a large chunk of ceiling tile are two injured fire fighters. At first no

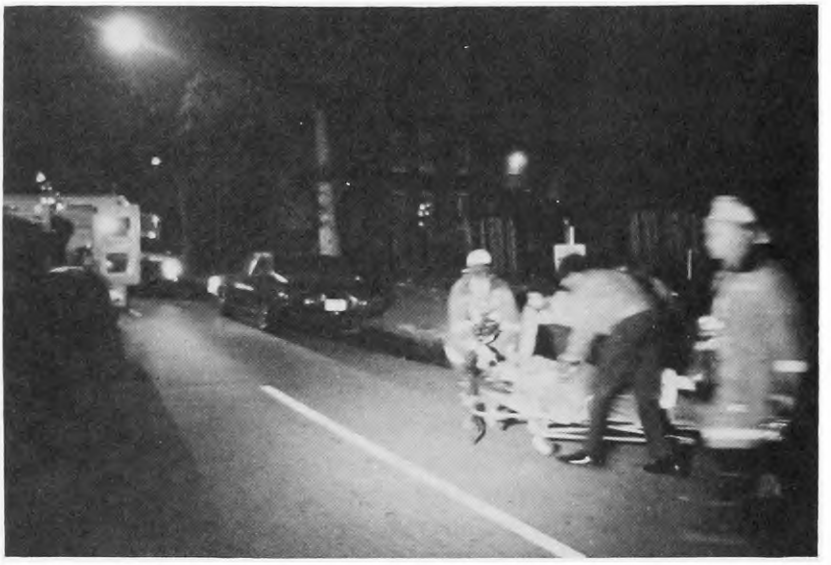

Figure 29. *A victim being rushed to the ambulance.*

one says a word. Four men grab the injured fire fighters and take them out of the room and finally downstairs to the ambulance. Immediately after the accident, the conversation went like this.

1ST FF: Where was the damn fire anyway?
2ND FF: Right back there. Boy it's a good thing you guys opened up right away.
1ST FF: I hope those guys are alright.
3RD FF: What the hell happened?
1ST FF: The goddam ceiling came down on them—knocked them both a little dingy, but not real bad, I don't think.[104]

Later—

1ST FF: Has anybody heard about those guys?
2ND FF: They admitted A., so something's happening.
1ST FF: That doesn't sound good.
3RD FF: I think he was just knocked out—I don't think he has a concussion or anything like that.
1ST FF: Yeah, but A. only had that much neck to start with.
2ND FF: Shit. I was right behind him on the line—I coulda got the P.O.D.*
1ST FF: It just must have been his day to get hit in the head.[105]

A couple of weeks later—

FF: That damn A. says he's coming back. What has it been about two weeks or so? He says his neck and back are still stiff—hell I wouldn't come back until I was one-hundred percent.[106]

When A. returns to the fire house—

A: I was just telling these guys that I was on the hose line trying to lighten up a little for them and I just turned around and wham—I don't remember anything until the hospital. When I woke up I didn't feel too bad, but the next day I felt like shit. My neck, and back and legs were all screwed up—felt like the whole damn ceiling came down on me.[107]

Accidents and injuries in fire fighting are a daily occurrence, much like they are in the heavy construction trades and in professional sports, to name just two other fields. Yet there are certain things that a fire fighter can do to protect himself by remembering the basics, like always wearing a mask, keeping low and buttoned up with all of your gear on, and learning when to exert yourself and when to hang back. But sometimes things just happen that no one can anticipate. One of the main ways in which fire fighters try to protect themselves, however, is by passing on information about specific accidents in the form of stories. Just as in other narratives, these stories range from the everyday accounts of cuts, bruises, and strained muscles to recurrent fire fighting injuries, like bad backs or injuries from falls, to stories about fatalities or very serious mishaps. This information usually is passed on in the following manner.

1ST FF: Whatever happened to that guy who got hurt up here on the roof when it was so snowy that time?

2ND FF: You mean that guy who tried to grab the downspout?

3RD FF: No, what happened was that he was trying to pull a Tarzan and he jumped across and grabbed the downspout and he fell in the backyard. We had a closet and a cockloft off and ....

2ND FF: He tried to go down the downspout or something like that ....

3RD FF: But anyway he ended up in the backyard.

1ST FF: As old as these buildings are, I'd never hang on to a damn downspout.

3RD FF: Shit, I've seen them fall just by hitting them with a line.

4TH FF: Color me trapped. I'm gone. I don't even like these damn fire escapes. Half the time they're only held up with coat hangers or something—the damn bolts or mortar rotted out long ago.

2ND FF: Did that guy ever come back who got banged up on that fire—Jones or whatever . . .?

3RD FF: He got two-thirds,* I know that. And that ain't bad for life.

2ND FF: Hell no. With two-thirds and the old lady working you could be set for life if you weren't too screwed up. Maybe go back to school.

4TH FF: I know this one guy who really got screwed up. He got his leg cut off down to the bare bone. A triangular piece of glass out of one of those old styled sky-lights. I think that he just went to one, he had been on one and just gone to two [platoon], I guess that was it. But anyway this glass cut everything in his leg—all of the tendons and when they sewed him up they didn't take care of the tendons and so when they took off the cast his foot slapped up against his leg. So they cut him open again and spliced all the tendons into his big toe and so it now has this big thing to it, and he puts all of his weight on his heel. But he has spent three and a half years on sick leave. P.O.D. And then they retired him on disability.[108]

The most detailed accounts of accidents are the stories that result from close calls—situations in which something almost happened but was averted at the last minute. These stories provide more specific information because they present central concerns found in serious fire situations, such as ways to escape when trapped in a room, trying to locate a fellow fire fighter, and even things like keeping your mouth directly behind the pipe in order to get the air coming through the hose with the water. The following story provides an illustrative example.

I was still in the squad when this happened; but we got a run for a fraternity house at G.W., and man—I came close to buying

the farm on this one. We pulled up and the nails were burning in this place—I mean it was well off.* We went in the front door and the officer told the chief we were going to need help because we thought there were a lot of people in there. We went up the second and then the third floor, and the guy I was with wanted to check the fire escape and I went up the stairwell. Well I got in this room and got turned around, and I couldn't find my way out; and man it was getting some kinda hot in there. So I thought, well this is it. I thought of my family and my kids and I really wondered what the hell I was doing there. But I figured I had to try at least once more, so I took five good sucks of pure oxygen out of the McCaa and somehow made it to the top of the stairs where the other animals from the squad were coming up to get me.[109]

The use of the McCaa mask (unique to squads and now being phased out), the need to try just once more, plus the implicit faith in aid from other fire fighters are all reflected in this account. If other narratives like those about characters, officers, and individual fire houses define the exterior cultural boundaries of fire fighting culture, then accident stories aid each individual fire fighter by openly presenting the interior emotional and psychological boundaries of fear in what is one of the most fundamentally frightening human situations—to be trapped in a burning building.

The final area of accident accounts is that which deals with serious injury and death. Without being morbid, it is important to illustrate with just two examples, stories that are told by fire fighters amongst themselves about these events. The first is by an experienced fire fighter about one of his good friends.

I had a friend of mine some years back who was injured quite badly. We were fighting a fire over here in Northeast, and he was laying out. And it was an early, pre-dawn fire, and there was so much smoke, they didn't know which house was burning. And after he hooked up the pumper he came in and the fire was in the basement. And as the story goes, at least he told me, he asked where is it, and they told him it was downstairs. He assumed position on the line in front of the line man. He was going to advance it down the steps. Well in the heat and smoke and the confusion, the officer didn't know that there were two men in front of him—he thought there was one. So when they

said abandon the building, everybody out, he had fallen down the steps when the fire flashed. So he had fallen in the fire. He had third degree burns that went up his night pants. And at the time we had different running coats. And he had lost an ear, and the only place he wasn't burned was where the face piece was. And he went from about two-hundred pounds down to about one-hundred forty-seven pounds. He's back up to where he was now. They retired him; and he and maybe one other fire fighter I can remember were the only two firemen to get one-hundred percent disability. And he had to wear special underwear because of so many skin grafts and the gloves just melted on his hands. He said, you guys be careful, he was telling me the story. He said I started up the steps trying to get out and I just fell down the steps into a corner. The whole time fire rolling right over him—he was in it. And he said he just knew he was going to die. They finally came in and got him and pulled him out. What had happened is the officer took a count when they got outside and discovered that there was a man missing, actually two men missing, from different companies, and they went in and got him out. And we're talking about something that happened in twenty or thirty seconds. Now it might have seemed like an eternity to him—but he wasn't in there that long. And the other man—they proved that he never put his face piece on because the inside of it was covered in soot. They found him draped over a chair in the window, he was in a position that looked like he was going to put a fan in the window. And they took him out and he suffered from second degree burns mostly from steam because of when they knocked the fire down. He said that mentally it did get to him, particularly the pain from the scrubdowns in the burn unit of the hospital. And he still has a fear of basements. Right after he was burned we had a terrible fire up on Georgia Avenue and Rittenhouse. It was the day after Christmas and the fire broke out around noon and there were still people in the store. And as we were going in we could hear debris and aerosal cans popping and the lights were flickering off. Funny thing was I thought about this guy who had been burned—you could feel the heat right through your boots. You'd be thinking all kinds of things—your mind is your own worst enemy, you know. The further you get in there, the hotter it gets and everything in your body is

telling you to get up and run out of there. Each man going in there—you're human and its not a normal condition. But I was thinking about this guy the whole time and what happened was the store went to a third alarm. And it broke out about 12:15 in the afternoon and I got relieved on the fire ground around six and went home and watched myself on the news.[110]

If nothing else, this narrative illustrates the internal thoughts of a fire fighter as he battles within himself the normal human reaction to flee from fire. Each inch crawled down a superheated hallway pushes a fire fighter farther and farther away from our reality toward a situation where instinct must give way to conditioning. The only thing that allows a person to do that more than once is knowing that others who you trust will share your fear and still do what has to be done. And a large part of that sharing is the passing on of information about others who have taken that internal exploration to its extreme.

Every year hundreds of fire fighters die in the line of duty. Fire fighting is one of the most hazardous occupations in the country. The death and disability statistics are staggering. Occasionally these deaths are the result of needless oversights. The last fire fighter to die in the line of duty in the District of Columbia was quite possibly such a victim.

1ST FF: Three of us lost a very good friend a few years ago in a vacant building uptown. So I think it's quite obvious how we feel. It was a needless death, young T.T., I used to work with him. In fact he was just nine months ahead of me in probation and the fact that he died in a fire like that was, I don't know .... You know the guys here will go the extra mile when somebody's in there, but to have a brother killed in an abandoned building I think is a tremendous waste of life.

2ND FF: I blame his death on the city for not insuring that that building was torn down. It was a four story warehouse and it had been vacant for about twelve years. It had condemned signs hanging on it and the owner had been ordered to tear the building down, and nothing had been done about it for a period of eight or nine years. So when that building caught fire and caved in on that fire fighter and killed him, it uh, that was a direct result of inaction of the city for not insuring the safety of the fire fighters in that respect.

1ST FF: We almost lost a whole company in that fire. We had fellows that the bricks actually tore their running coats trying to get away from the falling bricks. So, so we were very fortunate, we just got away with one fatality rather than a whole company.[111]

Fire fighting can be an incredibly emotional experience, particularly the sharing of a well-timed interior attack or making a rescue by working together in a tough situation. But it can also be a miserable, thankless job that forces you to crawl down filthy, rat infested basements choked with heat and smoke or climb a hundred foot ladder covered with ice to try and set foot on a spongy roof. A job with hazards like that takes its toll in human life and suffering. In addition to having a sharp mind, a strong back, and a good company, a fire fighter must also rely heavily on the experiences of those who have been there before to provide him or her with the confidence and ability to do the work.

The Centrality of Work Techniques

In occupational culture the exchange of inside knowledge is based on the techniques required to achieve the desired work goals of the group. These goals and techniques range from the simplest to the most complex: from the correct application of pressure on a tool handle or the proper advancing of a hose line up a fire escape or tight stairwell, to the successful rescue from a fully involved basement or from the top of an extended hundred foot aerial ladder. By observing a rookie attempting to perform any of these skills, in his halting nervousness or ineptitude, the development of coordination between thought and action can be appreciated. This acquisition of skills is the central focus necessary to understand work culture.

Folklorists have paid considerable attention to the verbal aspects of work culture, with a particular emphasis upon story and song. However, the ironies, tones, styles, and dramatic intricacies of nonverbal behavior should also be considered, although they are difficult to document or interpret. The occupational sociologist, Jack Haas, noted in his fieldwork with ironworkers that although fear is a component of the work environment, its suppression is indispensable to the cooperation necessary between any two workers in the trade. Therefore, the slightest stumble or gesture is read with incredible closeness, even to the point of giving names to such inappropriate, fear-exhibiting *faux pas*, such as "sea-gulling," "cooning," and "cradling" the steel.[1] Thus, in ironwork, as perhaps in many work cultures, skill performance that is the foundation of work culture has an expressive dimension.

Research in work technique was conducted by British industrial psychologists during World War II. The pioneer social psychologist F.C. Bartlett, who had been working with Royal Air Force bomb squadrons to measure and improve their accuracy and efficiency, suggested in an early article that skill or technique is not a sequence of continuous activity but is rather a discontinuous

series of effector/responder chains of action. In these chains each separate reaction is based on specific and anticipated stimuli.[2] These chains eventually result in an achievement or product that is merely the final part of the process. This insight forces the investigator to view work activity not from a goal-oriented but from a process-oriented perspective. The successfully extinguished fire or rescued child are certainly important results of work technique, but to members of the culture, the meaning of these achievements lies in the complexity of their execution. The importance of any expressive behavior lies in the group's mechanisms for recognizing and evaluating these activities—its critical canon. Therefore, if the folklorist understands the basic skills needed to accomplish a particular goal and the critical canon expressed by the fire fighter through his narratives of the events, the folklorist can ascertain the fire fighter's criteria of a good performance. Yet, as Bartlett points out, most workers in any field will answer direct queries about proper technique with a description of tools and timing, not of the procedures of a particular task.[3] This suggests that there are several levels of criteria upon which a worker bases his perception of what it is he does.

In an article in *Occupational Psychology*, C.A. Mace describes three levels of skill that provide us with a way of approaching technique for ethnographic purposes:

> What we call physical skill (it is not purely physical) is the ability to produce some required effect, or group of effects through bodily movements guided by sensory and perceptual cues. There are also intellectual skills in which generalized knowledge and imagination play an important part, and social skills in which subtle emotional reactions to personality and subtle expressions are the chief determinants of the required effect.[4]

These physical, social, and intellectual skills are affected by stimuli from the physical, social, and intellectual environments, which demand responses on any one or all three levels simultaneously. As an individual develops an ability to anticipate these stimuli, his responses become less conscious, and he begins to anticipate the next or several subsequent steps. Consequently, when questioned about any one particular technique, he can more easily place that technique in a continuum than he can describe it in isolation.

Moreover, the critical comments of a group of specialists discussing a particular work activity—based on a shared evaluative network or critical canon—will yield more meaningful data about all three levels of technique than could any one individual answering the direct questions of even the most astute investigator (Figures 30, 31).

In the fire fighting culture these types of techniques may be demonstrated as follows: the actual fire fighting situation, in which the individual is coping with the physical element of fire, requires physical techniques. At the same time, however, he must rely on the collective actions and responses of his fellow fire fighters to advance the hose lines, throw the ladders, and supply the water, as well as verbally evaluate the fire after it is over, clean and maintain the equipment and the fire house, and define his role in the attack. All of these latter involvements require both social and intellectual as well as physical, techniques. And finally, as he moves up the

Figure 30. *Members of a truck company practice raising a ground ladder.*

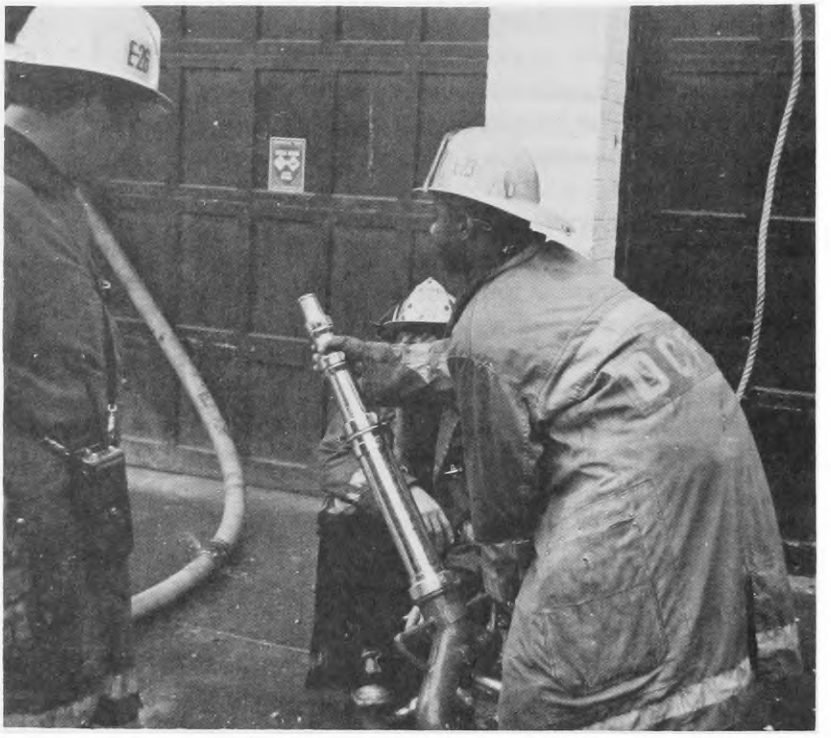

Figure 31. *Fire fighters prepare the ladder hose pipe for raising to the tip of the aerial ladder.*

administrative hierarchy, he spends more time directing the group using social techniques to achieve physical results. These directions, however, increasingly rely on individual philosophy (intellectual techniques), which are under the constant scrutiny of both the administrator, his peers, and those he directs. As a fire fighter proceeds up the command structure, it appears as though, rather than leaving one level of technique to pass on to another—e.g., the physical to the intellectual—an officer in the fire service accumulates a constellation of physical, social, and intellectual techniques that must be maintained as an ever-expanding background from which specific techniques are drawn.

The execution of these three levels of skill to meet the complex demands of the job must be continually reinforced through critical appraisals. The skilled officer must be able to make increasingly abstract decisions in order to organize physical activity that will

achieve the desired result. As Mace states concerning the skills of plumbers:

> The general knowledge that a plumber needs is that which will enable him to do what he wants to do under a variety of conditions, and will enable him to say why he does it .... Some degree of generality in his knowledge is essential to allow for flexibility and transference of skill. He needs to know the reasons for his actions so as not to perform an action when it is inappropriate. The awareness of reasons like generality, endows a skill with flexibility.[5]

It is this ability to know the reasons for his actions and articulate them, to be critical of his work and that of his peers that is the key to this concept. The critique after the fire (when fire fighters compare notes on who did or did not perform correctly) establishes a critical canon that both defines work and judges ability for those in the fire company. Although this canon has nonverbal expression in the technique performance itself, it is often expressed through personal experience narratives, which are a basic part of urban, occupational lore. By documenting these critical comments as they are expressed and responded to in a variety of work contexts, folklorists gain an insight into the worker's concept of key techniques and how the performance of those techniques are judged, i.e., how the canon is enforced. For example, in *Good Fire/Bad Night*, a young chief discusses some of the differences between his approach to fire administration on the fire ground and that of other chiefs (page 125). By itself this story does not reveal a tremendous amount about the esoteric perspective of an urban fire chief; but when viewed within the context of the general fire fighting culture, two opposing techniques for directing the fire fighting attack come into sharp relief. In the old days, before radios, the fire chief had only two ways to get orders to his men on the fire ground. He either shouted over the roar of the fire with a megaphone or he plunged into the building and directed the attack from the inside. The latter technique proved to be more efficient for most chiefs and, since fire fighters are extremely technique-conservative, this traditional method has been reinforced by the current generation of older, more conservative chiefs. The younger men fulfilling that role (as seen in the story) use the radio and their aides in directing the fire

from the outside. The statement that older chiefs are inside and younger chiefs are outside is depicted as a "weak generalization," due to the ambivalence on both sides of the age line regarding the efficacy of interior or exterior attack. This suggests further that this key fire fighting technique is in a slow process of transition and that, as the younger men become more numerous, the outside position will most likely predominate. For our purposes, it illustrates the utility of understanding technique through a careful reading of the collective critical comments of experts in the field, combined with ethnographic observation that further corroborates these changes. The current situation in the department is further complicated by fiscal cut-backs that have eliminated the aide position on the fire ground. Thus, the chief is now forced into entering the building to see what is going on, regardless of his predilections.

One difficulty in studying occupational groups from this perspective lies in the investigator's difficulty in distinguishing discussions and observations of key techniques from amongst the tremendous variety and volume of conversations, discussions, and interactions that comprise the daily give and take in an occupational setting. By locating the central, recurrent concerns expressed (such as during an after-fire critique, p. 41) it is easier to document the key techniques being evaluated. For instance, in a large office building where it is difficult to locate and extinguish a fire, the key technique is to conserve as much air for as long as is safely possible. This can be done either by taking off the mask in the stairwells where the air is probably good or by trying to breathe in shallow puffs rather than in big gulps. Since inexperienced rookies have a tendency to do the latter, the critique after the fire serves as a collective reinforcement for the rookie's proper performance. In this instance, the reinforcement is underscored by the reference to the "bimbo" who, when his bell rang, stayed in anyway. This event illustrates bad fire fighting form, improper technique, and potentially lethal behavior.

The rhythm of a fire fighting attack is also critically judged. An engine company's speed, accuracy, and judgment when it enters a building with a hose line depends upon a number of factors. These range from speed and accuracy over the road, the length of line chosen, the ease or speed with which the truck company "opens up" (allowing them to reach the fire), the severity and ventilation of

the fire, and the amount of oxygen and exertion it takes to both enter and exit the fire floor. In the critique cited above (p. 42), this particular company in its zeal to "hit," or be the first to get to, the fire had pushed its air supply to the breaking point. All of their bells were ringing, which means that they had five minutes of air left to get out. Yet as seen in the statement by the third fire fighter concerning the officer's order to leave the building, they had to be specifically told to get out. Usually a good company will time itself, and each individual will coordinate his rhythm with that of the others, so that often the officer gives few orders during the actual attack. In this instance, the officer must assert his authority because the company is quickly approaching the critical time limit and not moving fast enough. Thus, the group is evaluating the eagerness of a company to "get" the fire that caused a possible misjudgment so that the officer had to invoke his authority. The complexity of the expressive dimensions of performance and the critical canon used to evaluate that performance is illustrated in the wide number and variety of key techniques judged in this brief critique.

Mace's classification of techniques (the physical, social, and intellectual) is also well illustrated in this critique in which several individuals provide portions of the story.[6] Physical techniques range from estimating air supply to locating a fire in a smoke-filled hallway and locating fires in certain areas of the city. The social techniques used in this session as directed toward the rookie recognize him as an equal for a job well done. The main ideological technique is illustrated in the observation of the third fire fighter when he recounts the officer's decision to leave the building. This reveals the officer's ability to make a more abstract decision—to leave—by weighing the conflict of being the first company to attack the fire against the danger of a dwindling air supply. This critique also reveals a primary canon of the fire fighting culture: the need to totally trust your fellow fire fighter in possible life threatening situations. When a rookie joins a company, this trust must be earned. As seen in the preceding critique, this particular rookie is well on his way to being accepted.

Finally, the comments made to the rookie are perhaps the most illustrative of the cultural concerns of this group. First, in front of the whole company, the officer asks the rookie if he "worked his ass off," and the others talk obliquely about other fire

fighters who ran out of air—resulting in praise directed at the rookie by lack of similar criticism of him. This is reinforced when another fire fighter addresses him as an equal: "We should a had it buddy . . ." Only then does the rookie respond; and it is in the most self-effacing tone he can muster. To have bragged about a good performance at that point would have threatened his newly earned status. In another statement ("I was just scared . . ."), which is aimed obliquely in the rookie's direction, the company witnesses a rare admission of fear by one of the officers and one of the fire fighters. In an occupation as dangerous as fire fighting, fear is pervasive, yet seldom is it openly discussed. Jokes about narrow escapes and stories about near-misses allude to the fear that they cause without dwelling on the reactions of the individual. In the example given here, the admission of fear by one fire fighter is echoed in the responses of another who readily admits being afraid in this unusual fire situation. Had this been a typical "room and contents" fire, this individual admission would place the narrator of a similar story in an unusually isolated and self-conscious position.

Work technique, then, is the core element of occupational culture because all work involves the accomplishment of tasks, and techniques are the culturally sanctioned ways in which those tasks are accomplished. By isolating the key techniques of a given task, (namely by categorizing significant tasks between the polarities of mundane and unusual), we can discern a recurrent complex of work processes that characterizes any occupational group. The informal judgments of individual execution of these processes (based on the canon of technique performance) is reinforced through narrative sessions where specific first or second-hand incidents are consciously transmitted from one man to the next.

The following excerpt of an exchange took place late one night as three fire fighters and I sat around the watch desk talking and drinking coffee. I was particularly interested in the critical canon that they had acquired and the key techniques learned and discussed. Within the discussion, various work experiences and techniques are linked by combining parallel experiences to those told by others. These experiences form a cultural background of shared expectations in a variety of fire fighting situations.

S: That's like the other night when we got off of the elevator.

What I was looking for was, like a lot of times you can't get in coming from the elevator and you got to back up and go down to the floor beneath and come up the stairs . . . .

O: That's what happened in that highrise fire. We couldn't a gotten it from the elevator. I tell ya, those elevators are great for saving time getting to the fire, but you can get your ass tore up on an elevator. That's why, if some guy gets on the elevator without a mask, it's his ass.

S: You know, usually it is pretty cool, nothing really up there to worry about. But that one time, if you get up there without a mask and all of a sudden the shit comes down bad and you don't have a mask, you can be in big trouble.

O: Yeah, I remember at HEW one time—this is, wheew, I really learned my lesson. This guy Bill W. took a mask in, and the officers who were along did not. So Bill says to one of these guys, 'Here, take my mask.' And I said, 'Man, you're gonna be sorry you did that.' And we were just joking, you know, a pound a a half's worth of fire. [Gestures an explosion with his two hands mushrooming out from his chest.] Puggggghh!!! Like a blast furnace, man. And he's crawling around underneath me because he didn't have anything to protect himself, and we were all down with our faces to the floor sucking air.

S: Like I say, if you go in without a mask, it's your decision. We've got one if something happens.

O: But you better not fail in your job.

S: Like here, even when we run a street alarm* and nine times out of ten there's nothing to it but trash or its false or something, but we put everything on . . . . And if you're running the bar you have to have that mask on when you hit the street or else. The officer who we used to have here drilled that into our heads day after day. I tell you, we went to a fire around the corner here one night and we got on the elevator and neither one of us had one. Kinda deliberate because we had kind of an attitude. And he goes, 'Where's you'all's mask?' And we went, 'We don't have one.' And this guy was tough—an ex-Marine. And he said, 'Alright. When we get there, if there is anything there, you two stay right beside me.' So we're both grinning at each other knowing that it's probably gonna be false. So we finally get to the floor and thought we

smelled a mattress burning,* and they're always nasty. So, anyway, the door opened, and I mean the shit was on the floor. And he grabbed both of us by the ass and threw us in there, and man we took a whippin trying to get those things out of there.

O: And the thing is that that was a hotel storage thing, and they had a whole room full of mattresses to take care of . . . .

S: And to make matters worse, we're pushing these goddam mattresses into the hallway and they tell us that can't get any fucking water.

O: The stand pipe* was busted.

S: So we had to start shoving them back in the room they came out of. The whole damn time I kept looking for an old lady to rescue. Shit.

O: But you did learn your lesson that night.

S: Talking about doing stupid things, were you with us that night that J was down in the Metro tunnel there? We had an alarm ringing in one of the kiosks and there was a train in the station stopped. So we're all down there, and I look up and here's J walking down the third rail.

O: He was about two inches away from instant incineration . . . .

S: We all stood there with our mouths open, we couldn't believe it . . . .

O: . . . and he has the bar dangling down like this . . . . and not only that, but his officer was underneath the fucking train. And we're standing there and here comes another train through the tunnel and we're saying, 'Jesus Christ, they've still got the fucking power on!'

S: It was fucking unbelievable . . . .

O: We went back up to the kiosk and were talking to the chief. And he's looking at this panel with all of these blue lights on. The power is automatically turned off. I said, "I'll tell you what." And later we went back through the books and it said that the blue light was only an indicator and that it wasn't guaranteed that the power was really turned off.

S: The best way to handle that third rail is to just always treat it like that son-of-a-bitch is hot.

O: But you see this particular officer—this lieutenant—I

could not dream that he did what he did. But he did. He crawled under there with an air mask on his back and that's metal, right? If he'd got hung up there and touched just one wrong thing—zappp. He'd a been burned so bad they'd a never got him . . . they'd a had to bury him with the train. Cause he'd a been burnt all there up inside, they'd a never got him out.

S: Course we've had our own little mistakes, too. Nobody's perfect—specially on this job. You know the one I'm talking about?

O: That one that we crawled down the—oh yeah, heh. See we—that was a teacher too. There we had a couple of young officers and we went to a, well we went to an oil fire. And when we left this place, the stack was doin' what we call stackin', puffin black smoke. And we left, I asked W, I said, "W, are you sure they cut off the oil burner?" And he said, "Oh yeah, I guess." And they looked at it and said, "Yeah, we got it all out." They checked everything and looked at all the wires. And I said, "W, you ever seen a chimney doing that regularly—puffin in and out like that?" And he said, "Uh uh, but they said it was out." I said, "Okay." So we had this other run come in, and we got up there—checked an alarm or something. And the chief pulls up and says, "I think ah you'all better head back up to that oil burner." So we go hauling ass back up there, and W starts the line in the basement, and I'm behind him and I said, "W, whatya got?" And he says, "Ahhhhh, Jesus!" And he backs out of there saying, "I think we need a task force!" And so they called the task force, and the next thing was there were millions of people there. All the bigwigs with the gold on their helmets . . . .[7]

This narrative session reveals the pervasiveness of key techniques and the way in which expertise is gained through experiences that are "teachers" or object lessons. Syntagmatically, the following key techniques are linked in the flow of the stories related: the danger of getting on an elevator without a mask, careless disregard or safety in a metro tunnel, mistakes in fire that teach a lesson, and danger of basement fires. Each key technique is linked to an actual situation in which its abuse resulted in the knowledge being gained, e.g., in the mattress incident when the two

fire fighters did not take a mask. Since not everyone can experience all fire fighting situations, the verbal session provides an opportunity for fire fighters to learn techniques through the mistakes of others until, as one fire fighter put it, when you pull up on a fire and somehow it just seems to "click into place" without you really having to think about it.

Bartlett's concept of technique as a discontinuous series of effector/responder actions and reactions might be expanded to embrace the informal passage of technique from one generation of fire fighters to the next.[8] Just as a line man advancing a hose line into a building anticipates the length of the line to the fire, when to put on the mask, and when and how to attack the fire, that same individual can articulate the reasons for exercising those techniques by linking them to particular object lessons. By linking effector (smoke) to response (mask) learned through object lesson (the time he didn't take a mask), the individual melds his techniques with those of others and thereby both exploits and advances the canon of technique performance.

The most dramatic illustration of this linkage of past experience to on-going knowledge is the reference to the Metro tunnel incident. This new, and in fire fighting terms, potentially lethal environment, is relatively unknown to the fire fighters. To date, there has only been one serious incident in the tunnels of Washington, D.C.,[9] and the lessons learned from that experience are still being debated both formally and informally in the service. The limits that this lack of experience places on the pool of known techniques is illustrated by the shock and incredulity expressed about two fire fighters who blithely put themselves in danger without even being conscious of their exposure. Over time, this lack of knowledge will give way to a new canon of techniques based on increasing exposure to and experience with this technology.

Work techniques lie at the heart of occupational culture because the formally and informally shared knowledge of what to do and how to do it is the common goal of all the participants. Collectively, this set of expectations forms the canon of technique performance. The technology, labor force, or even the desired product may change, but the learned responses to anticipated circumstances will be reinforced by the collective experiences and practices of the group. Although we can intellectually see the importance of work technique as the central form of work related

expression, it is extremely difficult to document. Examination of the critical canon on which technique performance is judged provides a means by which to evaluate occupational competence and understand the structure and behavior of the workplace.

Custom in the Workplace

Definitions of Custom

Custom is here defined in its broadest sense to include, as Ruth Benedict said, "the patterns and standards traditionally handed down in a community."[1]

> By the time [an individual] can talk, he is the little creature of his culture, and by the time he is grown and able to take part in its activities, its habits are his habits, its beliefs his beliefs, its impossibilities his impossibilities .... There is no social problem it is more incumbent upon us to understand than this of the role of custom. Until we are intelligent to its laws and varieties, the main complicating facts of human life must remain unintelligible.[2]

In the workplace custom extends from the mundane to the unusual, from habitual activities (such as checking one's boots, hat, and coat) to the complex rites-of-passage associated with an initiation, promotion, or retirement. As Benedict warned, however, it is almost impossible to understand elaborate customs, such as ritual, without first being aware of the daily habits and norms of interaction upon which these more dramatic forms are based. Edmund Leach suggested that ritual can be viewed as a communications systems in which the "more condensed message forms which are characteristic of ritual action are generally appropriate to all forms of communication in which speaker and listener are in face to face relations and share a common body of knowledge about the context of the situation."[3] Customary behaviors and communications are merely a special type of interaction employed by such face to face groups when they confront the many repetitive social situations that comprise a large segment of their daily lives.

Tönnies' Schemata of Occupational Customs

Ferdinand Tönnies divides customs or social codes into several, increasingly complex categories: habits, norms, and those ceremonies that in some way dramatize the collective will of the group.[4] These categories provide a useful initial division of the spectrum of custom in the work place. The first two levels are substantive in that they combine customary codes of behavior with the accomplishment of daily work routines, whereas the latter is a highly condensed dramatic performance that is ceremonial, in that it is removed from the work flow and presented as a unique activity.[5]

Habits

Habits in the work place range from the wearing of certain types of clothing, to taking a work break at a certain time with a particular type of food. Pipeline welders, for example, wear a baseball brimmed polka-dot hat as an indication of their journeyman status.[6] In a classic article on occupational custom, Donald Roy illustrates the importance of an informal ritual called "banana time" in a monotonous assembly-line job in a factory: one of the men opens his lunch pail and takes out a banana.[7] Wayland Hand and Patrick Mullen have amply illustrated the relationships between customs and beliefs in occupational settings. These habitual customs pervade the performance of techniques in the workplace.[8] By exploring the way in which customs both shape and are shaped by the techniques of fire fighting, we see the importance of habits in forming informal work interactions.

In dealing with the physical environment of fire fighters (the technical dimension), there are a number of habitual customary activities. At the fire ground, the rookie of the engine company is almost always put on the nozzle or "pipe" so that he can work the fire, while he stays beside the officer at all times.[9] The wagon driver waits until his company reaches the fire inside a building before he shoots water to them, timing his actions by counting a mnemonic cadence or waiting until the hose line stops moving in the doorway.[10] Truck men carry special tools, such as, wooden wedges to chock open doors or locksmith tools to pick locks;[11] and a truck

driver notes various guideposts, such as a tree, parking meter, or sign, to indicate where to stop or pull up to before backing into a station.[12] These traditional methods of coping eliminate the need for each new generation of fire fighters to devise new techniques for recurring situations.

Norms

Following Tönnies' scheme, the second level (norms) is apparent in two forms of collective participation: racking hose after a fire and cooking the meal. Once a fire has been put out, members of both the truck and engine companies first return ladders and appliances to the apparatus, and then drain the hose out a window or in the street. Finally, everybody lends a hand by helping the engine company "rack" or accordion the hose back into the hose bed of the hose wagon. In addition to accomplishing the replacement of the hose (which requires special folds and techniques), this custom also provides everyone with an opportunity to compare notes about his experiences on the fire. As cold, wet hands feed the stiff and almost frozen hose into the bed, jokes about missed shots at the fire, observations about other companies, or just good natured bantering provide everyone with an opportunity to reestablish their participation in the collective experience.[13]

Collective participation in meal preparation and clean-up also results in opportunities for expressive behavior. Those "in on the meal," pay for their share, and then they either clean up as a group, or dice are rolled and the two lowest scoring men do the dishes. Just as in the hose racking situation, participation in the meal and clean-up transcends all other status or formal ranks, and officers as well as rookies are expected to participate. As the fire service becomes more heterogeneous, these differences may well affect the customary organization of the meal, but customs like racking the hose will continue to require full participation. This illustrates the firm yet flexible hold which social custom maintains in the work place. It will be revealing to re-examine this work culture in five or ten years to discover which of these social codes have changed and in what way.[14]

Customary norms in the work place represent a more elaborate form of social control based on shared cultural rules of such significance that their violation affects the entire group. In fire fighting culture, norms concerning individual behavior, such as,

lateness, physical appearance, sobriety on the job, joking relationships, and physical contact, are dependent directly on personal status within the group. For example, if a rookie or fire fighter of low status reports for work late, unshaven, or drunk, he will probably be allowed to get away with it once or maybe twice. But if the infraction is repeated, then it is the officer's job to make it known to this individual that he is violating the norms of the fire house, as well as inconveniencing and angering the other fire fighters in the company. However, if the individual transgressing the rules is an experienced fire fighter with higher status, then initially a less formal course may be followed. For instance, in one particular case, an experienced fire fighter reported for work regularly in an intoxicated condition. The responses of the men in the company ranged from initial amusement and joking about the man's condition to attempts to ignore his intoxication and just put him to bed. Finally repeated individual entreaties were made directly to him to seek professional help before he injured himself, someone else, or lost his job. Although the man wanted to quit drinking, he could not. It was not until a senior officer who knew him personally sent him to the clinic (under the guise of another ailment) that he sought and responded to treatment. In a male dominated culture like the fire service, the ability to drink and hold your liquor is considered desirable and customary. Therefore, although the traditional work collective allows for some flexibility, when this activity becomes unmanageable, the occupational culture itself has few ways of dealing with the afflicted individual and must seek outside aid to reestablish the norm. As occupational cultures are forced to change more quickly to meet accelerated technical or social changes, they will require additional outside assistance to enable them to cope with aberrant behavior that will not respond to the normal customary sanctions.[15]

A parallel set of norms surrounds joking relationships and physical contact in the fire service. The main form of joking in the fire service is a form of verbal dueling in which two or more protagonists attempt to best each other with insults, putdowns, humiliations or puns. The following passage from my field notes provides an example.

> [12 December 1979: The scene is the sitting room in the fire house in late morning. Five fire fighters and I are seated

around the table, reading the paper and drinking coffee, when one of the regular members of the company comes downstairs from the Deputy Chief's office where he has been doing the chief's typing.]

CHIEF'S HELPER: That's alright pussies, don't bother to get up.

1ST FF: Pussies my ass. Turn around and let's see if those knee pads caused any burn marks on those chubby little thighs.

CHIEF'S HELPER: You're just jealous 'cause you can't type worth a damn.

1ST FF: It aint typing he's after—let's see those lips. Hmm, kinda chapped, aint they? Been working out up there, I see.

2ND FF: Boys, boys, boys, please, you're interrupting my train of thought.

1ST FF: The only fucking train of thought you've had all week is what's in those cock books and where your next drink's coming from.

[Just then somebody shouts "cop in the alley," and everybody runs outside to try to keep the "meter maid" (female police officer) from ticketing their cars, which she does anyway. This is a periodic event that angers the fire fighters because it is so inconsistently enforced. To add insult to injury, a male police officer (unaware of the first's action) stops in for a cup of coffee and some conversation with one of the fire fighters whom he knows.]

1ST FF: [to police] Hey man, why don't you do something about their ticketing our goddam cars in the alley? You guys come in here drinking our coffee, why the hell . . . .

2ND FF: Shit man, he didn't know anything about that cunt—fuck off, man.

1ST FF: Oh yeah, jump right into the shit, you ugly mother fucker—you're not worried because you car-pooled today. Well I'm not paying no twenty goddamed bucks.

2ND FF: I don't give a shit if you take the fucking ticket and shove it up you hinie hole . . . .

1ST FF: Well my hinie hole is a helluva a lot better lookin than your fucking face.

2ND FF: Well your hinie hole . . . .

[At this point a third fire fighter grabs the shoe shine box from beneath the table, slams it on the table between the two protagonists and says:]

3RD FF: There, you dumb shits. You might as well argue with that!

1ST FF: [warming to the task, addresses the shoe shine box] And I don't give a shit who you are, mothah fuckah, aint nobody gonna talk to me like that! [He slaps the shoe-shine box and stomps out with everyone watching].[16]

In what may appear to be some pretty rough insults including allusions to homosexuality, this was a normal clearing of tensions that build up daily in the fire house. These insults and put-downs, however, are mock battles in which the solidarity of the group is reinforced by verbal parry and thrust. This is a permissible type of verbal expression, which informs the group of individual emotions and serves as a gauge to an individual's reaction under pressure. Some individuals require or invite this kind of social temperature-taking more than others, because they have more changeable moods. The norm enforced here is one of verbal probing, in which a sense of solidarity is achieved in full view of the group. If the individual cannot exchange this kind of abuse with equanimity, then his opportunities for acceptance as an equal in the culture are severely limited.

Physical relationships between individuals in the fire house also reflect customary methods of testing temperament and showing friendship and status equality; one does not "mess" with those above or below you in the status hierarchy. Just as there are those who excel in verbal dueling or repartee, there are individuals who either precipitate or are the frequent recipients of various forms of physical contact. These range from being grabbed behind the neck, tipped over while sitting in a chair, or most commonly, "goosed." In the particular fire house in which I spent a great deal of time,

goosing was referred to as "smoothing" and there was one individual who did a classic Jackie Gleason "take" complete with flailing arms and a loud "yeeow" every time he was smoothed, which was often. Almost all of the smoothing that went on involved this individual who could be relied upon to respond appropriately no matter what the circumstances. Consequently when the chief would line up the company for an announcement, the "yeeoow" would delight his fellow fire fighters. Or, when the company would be downtown racking hose after a run, the "yeeoow" would (hopefully) attract the attention of the women on the street downtown during their lunch hour.

In most situations, smoothing would be used to foil some potentially serious or boring situation in such a way that the entire company was guiltless of the transgression. Smoothing, as it was practiced by this particular company, was an inside joke shared by the members of the company. Like other forms of physical contact, it reinforced a feeling of camaraderie that requires constant bolstering due to the many boring hours of inactivity that are part of this occupational experience.

Ceremonies

The ritual passage of an outsider to insider status in a work group exemplifies Tönnies' "collective will of the group." This "collective will" in the fire fighting culture is best understood by reviewing an individual's path through the promotional system of the fire department. A novice fire fighter or rookie spends his first year on probation, during which he or she integrates the concepts taught in the training academy with first hand experience. At the end of the first year, he must pass an oral and practical skills demonstration, referred to simply as "saying your probation." Having completed this successfully, his passage into the fire service is marked by a probationer's dinner. The former rookie buys the food and either prepares it himself or gets one of the better cooks in the company to do the cooking. In the previously homogeneous fire department made up of white males and predominantly Western European descent, these special meals consisted primarily of steak, roast, turkey, or ham with the trimmings. In the increasingly heterogeneous fire service, however, the growing number of black,

hispanic, and female fire fighters have introduced ethnic and regional specialties that are served during these occasions.

In addition to receiving a free meal, guests, officers, and fellow fire fighters will often use the probationer's dinner to remind the former rookie of his past mistakes during his first year. Often the dinner is followed by a session at a local bar to add a more social, informal stamp of confirmation to his rite of passage. The strength and cohesiveness of this culture is reflected through the recognition by all of the participants that a boundary is being crossed by the initiate. That change requires an alteration in the relationship between the individual and the group. A rookie is "on probation" until he can absorb the formal, memorized knowledge and basic techniques of the job, perform the requisite skills, and demonstrate these at the end of twelve months. More importantly, however, he has informally developed a personality in the culture, i.e., he has moved from a non-person ("rookie") to a fire fighter on the back step. The responses to the dinner (who attends, compliments on the food, and companionable joking and ragging) reflect a confirmation of the group's expectations of this individual's future performance. As Leach suggests, the daily aspects of cultural interaction are given enhanced symbolic significance in a ritual setting. A taunting story about a missed assignment on a fire, an arm around the shoulders that turns into a headlock, or an appreciative belch at the end of the meal, symbolically dramatize acceptance into the group.[17] Poor attendance, refusal to accept the food, or worst of all, silence, would dramatically illustrate that although the probationer might have successfully completed the formal requirements of the job, informally he has not been accepted. His only hope for such acceptance would be to prove himself in a different company.

Once a fire fighter has been on the job for five years, he is eligible to compete in an officer's examination. As in other public service occupations, like police work, these examinations are highly competitive, requiring hundreds of hours of concentrated study. If he is successful and scores high on the exam, then he most likely will be promoted. When he is advanced to sergeant or a higher rank, his promotion is celebrated with a promotional dinner. This is a particularly emotional occasion, because he and his family and friends have had to make sacrifices so that he could work a regular tour of duty and study the long hours required to pass the exam.

Often, members of the same company have studied together as a group. Ironically, once a fire fighter is promoted to sergeant, he must leave that company and move to another company. When he trades the yellow hat of a fire fighter for the white hat of an officer, he also "loses" his first name and becomes simply "sergeant."

The promotional dinner planned and paid for by the new officer is held in the fire house. He usually invites fellow fire fighters, officers he has known in his career, and sometimes family or friends. In addition to sharing an elaborate multicourse dinner, this event also provides all of those attending with an opportunity to recount their personal experiences with the new officer when he was "on the back step." The probationer and promotional dinners share a confirmation of new status on the individual, but the expanded contacts and sphere of influence won after five years on the job deepens the pool of experience and reminiscence, while it also marks a dramatic split between informal expectation and formal power. An officer must be obeyed due to the formal chain of command. The response to his orders, however, is based exclusively on his reputation, which has been earned informally on the fire ground and passed on as part of the canon of technique performance. The dinner itself provides a microcosmic arena in which these expectations are dramatized, and the attendance of good fire ground officers, experienced technicians, and respected retirees at a new officer's dinner is a good indication that the necessary respect has been earned. Some individuals, realizing at this point in their careers that they don't have this informal support, or choosing not to pursue it, seek employment in other branches of the service, such as communications, research, administration or investigation. In many respects, the promotional dinner is a turning point in a man's career in the fire service. In this tightly controlled, informal culture, it is an intelligent individual who can accurately chart his course by anticipating its member's expectations of him (that is, by accurately reading the critical canon as it applies to him).

The most elaborate rite-of-passage in the fire service occurs upon an individual's retirement. A retirement dinner is often a lavish affair in which a man's friends organize, prepare, and serve a favorite meal and also use the forum of the dinner to recall his exploits during his career. These dinners are usually held in a suburban fire station so that beer can be served. They are either at-

tended by colleagues only or by friends and relatives as well. The former is the more popular pattern of attendance, because it permits more rambunctiousness and informality. Usually the organizers will circulate an announcement about the dinner and sell tickets, which entitle the holder to the meal and an unlimited supply of beer. Preparations are made early in the day to make sure that the food, refreshments, and other gifts and prizes are all on hand. After the meal, a master of ceremonies will usually lead the verbal "roasts" and at the end of the presentation the retiree will be presented with both gag gifts and legitimate symbols of his service, such as union placques. The dinner usually ends when the presentations are concluded and the members of the audience clear away the tables to play cards, drink beer, and just talk.

The retirement dinner is a recapitulation of an entire career, and like the two previous symbolic meals in a man's fire fighting life, it is a unique forum for the expression of expectation and response to an individual in transition within the culture. If the function of custom is to sanction and direct cultural change, then the retirement dinner is the most retrospectively focused mechanism, because it marks an individual's movement out of active participation in both the formal and informal aspects of the fire fighting culture. By recapitulating and dramatizing highlights of the retiree's career, the participants in the dinner assess, confirm, and freeze for the rest of the retiree's life his status in their culture. The dinner is a collective testimony by all participants concerning their assessment of the individual's lasting position within the canon of the trade. It is also one of the few times in a man's career when explicit statements about that position are made in front of the retiree and his peers.

Fire fighters are members of a unique culture, one which radically shapes their perception of themselves and the outside world. With each other they share a bond of experience and camaraderie based on a proven ability to push their collective envelope of protection to its ultimate limit in order to save a life or put out a fire. At the same time, the result of that experience changes their perception of the outside world; it forces them to see stand pipe connections in the front of a building where others see plain facades, to notice fire plug locations instead of street signs, and to identify a fire as "food on the stove" or "a smoldering mattress" instead of as merely "smoke." When an individual ceases

active participation in that culture, he must come to terms emotionally with his new status. The retirement dinner is the mechanism through which members of the culture assist the individual through this emotional and intellectual transition by summarizing his cultural experience, celebrating his impact on the culture, and providing a symbolic end to his active role. At the same time, however, since fire fighters can retire after twenty years with a good and well-deserved pension, this passage out of active fire service can also celebrate an individual's passage into another career at a relatively early age.

The preceding material has illustrated that rites of passage in the fire service are marked with celebratory meals. Probational, promotional, and retirement dinners provide an opportunity for members of this culture to assess their respective positions in the group before moving on to a next step. Time is collapsed and in the liminal glow of the dinner itself a person in transition is scrutinized, evaluated, celebrated by the "collective will of the group" and then sent on to his new status.[18]

A continuum from the technical customs of putting a rookie on the line, through social customs like hose racking to customary norms like joking behavior, and finally to symbolic meals as rites of passage reveals the importance of custom in occupational culture. As in all aspects of culture there are varying levels of experience that yield divergent pictures of the cultural whole when viewed from any analytical perspective. The preceding compartmentalization of the role of custom in an everchanging organic collective like the fire service, however, should in no way limit our conception of the interplay of all types and possibilities for human interaction as they actually unfold in the day to day lives of people. Like tableaux, these examples are representations of life that provide us with a glimpse of the vital drama that lies behind our fabrications.

The Spoken, Shouted, and Remembered Word

In most occupational settings, the primary form of communication is verbal. Whether this interaction takes the form of special terminology, general conversation, or fully developed narrative exchanges, it is the basic medium through which occupational knowledge is shared on the job between generations of workers in the same trade. This information exchange is accomplished through a linkage of work processes with the images and symbols verbalized by work group members to articulate the canon of technique performance. The discussion that follows presents examples of verbal interaction using the preceding method of placing these expressive forms between the extremes of the most mundane and the most unusual, giving greater attention to the more central, day-to-day verbal forms.

The reader should not assume that the examples chosen to illustrate the role of particularly significant symbols, terms, and narratives in the work place represent a comprehensive ethnographic view of fire fighting culture. As in any human group, television, newspapers, radio, and other sources provide a multitude of subjects for comment and discussion, and fire fighting is no exception. In the interest of advancing my analyses of occupational verbal expression, however, I have chosen to disregard these externally derived forms in favor of more significant occupational material. I have also included in this section transcripts that contain what some may construe as obscene material. The reader should be aware that in most male-dominated occupations, swearing is an accepted form of verbal expression. With the introduction of women into the trade, this pattern may change, but artful "cussing" is still a pervasive and respected form of verbal art.

The Basic Metaphor

The mundane mode of verbal interaction in the work place is the esoteric naming of things and people according to the viewpoint of

a particular occupation. Fire fighters in various regions of the country refer to the hose nozzle as the "pipe," "knob," or simply the "nozzle," and a man's position on the apparatus (tillerman, truck driver, line man, etc.) becomes his work identity within the company, at least during the attack.* One of the most significant metaphorical images used in fire fighting is the phrase "laid out short." On one level this refers to the improper choice of hose line length by members of the engine company. To "lay out short" is to not have enough hose line to reach the fire. In a broader sense, however, this phrase is also used to describe any situation of a lack of sufficient goods or services. If, for example, there weren't enough steaks for dinner or enough sheets for everyone, the responsible person would be said to have laid out short. This phrase is also used to describe situations of insufficiency off the job, as in an inability to perform sexually. Through the application of these metaphorical linkages of work process with generally recurrent human situations, workers not only express the impact of occupational culture on their perception of the world, but at the same time they are continually shaping and altering that unique perspective.

In this most basic mode of verbal expression, performance on the job may result in an individual being given a nickname, for example, "Hollerin Harry," "Colonel Sanders," or "The Little General." Often such names reflect peculiarities about the person like his physiognomy ("The Hawk" or "Shortwheels"); age ("Wrinkles" or "The Old Man"); name alliteration or rhyme ("Killer Kiwalski"); or off the job behavior or sexual prowess ("Stud") that suggest an appropriate title.[1] One individual in the urban fire fighting culture, an older truck driver who did all of the cooking in the house and had been assigned to one company for years, was referred to quite simply and directly as "Mother Kelly." And as illustrated on page 61 of *Good Fire*, the reasons for this designation reflect the important role that this individual played in food and food preparation in the traditional fire fighting culture.

Even in this mundane mode of verbal expression in an occupation—the naming of processes, tools, and individuals—we can discern the impact of the cultural forces that both reflect and are shaped by unique, group generated expectations and views. In most cases the functional aspects of a process, tool, or individual are singled out, perhaps because of their contrast with other

elements in the work culture. Over time, however, these unique characteristics and idiosyncracies may elevate a particular nickname or phrase to a level of meaning that reaches far beyond its original purpose, as in the laying out short designation, as well as the significant naming of a nurturing, food-providing figure who also delivers the company to the fire. In the material which follows I will examine how these linkages of the canon of work technique to verbal symbol are reflected in the more elaborate, performance-oriented forms of verbal expression.

Conversational Modes

Conversation

The second mode of verbal interaction in occupational culture is the conversation. It is here that occupational narrative emerges from normal verbal "give and take" to the more elaborated form. The following conversation (a continuation of that on p. 169) took place late one night as three fire fighters and I sat around the watch desk drinking coffee.

S: I was driving chief C. one night, and the engine had one back, and they called on the phone and said to send the truck up here. And the chief said, "Maybe we ought to ride on up there," cause sometimes its better to cover your ass than to get caught with your pants down, you know. And the chief says, "Well maybe it aint anything after all." And just then it goes to a task force, and the big man is sitting right there. Man, we both left the house at the same time and ended up racing him to the fire down here. But that ain't the first time. Going back to the same place to the same fire ....

O: ... is a no no.

Mc: Same thing is true in the forest fire stuff, if you have a....

O: Rekindle?*

Mc: Yeah, if you have a rekindle, your ass is grass man.

S: Well its the same way here.

O: Well this turned out to really look like a rekindle. But it wasn't. What had happened was that, after we had questioned around a little, the door to the boiler room was

definitely locked. But when we got back it was open and somebody had gone in there and turned on the switch or something. But afterward you couldn't tell, because every switch and knob in there was melted down. But what had happened is that the box was hot enough, or it arced or something, and it eventually ignited the oil, and the oil come up and the shit just blew . . . .

S: . . . the oil company had just come in there too, and what they had done is in a 275 gallon tank they had pumped in about 500 gallons, and the stuff had come up out of the overflow and filled that damned basement with oil. You'd think that the dummy would know that it was a 275 gallon tank, but he probably just put it in there and walked away from it or something, but then it just exploded . . . .

O: So this time the fire was really rollin'. I mean this whole basement was concrete, right? So it was like going down into a big furnace now. So there was a door leading down and it was only about 22 inches wide. And you go right down into it and make a left, and right there to the right is the master meter set—gas meters. And W was getting ready to go in there and I said, "W, stand back by the wall and let the pipe play in there." I said, "There aint no windows in there." And he said, "Yeah, right." And I said, "And for God's sake," I said, "don't let that shit come over the top of your head and hit these meters, or we're gonna come out a here." And he said, "Oh wow, mmm."

Mc: Like going into the fire box of a furnace, right?

O: You've been down in the weight room and seen those meters down there, right? You know you never give them a thought sometime in a large fire or something. But I tell ya, when they go off. You just can't put them out, and there's nothing worse.

S: Basement fires are a bitch. We had one down here at the Greyhound place. And just as we got in the basement—I was in the engine company then—the captain and I lost our helmets coming down the steps. And we kept feeling stuff running all over us, and we just thought it was electric cord meltin on top of us—it was just a bitch, pouring all over us. And when I got out of there, my head was frozen into this caramel blob all over the place. Well what it was was syrup lines

running to the restaurant upstairs. And he and I were covered with syrup.

Mc: Sheeit—oh God . . . .

S: Just covered with it.

O: We was in that basement that time, 'member all the solder was meltin on top of us? The fire was so hot that—I thought I was hittin the fire. But what it was was in the old exit signs, they used to use orange colored glass instead of the red or green that you see now. And I saw this orange glass and thought, "Shit, this is it," you know. You couldn't see nothing else. Those face pieces on that glass, they get scratched up so bad you can't see nothing out of em. And you can't. You just have to, through experience and all, you just have to kinda guess at what yer doin', you know. And in the dark, your hands, feel and sense of touch are your biggest eyes, because ninety percent of the time we're blinded, we don't have no real eyesight. Oh man, I'm tellin you.

S: . . . breaking mirrors and like that. You're down in basement looking for a window, and you see a reflection and you smack it. It'll crumble on a wall, drop in pieces. It's a mirror on the wall, and you can't tell. You see a reflection and just hope for the best.

Mc: Well, when you get a run, how far ahead are you thinkin'?

O: Well it depends on where it is and how well I know the area or the building. If its in our district and I know it well, I might be thinking about the hydrant or the line length depending on how much they tell us over the vocal. Also, when you pull up and see the color of the smoke, that can tell you a lot.

W: A lot of what you have experienced and others have told you about. You pull up on a going fire, and somehow it just seems to click into place without you having to really think about it.

O: And sometimes you are so sleepy, you don't really know where the hell you are or how the hell you got there. A number of times I sort of woke up at the scene and thought, "Where the hell am I and how the hell did I get here?" You sort of travel almost in your subconscious.[2]

This conversation contrasts with the one below in which the tone and style of interaction are combative i.e., the participants do

not accommodate each other verbally. In the fire house sitting room everyone is having their first cup of coffee. Usually in this context things are quiet until everybody is fully awake. But this morning the tensions that have built up between four of the younger fire fighters in the company flare up. As it usually happens the initial issue is a minor one.

1ST FF: [Grabs the newspaper out from under a second fire fighter's nose.]

2ND FF: Hey man! I'm reading that!

1ST FF: You weren't reading it. Your goddam eyes are still glued shut.

2ND FF: Man you know you've had a fucking attitude for a goddamed week. Why don't you go get laid or something?

3RD FF: He's got an attitude? Fucking O. is the one with a fucking attitude. You been in the kitchen after he's "helped out with dinner?" Looks like a fucking garbage dump. He just don't give a shit—particularly since he knows he's gonna get made. And another fucking thing. Every time somebody gooses O. he fucks around and plays and like that; but when I do it, he wants to smash my face in.

2ND FF: Since we're on the subject of bitches, I think we better go back to rollin dice to see who does the goddam dishes because some people aren't pullin their weight. You always see the same goddam faces in there every time.[3]

In the first conversation we can see how the topics flow into each other from a comment about driving a chief, to the subject of rekindles, to the lack of visibility during a fire. In this typical conversation the verbal contributions made by each individual build on, rather than attempt to top or best, the statements of others in the group, as they do in joking behavior (p. 176). The conversation about the syrup, for example, leads directly into a parallel story about solder and lack of visibility. This is in contrast to the second conversation, in which the fire fighters voice their various complaints in an interchange that is more oppositional: one complaint is opposed by another and another until the frustrations of everyone in the group have been vented.

The conversational structures reflect in a very direct way the canon upon which they are based. In both conversations, each individual has an opportunity to contribute either through an

insult, a descriptive observation about a subject, or a complaint. Yet no one individual carries the burden of the entire verbal flow. The conversations are not dialogue so much as verbal montage—linked statements about a subject or subjects made up of individually articulated segments. Just as in the fire fighting situation itself, these individual segments comprise a collective product or background against which the performance of any one individual is judged.

A participant in this type of interaction—either the physical activity or its verbal counterpart—must maintain a proper balance between idiosyncratic performance and participation in the group activity employing the proper timing, style, and critical stance for both the verbal and physical interaction. To break beyond these group-defined limits, to try to do your job in addition to someone else's on the fire ground or attempt to dominate the conversation, is to command individual attention and scrutiny for a singular performance in a physical and symbolic effort based almost exclusively on cooperation. Although opportunities for individual performance do exist on both the physical and verbal levels of interaction, basic fire fighting behavior and conversational style dictate that a cooperative posture be maintained; therefore, individual performance is a more unusual and a more critically judged type of behavior.

Dell Hymes, in a more formal model, indicates three modes of interaction: behavior ("anything and everything that happens"), conduct ("behavior under the aegis of social norms, cultural rules, and shared principles of interpretability"), and performance ("when one or more persons assume responsibility for presentation").[4] Typical conversations and routine fire fighting attacks take place on the level of conduct, because they are collective and structured by social norms. Unusual, idiosyncratic behavior, due to its unique individual nature can be elaborated into performance. Extremely dramatic individual performance—a rescue or what is even more rare, a fully developed rescue narrative told by the rescuer—might be considered "performance full," that is, an "authentic or authoritative performance, when the standards intrinsic to the tradition in which the performance occurs are accepted and realized."[5] The rarity and complexity of these full performance expressive forms makes them extremely important aspects of verbal behavior (p. 148).

Examining more deeply these conversational examples, we can determine the "principles of interpretability" (what I have referred to throughout this discussion as the "canon") upon which these exchanges are based. This canon not only reveals the meaning behind the verbal exchange, it also illustrates the criteria upon which this and more elaborate verbal (and nonverbal) exchanges are judged. In the conversation about rekindles and lack of visibility in a fire, each individual supports the other narrators' accounts by matching their narratives in tone, subject matter, and length. There is a spirit of verbal cooperation behind these accounts that parallels the cooperative nature of much of the work they are describing (Figure 32). Commensurate with this aspect of the interchange, however, is an underlying competitive desire on the part of each narrator to tell the most appropriate and the more memorable story. The dynamics of the conversation parallel those of the fire fighting situation in which the individual must rely on the

Figure 32. *"Skull" or book drill at the watch desk.*

members of his or her company for protection, yet at the same time perform the individual assignment as aggressively as possible. The tension between self-aggrandizement and cooperative responsibility on the level of action also exists in the conversation because no one individual assumes responsibility for the entire performance in either situation. This montage of verbal fragments and impressions collectively comprises the storytelling event.

In the second conversation, the canon (or "shared principle of interpretability") lies closer to the surface, since it is a lack of cooperation that has precipitated the exchange. This conversation is in reality a litany of problems affecting the morale of the company: accusations of having a negative attitude (anger or frustration revealed through a lack of cooperation), remarks about sloppiness, resentment about promotion, and a frustration at not being allowed to participate in a joking relationship. These statements suggest that the need to return to a more structured method for getting the dishes done is only a surface indication of a much deeper problem. All of these complaints reflect what is perceived by these four fighters as a dangerous break-down of cooperation and cohesiveness within the fire house. By voicing these fears openly to the rest of the members of the company, they are (as a group) attempting to bring attention to this slippage of camaraderie. They also are suggesting remedial action (the dice rolling for dishes) in the hope that mandatory yet informally generated structure will resolve the problem. The gripe session seeks to re-establish traditional (and necessary) cohesiveness in a contemporary situation by pointing out indications of its slippage by citing examples of increased individuation and selfishness.

In both examples, participation in the verbal exchange itself and the underlying values upon which the exchanges are based attempt rhetorically to "move" the group as a whole toward a more stable social base.[6] The force of this effort is augmented by the collective nature of the exchange and the appeal to a changing but still pervasive white male value system. An individual attempting such an appeal through an isolated verbal performance would have to command an extremely high status in the group or be a very adept raconteur.

Critique

As we review the more central forms of verbal expression, we move

from group defined "conduct" toward individual "performance" forms. At the very center of fire fighting expressive culture we find the fire critique and the narrative session—verbal portraits of the technique canon. Both of these forms are structurally similar to the above conversations, but they differ in that the individual narrator responds to the comments and expressions of others in a more fully developed narrative framework, as seen in the example on page 142 of *Good Fire.*

In this fire critique, the chief's aide, layout man, and the bar man from the truck company compare their various perspectives about the fire. They present their accounts in complete narrative units, not in fragments or collective montage. Because each individual at the fire has a specific job to do and a place to be on the fire ground, these responsibilities result in a variety of different experiences, which are compared within the critique. The aide (who actually relays the chief's orders to the officers inside of the fire building) sees the whole picture from the inside, i.e., members of the truck company pulled the ceiling, which rekindled after the engine company had hit the fire and assumed it was out. Meanwhile, the layout man sees the fire strictly from the outside, because, being from a company arriving on the scene as back-up, he had just laid out hose lines when the fire re-ignited and everyone was ordered out. And, finally, the bar man (in the second-due truck) saw the fire from the rear of the fire building; therefore he concentrates his narrative on that approach.

Rather than being a collective composite based on fragments of information and observation, a fire critique allows each individual to tell his story. Even though all of the narrators participated in the same event, their frames of reference are geared to specific tasks, so that each man is really only aware of his own actions during the incredibly fast moving attack. After the fire is over, he must then present his individual perspective to the group. In order to make sure that the information is clear, however, he must place his action in a narrative framework with an identifiable beginning, middle, and end. The aide, for example, reverses the order of his narrative, talking first about the results of the fire when it re-ignited, then later backing up to what it looked like when they first arrived on the scene.

As illustrated in the brief segment of transcript, a fire critique recreates in verbal form an individual's performance and obser-

vations on a particular fire and provides everyone with a comprehensive view of the event. The critique also defines and reinforces the canon of both physical and verbal exhibitions of competence for that particular experience. A good job on the fire ground, for example, could be eclipsed by a too boastful or unbelievable account of that performance, just as a bad performance would be impossible to overcome by the most superbly narrated account. Until an individual earns his status in approved fire ground performance of technique, he would put himself in a vulnerable position to attempt to recount his experiences in anything but the most self-effacing manner during the critique. However, his style of narration (satire, mimicry, derision, self-mockery) may lend additional credibility to his performance by a clearly humorous delivery.

Narrative

The narrative or story telling session differs from the critique in that the accounts may or may not be first person narratives. The emphasis is upon relating individually developed narratives to the stories that precede them or topics brought up in the verbal flow. Although many of these narrative sessions include stories about specific fire experiences, the tight evaluative criteria used to judge critiques is not as strictly observed, because in many cases the individual telling the story is the only one who had either experienced or heard about it. It is in the narrative session that a skillful raconteur is given more latitude to embellish stories from the topic at hand. The canon is still applied to these stories, but the fine points of accountability exercised in the critiques give way to a more overt appreciation of storytelling ("telling lies," "bullshitting," "pumping water," "telling war stories") for its own sake. The following transcript provides an example, which took place around the watch desk. Four fire fighters are just passing the time.

1ST FF: Goddam.

2ND FF: This mother fucker's so cold here [pointing to the hose wagon].

3RD FF: That goddam squad wagon wouldn't ever start. I used to cuss that son-of-a-bitch. Some days that thing would

run real good, and other days you'd take out of that house and that thing would go kebang, kepow; and you'd pull that choke out, and no matter what you did, it wouldn't run.

2ND FF: Well, this choke jumps up, and I can just blow out of here. We had this run over to Seventh Street and I had to put that choke all the way out. But once that thing gets hot, boy, that son-of-a-bitch will jump like a frog.

4TH FF: That piece was the best piece the city ever bought—small wheel base.

3RD FF: We went out of here on a fire one night, J.F. is in charge of 2 Engine, Fuzzy's drivin the wagon. Turned left on Twelfth Street and run Twelfth Street the wrong way all the way back in the tunnel to the other side. [Laughter]

Zoom—all the fucking way back in that tunnel. J.F. said, "I kept tellin' him, don't run it the wrong way." He said, "I finally told him that Kenny, if you ever run that the wrong way again, I'm gonna take that fucking axe and hit you in the head with it." He said that's the only way he ever stopped him from doin it. "I'm gonna take that fucking axe and hit you right in the head with it."

5TH FF: Yeah, we'd make that fucking alley by the dry cleaners across the street from you all, and man, he used to dart through that mother fucker at about a hundred miles an hour.

3RD FF: I was riding on the back of the pumper with W. and we got a run. When M Street used to be one way east. I don't know where we were going but we went way out [pause]. Anyway he took us up M Street the wrong way the whole way. And the whole way he's sitting in the pumper yelling, "Look at that crazy son-of-a-bitch, that's the craziest thing I've ever seen that mother fucker do." And he was cussing like that all the way up M Street.

5TH FF: I'll tell ya what, W. takes a lot of abuse but that's a hard worker, boy. And don't piss him off.

3RD FF: We were up on Montana Avenue, on a second alarm one night. The whole ass end of this place was off. It looked like the block was off. We were up on the second floor when it was all over. Red F., me and a couple of other guys, and we were pulling walls and ceilings. And the guys said hold up for a second and let's check something. And W. was working so

> furiously and was so excited that he just grabbed the door to this place and ripped it off the hinges.[7]

Unlike the conversation, in which everyone contributes a portion of the montage, or the critique, which is based on the strict evaluation of techniques performed on a given fire, the storytelling session is a looser verbal form, as illustrated in the narrative ability of the third fire fighter in this interchange. The raconteur spins his stories out of the various topics that come up in the conversation. In this example the topics include pieces of apparatus that are difficult to start (the squad wagon), a story about going the wrong way in the hose wagon, and a final story about an excitable individual. In each case the narrator not only supplies stories for each of the themes that arise, but he also reflects in tone and length the pace of the other observations and narratives. This ability to pick up and elaborate stories from subjects that arise in conversation reaches its peak in the elaborated personal experience narrative (p. 148), which is a somewhat unusual occurrence in an occupational setting.

Further illustrated in the preceding example is the creation of an opportunity for the narrator to carry the momentum of the verbal exchange. This is possible as long as he can continue to generate stories that inform and entertain those involved in the session. In this case, the third fire fighter wrests the narration from the other participants by turning a casual mention about the coldness of certain engines to an illustration of two different incidents in which a wagon driver ran his route to the fire the wrong way. Following the mention of the individual responsible for one of the wrong way incidents, he then embellishes this theme with a story that provides additional proof of this individual's over-zealousness. Although the narrator in a storytelling situation has more latitude in choosing his topics and shaping his stories, he must also maintain a currency with the canon in order to influence the direction of the narrative flow and also provide enough opportunities for the others in the session to take part so that they will not lose interest. Even the most skillful narrator cannot maintain a command of the story-telling situation without frequent verbal and paralinguistic reinforcement for his narration from his audience.

Viewed in its entirety, this conversational mode of communication (conversation, critique, and narrative forms) reflects

verbal responses and interchanges about elements of a recurrent concern in the occupation. They provide group members with an opportunity to question, discuss, evaluate, and entertain each other using language to define the perimeters of occupational experience.[8] Within this framework an individual can negotiate, refine, and even advertize his occupational knowledge with a minimum risk of rejection in the collective verbal exchange. At the same time, these conversational contexts can provide an opportunity for an accomplished racounteur to relate narratives that exhibit emotional or ideological extremes that extend beyond the normal give-and-take of a storytelling session. Admissions of fear, failures of technique, or the expression of deep personal emotion are subjects often alluded to yet rarely expressed. Just as there is constant danger and fear in a fire that must be individually confronted and culturally suppressed, there is a resulting set of memories and experiences that are retained by all of the fire fighters yet rarely drawn upon as topics of conversation. In this predominantly male culture, there is a point beyond which personal feelings and emotions are not normally aired. If they are expressed, the individual places himself at risk by appearing preoccupied with himself, thereby violating a cultural canon. The suppression of emotion and the lack of references to fear in this occupational setting have less to do with a "macho" refusal to admit the existence of these feelings (although that is part of the reason), than with a cultural preoccupation of emphasizing overt collective effort and camaraderie. Making a rescue in a fire and telling a story about that rescue from a strictly individual perspective is rare, because collective perception dictates that the event is possible and the storytelling acceptable only through the collective efforts of one's peers and the body of cultural knowledge one inherits as a member of the trade. There is an ever-present tension between collective ideals and personal motivation in this culture that forces even the most accomplished fire fighter to be cautious about the way in which he draws attention to himself.

The Unusual Mode

The third mode of verbal interaction is the elaborated personal experience narrative, which deals with unusual and extreme

situations in the workplace (Figure 33). This narrative form is the most individual verbal expression found within the occupational setting. The subject matter includes accounts of bizarre incidents retained in the verbal repertory of the group (sometimes for many years) and accident accounts that refer to repeated exposures to danger and their consequences. The narratives in this section are considered unusual due to their length, preoccupation with self, or the strong emotional content they project.

Collective Narrative

In fire fighting culture, the communication of unusual, historical information is linked to specific precipitating factors. These may be situations or locations that remind an individual of an earlier experience, topics that arise in narrative sessions that trigger specific memories, or merely the mention of an individual's name. The historical facts of an event, however, may be somewhat distorted to satisfy the canon of technique performance and therefore, they should be interpreted within the confines of the cultural

Figure 33. *A member of the truck company operates the ladder hose pipe at the tip of the aerial ladder.*

context. The following narrative session illustrates the importance of understanding this context before interpretations of verbal material can be made.

[Late at night as the fire fighters are watching the news, a story about a hotel fire in New York City is broadcast in which the bodies of a number of elderly residents are shown being taken out on sheet-draped stretchers. As the news continues, the four men in the room engage in the following exchange.]

1ST FF: Shit man, those people look pretty crisp. You see that one was bent right up? Probably looked like a split hot dog.

2ND FF: Sometimes you can't even tell they're people, let alone white or black. I went on one one night, and we were overhaulin and I grabbed what I thought was one of those rubber baby dolls all burnt up and threw it out the window. But as I threw it out the arm socket popped off and it was a real kid—just burnt to shit.

1ST FF: That's like the night down on Twelfth Street. I've never seen so many kids in one place. What was that, about five or six kids in that place?

2ND FF: Yeah, that was with 2 Engine that night.

1ST FF: We made that turn on Twelfth Street half asleep about three o'clock in the morning, and that shit must have been blowing twenty-five feet out in the street.

3RD FF: What floor was that?

1ST FF: Second or third floor. I mean talk about waking you up. But then they brought out one kid, and that wasn't unusual, but then they just kept coming out.

2ND FF: Lost almost all of them didn't we?

1ST FF: Well, they would come out with one kid, and you'd think, "Well that was normal." But then they come out with another and another, and you didn't think it was going to stop, they came out with so many kids in this place.

4TH FF: I went out with 13 Engine one night, and they had six people in the front room of a two story, and they were incinerated right there. They threw a molotov cocktail in the front door around ten o'clock at night. I mean we're rolling down the street, and there's snow on the ground, and we're throwing ladders, and this guy jumps out of the second floor

window, and he lands right on his head, and he's already burnt to shit. But in the front room there is nothing but bodies stacked right on top of each other.

2ND FF: You know the funny part of that is, when you find these bodies, how many times do you find that sucker right at the window? It seems as though they get that far and they can't get any further.

3RD FF: You see some weird stuff. Like that guy on that mattress. He must have been smoking and died before that fire ever got to him. Because he was nothing but bare bones on the springs by the time we got to him.

1ST FF: That reminds me of that guy from Truck 1 that night. We had this place that was completely off when we pulled up—shit blowing out into the street. We finally make it up the stairs to the door of this apartment, and here's this guy layin' across the threshold burnt to shit. So this fucker from Truck 1 bends down and looks at him from one side and then walks around and bends down and looks at him from the other. Then he throws up his hands over his head and says, "Any part of the ball." I'd thought I'd shit.[9]

Taken out of context, this narrative session in which fire fighters talk about various fire victims they have seen might be viewed as a ghoulish display of insensitivity and callousness. By placing it within the actual emotional context of this occupation, however, this objectification of the dead is not the result of a lack of concern, but more a matter of conditioning and exposure aimed at achieving emotional distance. Mutilated and horribly burned corpses are a part of their work experience. By collectively and openly experiencing the past encounters of other group members, and even joking about them, fire fighters prepare themselves for future encounters with fire victims. The apparent levity and objective tone of these accounts—matching in many ways the superficiality of the media presentation—establishes a culturally sanctioned release for this grizzly possibility. The importance of this verbal process is underscored by the fact that fire fighters are subjected to these life-threatening situations on a regular basis and must face the possibility of severe burns and death to themselves. This further illustrates the complex cultural significance of a narrative exchange that to the outsider might appear to be cruel and morbid.

Closely linked to narratives about the unusual events in the past are accident accounts that address the variety of mistakes and mishaps encountered on the job. These include accounts of minor injuries (like cuts and scrapes), more serious and permanent mishaps (such as sprained backs and knees), and stories about fatalities or crippling injuries. These accounts parallel other covert aspects of work culture that are known only to members of the culture and used to protect workers from dangers in the workplace, while at the same time maintaining informal control. Unauthorized short-cuts, the use of city-owned equipment and tools for personal use, the pilfering of goods and even sabotage of equipment are physical means through which workers in this and other occupations attempt to fight management and exert control over the work environment. In a similar manner, accident stories and other narratives reflecting covert occupational knowledge provide a verbal means through which this same information is passed. Management (the city administration and the office of the fire chief) is viewed as the enemy, because many of the most repetitious, exploitative, and dangerous techniques that workers are forced to perform are imposed by management, which—from the workers' point of view—always sacrifices their health and well-being for financial gain. Since he too must live on the profits generated by the work he performs, however, the individual worker attempts to protect, express, or avenge himself by maintaining this covert cultural network. The accounts included in the accident stories of *Good Fire/Bad Night* (pp. 151-158) are the most dramatic and overt examples of this protective network. The documentation and exposure of more covert narrative information would be an exploitation of the culture no matter how well intentioned my portrayal.

Accident narratives are in a sense the informal research arm of the fire fighting culture, just as they are in other dangerous occupations. In addition to industry and government experiments to test equipment and techniques, from protective clothing to the use of air support systems, the current generation of fire fighters has only to look and listen to their predecessors for warnings about the dangers they face and ways to protect themselves from those dangers. These stories and the corresponding widespread disabilities from lung and cardiovascular ailments and burns sustained by retired fire fighters attest to to the hard-won knowledge,

which is passed on to the next generation of workers. The canon of technique performance defines the context within which fire fighters operate, while accident accounts detail specific situations in which an individual is made dramatically aware of how delicately his mastery of the canon is held in balance.

The Elaborated Personal Experience

As we have traced the various modes of verbal interaction in the workplace from the simplest to the most complex (from technical terms and nicknames, through the conversational modes to the historical and accident accounts), we note a progression from collective to individual verbal expression. This individual expression reaches its most elaborate form in the extended personal experience narrative. Occasionally told as a reminiscence at a retirement dinner, card game, or at some other social occasion where old-timers congregate, these lengthy personal accounts are important not only for the insight they give us into the mind of the narrator but also for the symbolism, emotion, and historical detail that they contain.

The rescue account in *Good Fire/Bad Night* (p. 148) was told to me in response to a request for a version of this fire fighter's most challenging fire. Although it is unlikely that a narrative of this length and detail would occur naturally, its dramatic impact, emotion, and effectiveness make it an excellent example of the extended form. As Robinson correctly points out, the elicitation of narratives in such a context can alter the natural form due to the artificial setting and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee.[10] Yet it is only through such elicitation that these unusual, extended forms can be documented, since opportunities for their natural occurrence are so rare.

The form and structure of the narrative follows the basic "template" or informal model of a fire story, i.e., "individual in content but structurally stereotyped."[11] This basic or ideal form for a first person account can be reduced to the following structural levels: (1) description of the events preceding the fire (abstract and orientation); (2) response to the fire (complication); (3) fighting the fire (action); (4) events following the fire (resolution); and (5) comment (evaluation—coda).[12]

Each structural level of the story has been greatly expanded, so that where an average narrator might respond to the questions about an unusual fire by concentrating on one level (e.g., a bad backdraft—level 3, or comparison of the fire to another—level 5), this particular narrative expands and details the entire classical form on all levels. It is for this reason that, even though this may be an "unnatural" narrative (in that it has been elicited during an interview), it conforms to the naturally occurring verbal forms of the basic narrative template. Like customary interaction, in which rites-of-passage are unusual and fully elaborated technique performances in front of an audience are equally as rare, the extended personal narrative is a unique phenomenon, but one which is composed of elements common to all of the less elaborate forms. This narrative further reinforces Leach's maxim about the more dramatic forms of culture expanding the more common, day to day images and symbols; it also supports the organic model of culture that underlies my theory of occupational folklife, i.e., that all aspects of occupational expression relate in some way to the canon of technique performance.[13]

An evaluation of the structural levels of the story reveals that this account largely follows the temporal unfolding of events as they occurred during the attack. On the first structural level (the orientation and description of events preceding the fire) we learn that the speaker is detailed to another house, it is night work, they get a street alarm and nobody else puts on their mask as they respond. By the end of the speaker's second sentence a knowledgeable listener would have some idea of the point of the story, i.e., in a fire fighting situation your only reliable teacher is experience. Since this is a slow house without extensive experience (p. 148), the narrator stands out as the most competent performer.

Returning to Bartlett's effector/responder concept of technique, we see in this narrative the anticipation of an experienced fire fighter contrasted to the lack of anticipation on the part of the others.[14] He puts on a mask, they do not; he advances the line, they do not; he makes the stairs, figures out the search, makes the rescue, etc. At the same time, however, he also attempts to minimize his achievements by undercutting his performance as it compares to the performance of others in the company. The narrator puts on his mask "for the hell of it," is griped that some fire fighters are stationed at slow houses, and when he comes down alone with the

baby states, "Again not to down anybody . . . ." Using this extended account, the narrator of this story reveals himself to be a highly accomplished fire fighter, while at the same time he gently reveals the ineptitude of a slow, lax company without making them appear totally responsible: "some of these guys have to spend their time at a station that doesn't run, and a lot of times it's not of their own volition . . . ." The culprit is a lack of experience and that creates a vacuum, which is filled by the experienced and quick thinking narrator. Yet he too gained his experience from the culture and does not want to undermine his fellow fire fighters or the accomplishments of his trade. It is unusual for a company to make so many mistakes, and that is one of the reasons that this individual is given the opportunities he is to make the rescue.

Between levels 1 and 2 (the orientation and the response) of the story, the narrator provides a summary of the origins of the fire, its spread through the structure, and the grandfather's unsuccessful rescue attempt of the infant. Just as the orientation provides the basic background for the action, this aside (and those in level 3 where he says that he didn't find these things out until after the fire), brings us up to date on what has been going on out of our awareness before the street alarm was pulled. This information could only have been learned after the fire, but it is inserted in this portion of the story because it provides the listener with the knowledge that he needs to understand the basis for the narrator's expectations throughout the event.

One of the characteristics of the extended personal narrative (at least in this culture) is the ability of a narrator to approximate the sequence of activities that occurred during the rescue along with his personal emotions and thoughts as they were unfolding. In order to place that activity in its appropriate context, however, we need information that is brought in from outside of the experience. The narrator of an extended personal narrative is a native ethnographer attempting to portray an inside view of his cultural experience; he is providing his personal view of the canon upon which his actions are judged. The more knowledgable his audience, the less elaborated and annotated his narrative must be.

The initial conflict between the formal rules of fire fighting and informal, improvised strategies for action in a real fire situation are graphically illustrated in the second and third levels of the narrative: the response to the fire and fighting the fire. The tension be-

tween the inexperienced company and the narrator reaches a level where he finally declares the fire a "circus" and decides to break the formal organization of the attack by trying to charge through the fire to reach the stairs, an action clearly not his responsibility. The fact that no one else has a mask on, the lack of water, the dropping of the pipe, and the disorganization of the entire event force him to concentrate solely on getting the baby out, even though it could cost him his promotion. The key to this entire decision-making process is the lack of response by the officers present. Again, an unusual vacuum of decision-making has been created, and the narrator steps in on his own initiative to take action based on experience. His instincts are the instincts of the canon which dictates that the very first priority is to protect human life. Usually that is achieved through a highly organized attack, but in this case there is no organization, so the narrator acts individually despite his personal and professional vulnerability.

By the time he gets to his description of the rescue attempt itself, we have a very clear picture of the setting, the conflict and danger, as well as his expectations. As Robinson accurately points out in his article on personal narrative, it is this ability to pull together both the diachronic and synchronic levels of cultural experience that reveal the ability of a good personal experience narrator.[15] The historical events leading to the fire, the reasons why this inexperienced company does not perform more efficiently and the more experienced background of the narrator provide a diachronic backdrop for his dramatic description of his internal choices and decisions as he crawls blindly down the burning hallway. The one-on-one interview with me provided the synchronic opportunity for the narrator to engage freely in this introspection, because I was responsive and keenly interested in the account, knowledgeable about the culture but not an insider. It is possible, therefore, that in this culture when stories are told in natural contexts, the commonality of terms, expectations, and proper emotional perspective reduces verbal expression to its most minimal level. Had he been relating this event to a group of fire fighters, it would probably have been condensed and this internal material greatly abbreviated or left out.

In most fire experience stories the tension of the narrative would diminish at the point when the narrator exits the fire building and the fourth level of the narrative—the events following the

fire—is related. In this account, however, the additional activity maintains the excitement, i.e., the mouth-to-mouth resuscitation until the baby is delivered to the hospital and comes back to life. It is only at this point in the story that the narrator realizes his exhaustion, and after relating the events about the grandfather, he returns the exchange to me with the coda: "... but that's the way that one worked out."

Viewing the story in its entirety, it reveals a level of introspection and attention to detail and individual accomplishment that would be unthinkable in a naturally occurring critique or narrative exchange in the fire house. As the most self-conscious form, however, it also expands each structural level of a fire experience account to draw attention to personal concerns, expectations, and observations on each level. The correspondence between the action of the rescue and the thoughts running through the narrator's mind while he makes the rescue betray an extremely unusual ability to capture emotion. As in other expressive forms in the culture, we can learn a great deal about the culture and its canons from raconteurs such as this individual. His ability to both capture and convey the feelings of the moment reveal a fire fighter and narrator of impressive ability. Interestingly, fire fighters who subsequently listened to the taped account reacted negatively to what they interpreted as a self-serving "war story." It seemed to them that the narrator was presenting himself as a hero. Although he was decorated for this rescue (an official recognition of his achievement by the fire fighting community), the negative reaction of the members of the occupation to the personal narration of the event alerts us to the unacceptability of this type of account within the canon of the workplace. Individual ability, aggressiveness, and emotion are viewed as positive cultural attributes as long as they are publicly subordinated to team work and cooperation.

The elaborated personal narrative in the fire service is essentially a private expression of the cultural canon that features introspection not evident in other naturally occurring verbal exchanges. Having listened to, worked with, and interviewed a large number of fire fighters, I am convinced that most have one or more such stories in their minds based on a particularly frightening, satisfying, or dangerous incident in their careers. Within day-to-day verbal interaction, however, this personal story is not appropriate, because it would draw too much attention to the individual. This is

unacceptable in a culture that suppresses the expression of such individuality in favor of cooperative verbal exchange and repartee. If conversational exchanges, such as critiques and narrative sessions, provide opportunities for assessing one's position in the daily flow of cultural experience, and accident accounts reveal the collective boundaries of exposure to hazardous situations (how far the envelope of safety can be stretched), then the extended personal narrative is an examination of personal limitations that may never be expressed in public due to its idiosyncratic focus on self. It appears to be a latent form that can only be performed in contexts like retirement dinners or interview situations, where nostalgia or direct requests and urgings outside of normal cultural expectation create a receptive audience.

Concluding Remarks

The above material has indicated that in the fire fighting culture there are modes of verbal interaction ranging from nicknames and basic metaphors to conversational genres like critiques and joking sessions and finally to the unusual personal experience narrative itself. These types of verbal exchange have been selected from the cultural fabric to reveal representative samples of cultural expression. I do not wish to suggest that these examples represent a comprehensive view of the cultural experience, merely that these forms do exist and can be classified from the simplest to the most complex in order that we may ultimately place them in their proper ethnographic perspective. The fire fighters refer to these events by emic terms, e.g., critiques are called by that name or sometimes "bull sessions," joking exchanges are sometimes referred to as "throwing darts," and the variety of conversational genres from accident accounts to story telling are referred to variously as "telling lies," "telling war stories," "shooting the shit," or "pumping water." The next step in constructing an ethnographic picture of the culture is to select and document representative contexts in which these exchanges take place and then arrange them in a comprehensive framework so that their natural occurrence is accurately portrayed.

The construction of an ethnography, at least as I have approached it, should begin with an understanding of the basic

particles of culture—the metaphors, habits, and simplest techniques—before the more elaborate forms can be adequately understood and documented. Prejudgment, or the use of vague, externally derived classifications of types of expression without first linking these types to a specific body of data is to return to the generic butterfly hunt at a time when folklorists are just beginning to appreciate the potential of their unique approach to ethnography. Externally derived concepts and theories must be a part of our work, otherwise we are conducting research that has no potential for communication to an audience beyond ourselves. Those who articulate abstract models and theories, however, are most valuable when they link their constructs as closely as possible to specific cultural reality and synthesize their ideas so their concepts enable us to move to new insights and future goals.

By walking before we attempt any faster pace—working from the atomistic to the more comprehensive level of cultural description—folklorists can construct ethnographies that will profitably utilize not only our sensitivity for appropriate cultural expression but, more importantly, our understanding of the rules that underly a particular expression's use. We can work from the inside out and truly begin to understand folklore in culture.

Glossary

(First instance of each term in the text is noted by an asterisk.)

ACTING: When a fire fighter or officer temporarily substitutes for someone with a higher rank.

ADVANCE: The movement of a hose line from the street to the seat of a fire.

AERIAL TOWER: A bucket platform mounted on the telescoping boom of a truck.

AIR BOTTLE: The air cylinder that is worn by a fire fighter at the fire ground and contains enough breathing air for fifteen to thirty minutes, depending upon the size of the cylinder and the amount of exertion.

APPARATUS: Any fire fighting vehicle, such as a truck, wagon, or pumper. Also called "a piece."

ATTACK: The entire constellation of activities involved in suppressing a fire: advancing hose lines, putting up ladders, and searching for victims.

BACK STEP: The position behind the driver of the hose wagon, where fire fighters stand when responding to a fire. Also refers to any fire fighter who is not a technician or an officer; e.g., "he's on the back step."

BAR MAN: The truck man who carries the Halligan bar and forces entry into a structure for the engine company.

BELL: An automatic alarm built into an air cylinder pack that signals to a fire fighter that it is almost out of air.

BLOCK THE TRUCK OUT: Often in narrow or congested streets or alleys, other apparatus prevents the truck from getting its aerial ladder to the roof.

BOAT: The District of Columbia fire boat, which is moored on the Potomac River.

BOOK: The daily log book in which all responses are recorded by the technician, as well as all duty, relief, and leave times.

BOX ALARM: A major response involving four engine companies, two truck companies, a rescue squad, and a battalion fire chief.

BOX LOCATION: The alarm switch or telephone receiver that has a numerical designation identifying it at a specific location on the street or in a building.

BRASS WORK: The poles and brass railings in the fire house.

BURNED AREA: Any portion of a structure that has been scorched, heated, or damaged by fire.

CEILING HOOK: A long-handled pole with a hooked metal end that is used to pull down burned ceiling material.

CHARGED: A hose line that has been pressurized with water.

CHIEF'S HOUSE: A fire house in which a battalion fire chief is stationed with other companies.

CHOCK: See DOOR CHOCK.

CLOSED CHEST: A cardiopulmonary resuscitation technique for stimulating the heart through rhythmic pressure on the chest.

CODE: A radio designation sent to the nearest hospital to have a life-saving team waiting to receive a critically ill or injured person when the emergency unit arrives.

DETAIL: Temporary assignment to another company other than the one to which a fire fighter is permanently assigned.

DISTRICT: The area of the city for which the company is directly responsible.

DIVIDING LINE: One of the north/south or east/west quadrant lines that divide the District into four sections: northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest.

DOOR CHOCK: A wooden wedge used to hold doors open, allowing fire fighters to enter a room and preventing the hose line from being pinched.

DOUBLE HOUSE: A fire house that has two companies assigned to it.

DOWN: When a piece of apparatus is not working properly or is in the shop for repairs, it is referred to as being "down." Also refers to a company that does not have a full complement of personnel.

DRILLS: Practice sessions conducted either in the fire house using books and maps or on the street using the apparatus.

FACE PIECE: The clear plastic and rubber mounted face protection, which delivers air from a cylinder to the fire fighter's mouth.

FILL-IN DRIVER: A substitute for the regular driver.

FILLING OUT THE BOX: When a company responds to a local or street alarm and discovers a major fire, headquarters may dispatch the remaining units that make up a full box alarm complement. See BOX ALARM.

FIRE EXTENSION: The path of burned material made by a fire as it burns its way within or between ceilings.

FIRE GROUND: The fire building itself as well as the area surrounding it, which may be used by the fire fighters.

FLY SECTION: The top section of a portable or ground ladder that is extended by pulling on the halyard or rope that is connected to pulleys on the stationary portion of the ladder.

FRONT PIECE: The triangular-shaped, leather, upraised portion of a helmet, which identifies the company to which a fire fighter is assigned.

GENERATOR: A gas-powered engine mounted on the truck, which generates electricity for the fans and lights.

GREASING: One of the technician's or driver's duties that maintains the undercarriage of the vehicles.

HALLIGAN BAR: A crow-bar-like steel bar used for forcible entry.

HEARST CUTTING TOOL: A heavy-duty hydraulic, scissors-like device used to pry open and cut through metal.

HEROES INCORPORATED: A civic organization in the metropolitan area that annually decorates policemen and fire fighters for valor.

HOOK-UP: The connections of supply and attack lines to the wagon.

HOSE BED: The rear portion of the wagon and pumper that contains the hose.

HOSE TOWER: A tall, vertical shaft in the fire house in which hose is suspended for drying.

HOUSE FUND: The central fund into which everyone contributes a share once every two weeks and which is used to purchase major items, such as television sets or dishwashers. There is also a commissary fund used to purchase condiments, snacks, and cigarettes.

HUMPING HOSE: Dragging a hose to the fire by pulling and pushing it up stairwells, down hallways, and through doors.

JACKS: The outrigger metal stands that support and stabilize the aerial ladder when it is extended.

JUNCTION BOX: A portable electrical socket with a light powered by the generator on the truck.

LADDER PIPE: A heavy duty, high-volume water nozzle mounted on the tip of the aerial ladder for use in major fires.

LAYOUT: The act of stepping off of the back step of the wagon to take the supply line to the pumper, or the place where the fire fighter stands on the back step behind the driver. See PUMPER.

LEATHER HELMET: The traditional fire helmet, which was made of leather stretched over a metal frame. The standard issue helmet is now made of reinforced plastic.

LIFE LINE: A length of high-test rope carried in the running coat pocket for use in emergency escapes from a building or for raising equipment from the street.

LINE: The hose line, in most cases an inch and a half cotton-covered rubber hose.

LINE-UP: A daily roll call of the company standing shoulder to shoulder on the apparatus floor to hear announcements or instructions by the officer.

LOCAL ALARM: A response by a company within its district; if two companies are dispatched to a fire; it is a "double local alarm."

MANNING: The distribution of sufficient personnel in the department to insure that each company has a full complement.

MB5: A military chemical foam wagon.

MCCAA MASK: A rebreathing, chemically based air mask developed for mine rescue work and used by rescue squads in the District of Columbia until 1981.

NFPA: Acronym of the National Fire Protection Association.

NOTHING SHOWING: A term used by an officer over the departmental radio to indicate that there is no smoke or fire evident from the street.

ON CHARGES: An official reprimand and citation for violation of fire department regulations.

ON THE SIDE: The position of a hook, bar, or axe man on the ladder truck.

ONE OR TWO: Either number 1 or number 2 platoon. There are three platoons in the district who rotate their schedules.

OFF: A fire that is burning out of control by the time fire fighters arrive. Also referred to as "well off."

OPEN UP: Ventilation of a room or structure during a fire.

OVERHAUL: The entire range of operations performed by the truck company when it removes all burned debris from a fire.

PART-TIME: Most fire fighters work part-time or have two jobs to make ends meet.

PIECE: See APPARATUS.

PIPE: The nozzle of a hose.

PLATOON: Shift to which a fire fighter is assigned. The three platoons work in rotation with three days of day work (7:00 A.M.–3:30 P.M.), three days of night work (3:30 P.M.–7:00 A.M.), and three days off.

P.O.D.: "Performance of duty," sick leave due to job-related injury or illness.

POLYVINYL CHLORIDE: A lethal, odorless, and colorless gas produced by the combustion of some plastics and other petroleum-based products.

PRE-CONNECT: A pre-connected hose line of varying lengths from 150 to 350 feet connected directly to the pump.

PRESSURE READINGS: The measured pressure of an air cylinder. The Scott-Air Pak has a maximum pressure reading of 1980 psi.

PROBATIONER: See ROOKIE.

PROBATIONER'S BOOK: A basic study book used by the probationer to study terminology, equipment, and techniques.

PROMOTIONAL DINNER: A special dinner that marks the transition of a fire fighter to a higher rank.

PROMOTIONAL EXAM: A competitive examination that provides rankings upon which promotions are based.

PULLING CEILINGS: Using long-handled ceiling hooks to pull down and discard burned lath and ceiling material.

PUMPER: The engine company apparatus that is attached directly to the water hydrant at the fire ground and supplies the hose wagon with water.

PUMPER MAN: The fire fighter who drives the apparatus and monitors the water supply to the wagon. Also called "pumper driver."

RACKING THE HOSE: Folding the hose into accordion folds onto the hose bed of the engine.

REELS: The metal revolving device on which electric lines for lights and fans are wound.

REKINDLE: A fire that re-ignites after it apparently had been extinguished.

RESERVE PIECE: A substitute vehicle used in place of the regular one, while the latter is being repaired or serviced.

RESPONSE: The transportation of fire fighters and equipment from the fire house to a fire.

ROOKIE: A novice fire fighter in his/her first year; also called "probationer."

ROOM AND CONTENTS: A fire limited to a single room and its contents.

ROUNDS: Routine checks of his battalion by the battalion fire chief.

RUN: A fire or emergency response by a company.

RUNNING COAT: The heavy canvas and leather coat worn by fire fighters when responding to a call.

RUNNING COMPANY: An active company that has a high number of responses.

RUNNING GEAR: A fire fighter's basic work clothing: helmet, mask, running coat, gloves, and boots. At night he uses turn-out boots, which are placed inside pants held up by suspenders and called turn-out pants.

RUNNING ROUTE: Pre-determined routes to all locations in a fire district.

RUN OUT OF WATER: Using up the reserve water in the wagon's tank before water arrives from the pumper.

SAYING PROBATION: A rookie answering examination questions posed by his officer at the end of his probationary year.

SCOTT-AIR PAK: The commercial name for a self-contained breathing apparatus, which consists of the pressurized cannister of air (the "bottle"), the regulator, hose, and rubberized face piece that makes a protective seal around the fire fighter's face. Also referred to as "the mask" or the "Scott mask."

SECOND ALARM: A multiple alarm that adds an additional full box alarm complement to the full box alarm units already on the scene, i.e., an additional 4 engine companies, 2 truck companies, a rescue squad, and a battalion fire chief would be added to the same number of units to double the number of companies at the fire ground.

SECOND DUE: On a box alarm assignment (see BOX ALARM), the second-due company is assigned the second position when called to the fire. Upon arrival at a fire, companies respond to the front or the rear of the building according to their assigned order, as follows: first due (front), second due (rear), third due (front), and fourth due (rear). The same rule applies to all other responding units, including truck companies and rescue squads.

SEVEN O'CLOCK BELL: The morning bell that announces the change in shifts.

SINGLE HOUSE: A fire house consisting of one company of fire fighters.

SITTING ROOM: The "parlor" of the fire house where the meals are served and most of the social interaction takes place.

SLOW HOUSE: A fire house known for few responses on the average.

SMELL OF A MATTRESS: Experienced fire fighters can often determine the type of fire they are approaching by the smell, because mattresses, food, garbage, and rubber all have distinctive aromas when they burn.

SNATCHED UP: An older term meaning a situation in which one company beats another to a fire, currently referred to as "aceing" or "smoking" another company.

SPANNER: A special wrench used in making hose connections and couplings.

STAND PIPE: A closed water-pipe system built into high rise buildings. The system is "charged" or pressurized with water pressure from the hose wagon and outlets or "risers" on each floor can then be tapped for water.

STAND-PIPE HOSE: One hundred feet of 1½ inch hose plus a nozzle, pipe adapters, and a spanner, usually carried in a large canvas bag and used for interior attack in offices and apartment buildings equipped with stand pipes.

STRAIGHT STREAM: A nozzle setting that projects the water in a straight, high velocity spray.

STREET ALARM: A manually or orally activated alarm box.

STREET DRILL: Every tour of duty has a day designated for practicing laying hose, ladder evolutions, pumping procedures, and other techniques. These drills are conducted in the street to familiarize the members of the company with their district.

TASK FORCE: Additional units (two engine companies, a truck company, and possibly the rescue squad), which respond on a fire when additional help is requested.

TAKING UP: The securing of all tools, hoses, ladders, lights and fans on the apparatus prior to returning from a fire to the station.

TEST: The promotional exam.

THIRD-DUE COMPANY: See SECOND-DUE.

THROWING THE LADDERS: Raising ground ladders to the building.

TIGHT RUNNING COMPANY: A company that sees a lot of fire fighting activity and whose members maintain a strong group solidarity.

TILLER ASSEMBLY: The collapsible steering mechanism and housing over the truck's rear axle used by the tillerman.

TOUR: A six-day work week.

TRIP LIGHTS: In most fire houses, the lights in the bunkroom that are turned on automatically when the response bells are rung.

TRUCK RUNNING DOWN: The truck is running with five rather than six fire fighters.

TURNTABLE: The round platform from which the aerial ladder is controlled after it is extended.

TWO-THIRDS: Two-thirds of a full pension, a common result of a fire fighter having to retire on disability due to injury.

UTILITY TOOLS: Fans, lights, and junction box, all of which are powered by the generator on the truck.

VENTILATION: The opening up of skylights or windows to allow heat and smoke to escape from a structure; a duty of the truck company.

VOCAL: The radio speaker in the fire house over which alarms and all communications from headquarters are broadcast.

WAGON PIPE: Heavy-duty nozzle mounted on the back of the wagon for use in major fires.

WATCH: Sitting at the watch desk at the front of the fire house and sounding the alarm when a call comes in over the departmental radio.

WELL OFF: See OFF.

WHITE HAT: An officer in the department.

WIDE FOG: The widest nozzle setting that results in a wide curtain of water, which provides protection but has little or no force to extinguish a fire.

Notes

Some of the following citations refer to the District of Columbia Fire Fighters Project (DCFFP) field notebooks, tapes (cited by date, letter designation A, B, or C, and side 1 or 2), and tape log (cited by page number), all of which are in the files of the author. Complete citations of publications are in the Selected Bibliography.

Introduction

1. McCarl, "Occupational Folklife," p. 3.

2. Byington, "Strategies for Collecting."

3. DCFFP field notebook I, 27 October 1976.

4. McCarl, "A Selected Index."

5. DCFFP tape, 14 March 1978; DCFFP tape log, pp. 2B–3.

6. DCFFP field notebook I, 7 December 1978.

7. Thorp, *Songs of the Cowboy;* Lomax and Lomax, *Cowboy Songs;* Dobie, "Ballads and Songs."

8. Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch;* Beck, *Folklore and the Sea;* Hand, "California Miner's Folklore: Above Ground," pp. 24-46; Green, *Only A Miner.*

9. Boatright, *Folklore of the Oil Industry* and *Tales from the Derrick Floor.*

10. Nickerson, "Is There a Folk in the Factory?"; Bell, "Tending Bar at Brown's."

11. Hymes, "The Ethnography of Speaking," pp. 13-53; Abrahams, "Personal Power"; Glassie, *Passing the Time;* Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance.*

12. Adapted from Siegfried Neumann's suggestion concerning the range of expressive forms in the workplace. See Neumann, "Arbeitserrinnerungen," pp. 274-275.

Good Fire/Bad Night

1. Tape 1 May 1979, A1; log p. 1.
2. Tape 15 November 1978, A1; log p. 3.
3. Tape 5 November 1978, A1; log pp. 1-1B.
4. Tape 9 November 1978, A1; log pp. 3-4B.
5. Tape 24 November 1978, A1; log pp. 1-2B.
6. Tape 31 October 1978, A1; log pp. 1-1B.
7. Tape 23 June 1979, A1; log pp. 1-2B.
8. Tape 24 February 1979, A1; log pp. 4B-5.
9. Ibid.
10. Tape 18 November 1978, B2; log p. 4.
11. Tape 21 January 1979, A1; log p. 4B.
12. Field notebook II, 21 May 1979, Monday.
13. Tape 18 November 1978, A2; log pp. 1B-3.
14. Tape 15 November 1978, A2; log pp. 2B-3.
15. Tape 21 January 1979, A1; log p. 4B.
16. Tape 28 January 1979, A1; log p. 1.
17. Tape 18 November 1978, B2; log p. 6.
18. Tape 21 January 1979, A2; log p. 5B.
19. Tape 14 March 1979, A1; log pp. 4-5.
20. Tape 9 March 1979, A1; log pp. 3-4.
21. Tape 14 March 1979, A1; log p. 3.
22. Tape 9 November 1978, A1; log pp. 2-4.
23. Tape 10 January 1979, B1; log p. 12.
24. Tape 30 January 1979, A1; log p. 6B.
25. Tape 19 April 1979, A1; log p. 4B.
26. Tape 15 November 1978, A1; log p. 4B.
27. Tape 19 April 1979, A1; log p. 4B.
28. Tape 15 November 1978, A2; log p. 6.

29. Tape 21 January 1979, A1; log p. 2B.
30. Tape 21 January 1979, A1; log p. 2.
31. Tape 21 May 1979, A1; log p. 2B.
32. Tape 21 May 1979, A1; log p. 1B.
33. Tape 7 October 1979, A2; log pp. 4B-5.
34. Ibid.; log p. 6.
35. Ibid.; log pp. 4B-5.
36. Tape 24 February 1979, A1; log p. 4.
37. Tape 2-3 April 1979, A2; log pp. 4-4B.
38. Tape 26 February 1979, A2; log p. 6.
39. Tape 28 January 1979, A1; log p. 1B.
40. Tape 12 May 1979, A1; log p. 3.
41. Tape 7 June 1979, A1; log pp. 3B-4.
42. Tape 22 June 1979, A1; log p. 3.
43. A provocative report concerning race relations in the department was published in 1971 (Brooks and Janney, *Analysis of Racial Discrimination*).
44. Tape 26 November 1978, A1; log p. 4B.
45. Tape 16 July 1979, A1; log p. 5B.
46. Tape 3 May 1979, A1; log pp. 1B-2.
47. Tape 21 January 1979, A1; log p. 6B.
48. Tape 9 July 1979, A1; log p. 3B.
49. Ibid.; log p. 2B.
50. Tape 9 August 1979, A1; log p. 3B.
51. Tape 9 July 1979, A2; log p. 8.
52. Tape 6 December 1978, A1; log p. 3B.
53. Tape 7 January 1979, B2; log p. 8.
54. Tape 22 September 1979, A1; log p. 1.
55. Ibid.; log p. 4B.
56. Ibid.; log p. 1.

57. Tape 14 March 1979, A2; log p. 6B.
58. Tape 22 September 1979, A1; log p. 4B.
59. Ibid.; log p. 5.
60. Ibid.; log p. 2.
61. Ibid.; A2; log p. 5.
62. Ibid.; log p. 5B.
63. Tape 26 November 1978, A1; log p. 7.
64. Tape 26 November 1978, A1; log p. 1B.
65. Tape 21 May 1979, A1; log p. 2.
66. Tape 14 March 1979, A2; log p. 3B.
67. Tape 1 July 1979, A2; log p. 6.
68. Ibid., A1; log p. 6B.
69. Tape 12 April 1979, A1; log pp. 2B-3.
70. Tape 12 May 1979, A1; log pp. 2B-3.
71. Ibid.
72. Tape 12 April 1979, A1; log p. 3B.
73. Ibid.
74. Tape 29 May 1979, A1; log p. 3B.
75. Tape 12 May 1979, A1; log p. 2B.
76. Tape 21 January 1979, A2; log p. 7B.
77. Tape 14 March 1979, A2; log p. 7B.
78. Tape 16 March 1979, A1; log pp. 1B-2.
79. Tape 12 April 1979, A1; log p. 3.
80. Ibid.; log p. 3B.
81. Ibid.; log p. 4.
82. Tape 14 December 1978, A1; log p. 4B.
83. Ibid.
84. Tape 20 April 1979, A1; log p. 3B.
85. Tape 14 March 1979, A1; log pp. 3-3B.

86. Tape 16 July 1979, A1; log p. 4.

87. Tape 12 May 1979, A1; log p. 4.

88. Tape 10-11 November 1978, B1; log p. 4.

89. Tape 26 November 1978, A2; log p. 7.

90. Tape 5 April 1979, A1; log p. 3.

91. Tape 5-8 February 1979, B2; log pp. 3-4.

92. Tape 20 December 1978, A1; log p. 1.

93. This concept of narrative defining the limits of occupational knowledge was suggested to me by Peter Seitel. I am grateful for the suggestion.

94. Tape 20 January 1979, A1; log p. 1B.

95. Tape 10-11 November 1978, C1; log p. 7.

96. Tape 5-8 February 1979, B2; log pp. 3-4.

97. Field notebook II, 15 March 1979, Thursday.

98. Tape 2-3 April 1979, A1; log pp. 3B-4.

99. Tape 5-6 November 1978, A1; log p. 1.

100. Tape 7 June 1979, A1; log p. 4.

101. Tape 2-3 April 1979, A1; log p. 4.

102. Tape 3 May 1979, A1; log p. 4B.

103. Tape 7 January 1979, A2; log pp. 9-9B.

104. Tape 22 February 1979, A1; log p. 1B.

105. Ibid.

106. Tape 5 March 1979, A2; log p. 9.

107. Tape 15 March 1979, A1; log p. 2.

108. Tape 5 March 1979, B2; log pp. 8-8B.

109. Tape 24 April 1979, A1; log p. 1B.

110. Tape 21 June 1979, A1; log pp. 1-1B.

111. Tape SI-FP-WA-77-508, counter 981; transcript p. 12. The tape cited was recorded at the Working Americans section of the Smithsonian Institution's 1976 Festival of American Folklife, which was held in Washington, D.C., from 16 June to 8 September of that year. This citation reflects the manner in which it is logged and indexed in the archive of the Office of Folklife Programs, Smithsonian Institution.

The Centrality of Work Technique

1. Haas, "Learning Real Feelings," p. 155.
2. Bartlett, "Measurement of Human Skill," p. 91.
3. Ibid., p. 85.
4. Mace, "Analysis of Human Skills," p. 126.
5. Ibid., p. 130.
6. Ibid.
7. DCFFP tape 10-11 November 1979; log pp. 7-9B.
8. Bartlett, "Measurement of Human Skill," p. 91.
9. "Metro Train Derails, 3 Die." *The Washington Post,* 14 January 1982, p. A1.

Custom in the Workplace

1. Benedict, *Patterns of Culture,* p. 18.
2. Ibid.
3. Leach, "Ritualization," p. 337.
4. Tönnies, *Custom,* p. 15.
5. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual,* pp. 51-56.
6. Tape SI-FP-WA-77-503.17, counter 130, participant speaking: Bernie Thornberg, occupation: pipefitter. (See note 111.)
7. Roy, "Banana Time."
8. Hand, "California Miner's Folklore" and "The Folklore, Customs and Traditions"; Mullen, *I Heard the Old Fisherman Say.*
9. DCFFP tape, 21 March 1979; log p. 2B.
10. DCFFP tape, 25 March 1979, pp. 6-7B.
11. DCFFP tape, 24 February 1979; log pp. 3-4.
12. DCFFP tape, 25 March 1979; log p. 1B.
13. DCFFP tape, 31 October 1978; log p. 1.
14. McCarl, *Good Fire/Bad Night,* pp. 16-19.
15. DCFFP field notebook II, 14 March 1979.

16. DCFFP field notebook I, 12 December 1978.
17. Leach, "Ritualization," p. 337.
18. Tönnies, *Custom,* p. 15.

The Spoken, Shouted, and Remembered Word

1. DCFFP field notebook I, 14 December 1979.
2. DCFFP tape, 10–11 November 1979; log pp. 8-10.
3. DCFFP field notebook II, 4 March 1979.
4. Hymes, "Breakthrough into Performance," p. 18.
5. Ibid.
6. Fernandez, "Persuasions and Performances," p. 47.
7. DCFFP tape, 18 November 1978; log pp. 1-2B.
8. See note 93 of *Good Fire/Bad Night.*
9. DCFFP tape, 5 March 1979, A1; log pp. 1-1B.
10. Robinson, "Personal Narratives Reconsidered," pp. 68-69.
11. Pentikainen, "Belief, Memorate and Legend," p. 232.
12. Labov, *Language in the Inner City,* p. 363.
13. Leach, "Ritualization," p. 337.
14. Bartlett, "Measurement of Human Skill," pp. 31-33.
15. Robinson, "Personal Narratives Reconsidered," p. 61.

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