

THE POULSBO FIRE DEPARTMENT

A Brief Written History

The Early Days

Poulsbo is a small community located on the shores of Liberty Bay, formerly known as Dog Fish Bay. The settlement grew from a few settlers living close to the shores of the bay in the 1880s into the small, modern city it is today. Over the years, the need for fire protection was one of the foremost concerns of these frontier settlers. Poulsbo was served by one or more steamship companies after the turn of the century and all supplies had to come via this route, primarily from Seattle. Telephone service as we know it today did not exist then and the only method for communicating with the "outside world" was by U.S. Mail. With this level of isolation, the question of protection for the residents from disasters, especially fire, became one that had to be solved locally. As far as fire protection was concerned, there wasn't any outside help available within the time required to extinguish a blaze soon enough to save either the contents of a structure or the structure itself, be it a house, barn, store, or wharf. Hence, the issue of fire protection fell entirely on the small community.

From the earliest times, each home kept a barrel or tub of water outside, ready for use, i.e. washing dishes or clothes, water for the few animals kept around a small farm or for use in case a fire should break out. In the more densely developed areas such as where the cluster of stores were located on Front Street, the fire underwriters either required or strongly recommended there be an available supply of water tanks and buckets. These buckets were very special, made of galvanized iron and of a size to hold about three gallons of water. One very special feature was the bottom of the bucket was rounded so that if the bucket were set down, it would tip or fall over. Hence, these buckets could not be used for purposes other than firefighting. Many buildings had a collection of wood barrels located on the roof and each barrel had a bucket hanging on the outside.

As the small community grew, the need for fire protection from the terrible destruction of a conflagration induced the merchants to form an association for the benefit of each other. There wasn't a formal fire department established in Poulsbo until 1936, however, prior to that date an effective team was available in case of emergency.

The Early 1900s

During the early days of this century, that is after 1900, a water supply system was constructed by Mr. Jorgen Eliason consisting of a collection basin on the hill and a 6-inch wood stave pipe to First Street (now Front Street) serving all of the stores and a few residences. By 1918, the date of the first available report on the Poulsbo fire protection by the Washington Surveying and Rating Bureau, there were 6-inch mains throughout the main business district, and either 4-inch or 6-inch mains in the more densely populated residential areas. The mains were supplied from a spring about 3/4 of a mile away. A 74,000 gallon storage tank located on top of the hill near the old Ebenezer Rest Home provided 68 pounds per square inch static pressure under normal conditions although this was reduced to only 37 pounds under a heavy flow of 427 gallons per minute. This system allowed most businesses and residences in the areas covered by City water mains to have garden hoses for lawn watering and fire protection if needed.

Still, there wasn't a formal department organization. An alarm system had not yet been installed. The men of town responded to the call of "FIRE" and ran either to the fire or to the hose cart shed. Mel Borge was in charge of what fire equipment they had and this was stored in a wood shed on the water side of First Street, across from his store and near the present

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site of "The Brothers Store". The meager tools consisted of a hand drawn two wheel cart with 850 feet of 2-1/2" single jacket rubber lined cotton hose (of which up to 500 feet was normally kept on the cart).

Also on the cart were a few hand tools consisting of fire axes, a shovel, and a 35 gallon tank of water fitted so that if up-ended it would dump hydrochloric acid into the water which already had bicarbonate of soda dissolved in it. The chemical action produced carbon dioxide gas, creating pressure so that a good stream of water would jet from the attached hose. If the fire were on the hillside above First Street, the hose cart with water tank was hitched behind a car and towed up the hill, being too heavy for the men to pull over the rough gravel roads and up the steep grades. The cart's wooden wheels were at least four feet high and had two inch wide steel tires. It was also noted in this first underwriter's report that the storage shed was kept locked and when needed Mel Borge had to be found, as he had the only key. Furthermore, the tank was not protected from freezing during cold winter weather.

In 1914, a disastrous fire broke out on the east or away-from-the-water-side of First Street. The bucket brigade was unable to quell the blaze and the Seattle fire boat was summoned for assistance, there now being a telephone line to Seattle. All available resources were brought into play. The steamer HYAK had arrived from Seattle on the scheduled daily evening run, arriving at Poulsbo by approximately 6:45 p.m. Fortunately, it was high tide and Captain Hostmark brought the vessel in as close to shore as the tide would allow, tying up at Eliason's dock. The HYAK's pumps were started and hose was strung across the street to the blaze. The conflagration was brought under control before the Seattle fire boat arrived. The damage: every building on the east side of the street was destroyed for a distance of about one block, including the Olympic Hotel and Boyd's Drug Store. As the fire spread south, it consumed every building in its path, but was finally stopped before Mr. E. J. Eliason's building, presently the Warren G. Harding Lodge, as there was an empty lot adjacent to this structure. "The fire did not cross the empty space. On the north end, the fire was stopped near the present site of Sluy's Bakery. Between was total destruction; however the courageous men had saved the remainder of the town.

As time went on, more equipment was acquired, but the underwriter's reports indicate there was usually a considerable deficiency in quality of fire hose. This was before the days of nylon and other synthetic fabrics or butyl, the substitute for rubber. Consequently, the cotton fabric would rot in a short time and the rubber lining of the hose had a very limited life. Additionally, the firefighters did not even have a hose tower to hang and dry the hose after it was used at a fire or during a drill. Because there was not a formal fire department, there was likewise not a readily available source of funds, so- the men of the volunteer fire department started an annual Firemen's Ball and the funds collected there, plus donations by the local merchants, were the only monies available to purchase needed equipment.

Another fire of great importance to Poulsbo occurred on a sunny day during the summer of 1934 at the Pacific Coast Codfish Company plan the present location of the Liberty Bay Marina. A fire had been started in the heating stove in the main packing room to burn up trash,

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old papers and a few cartons. A chimney fire soon developed and a second floor fire started from paper cartons piled too close to the chimney. The flames erupted from an opening for another stove in the chimney on the second floor. It was daytime and the firefighters responded, formed a bucket brigade, and passed the round bottom fire buckets filled with water from the elevated storage tank and Liberty Bay, past one man after another until at the end of the line next to the fire on the roof Bjarne Rindal threw the water from each bucket onto the blaze. The fire was extinguished and the fish packing plant was saved. There was considerable damage to cardboard cartons and some of the interior of the building, but the plant was saved and, with it, the winter jobs for 30 to 40 persons. The volunteers had come through again. It must be remembered that the City limits of Poulsbo did not extend this far and there were no fire mains, only a small private water supply for the fish plant.

At about this time, another fire occurred in the building on the corner of Hostmark and Fjord, the building where Mr. Mike Alvarado now has his home and office. The building was no different in outside appearance then when it had been a funeral parlor at times and it also included two apartments. It had belonged to Leif Ness and was sold to Elmer Borgan, a storekeeper. He was in the process of remodeling it when fire broke out. Again, the bucket brigade did the task and, as always, Bjarne Rindal was on the roof throwing each bucket of water.

Poulsbo had its share of fires. There was no routine inspection of the town by the men, only the primary inspection being conducted by the underwriters in the high risk areas and the outlying fish plant. The present site of the Martha and Mary Nursing Home was formerly a children's home run by the Lutheran Churches. A fire of considerable intensity broke out there about 1926 or 1927 and destroyed the main building. The enthusiastic volunteers were unable to save the structure. It must be recognized that at this time Poulsbo did not have a fire engine, therefore hoses fed from the town water mains and the well-known bucket • brigade were the only available means of extinguishment. With only 68 psi available on First Street, this building being at a higher elevation had considerably less pressure. Further, when the large 2-1/2" hoses were opened up, the pressure fell even lower and often water pressure was not adequate to squirt a hose stream over the roof.

During the early 1930s, a major improvement was the installation of a fire alarm siren or horn on First Street (now Front Street). It was located at various places including on the roof of Iverson's Butcher Shop (presently the gift card store adjacent to Poulsbo Drug Store), on top of a utility pole near the present location of the Senior Citizen's Lounge, and finally on top of City Hall. With this alarm, a person could call the telephone operator 24 hours a day to report a fire. The operator slept in the office and would awake should a call come in at night. There was an extra charge for these late night calls, however. She would turn the alarm on and the men would come running from their homes at night or during the day from every store in town. Poulsbo Fire Department is Formally Organized

The year 1936 saw the beginning of a new formally organized Poulsbo Fire Department. Mr. Selmer H. Myreboe was the mayor and he appointed Mr. Rudie M. Iverson as the first Fire

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Chief. The new Department was now official and had a status of its own, a great advance from the former, strictly voluntary group of men not backed by a city government.

One of the first actions was the purchase of a pumper truck, an extremely needed item if the Department were to be able to respond to fires beyond the limits of the City or higher on the hillside than the low water pressure could supply a fire hose. The City of Portland had a used 1918 American La France fire truck that was no longer adequate for their needs. This was purchased by Poulsbo and converted or modernized to fit the needs of the rural community. This truck was right hand drive with an open seat for driver and one other person. It had a large six cylinder engine consisting of three, two cylinder blocks, dual ignition, a large bell behind the driver's seat, electric starter, 24 foot extension ladder, 12 foot roof ladder, 115 gallon water tank, 800 feet of 2-1/2" hose, 400 feet of 1-1/2" hose, 200 feet of 3/4" booster hose, and 150 feet of 3/4" garden hose, as shown by the 1937 Underwriter's report. The engine had been overhauled and the brakes placed in first class condition. Additionally, the original solid rubber tires had been removed and a new set of wheels installed with pneumatic tires of considerably larger diameter than the former ones, necessitating modifications to the fenders. However, the rear wheels were still of the single tire type, the idea of dual rear wheels had not progressed to remodeled fire trucks. This engine had chain drive as did all trucks of that vintage, with brakes on the rear wheels only. The overhaul allowed the truck, formerly a 750 gallon per minute pumper, to qualify at 500 gallons per minute with 100 pounds pressure. With this new truck, Poulsbo for the first time was able to respond to rural fires.

A new fire station was constructed to house this equipment near where the present Senior Citizen's Lounge is located. The truck had cost about \$300 in Portland originally, but with the overhaul and conversions (to pneumatic tires), the cost had risen to about \$700. The engine was quite powerful and enabled the truck to pull most of the hills without shifting. Even the steep grade up Finn Hill could be made in high gear. The men of the Department were very proud of this newly acquired truck and, with the addition of the rural areas outside the City limits, the number of volunteers increased. To be a fireman in Poulsbo was a great honor. The new truck also had special problems. At one time a cam shaft in the engine broke. The American LaFrance Company did not have a replacement and without this part, the engine would not run. Chief Corning of the City of Seattle Fire Department came to the rescue and donated a cam shaft from their stock of parts removed from old trucks. Another problem was the chain drive. This was the weak link for a rural fire truck. The chain that drove each rear wheel was totally exposed. This was no great problem in a city such as Portland where all the streets were paved and accordingly reasonably clean. Not so for Poulsbo Most of the roads outside of town were of Macadam construction, that is, graded and covered with gravel. There was terrific dust and the lubrication oil on the exposed chain collected this abrasive material thus causing excessive wear on the chain. More than once during a run to a rural fire, the chain on one side or the other would break. The Poulsbo crew was up to this and carried a chain patching kit on the truck even including entire spare chains.

Leif Ness was the regular driver of the truck, as he operated the delivery truck for the Rindal and Ness Feed Store and knew where everyone in the north end of the County lived. He has

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recounted how on one run to Sandy Hook, while racing along through Lemolo, he had to apply the brakes on a down grade. The brakes locked and he lost steering, but being on the curve at Brauer Road, he continued straight ahead and finally stopped. A little water was used from the truck tank, the brakes cooled off and they continued on. While on Sandy Hook Road and approaching the fire, the narrow high pressure tires bogged down. The men were up to this also and pulled the truck the last hundred yards to the fire and quickly extinguished it. The home was saved.

The year of 1936 also saw the beginning of other great improvements within the City of Poulsbo. A new system of water mains was undertaken, to be completed over several years. The former wood stave pipe was replaced and new iron pipe installed covering the enlarged city. This was also the beginning of more formal training of the firemen. Members attended fire conventions and schools. Certificates were obtained for proficiency by many of the men. By the 1937 inspection of the Washington Surveying and Rating Bureau, the rating classification had been upgraded from Class 8 to Class 7. This new classification brought lowered insurance rates within the City.

The American LaFrance pumper truck served the City of Poulsbo Fire Department well. Roads were continuously being improved and, while mainly gravel surface without paving, the Poulsbo crew was still able to extend their area of coverage. One year there was a forest fire on the outskirts of Port Gamble heading toward the town and mill. The Poulsbo crew was summoned, responded, and extinguished the fire before it destroyed the town. Only two buildings were scorched. The engine had been pumping water for four hours steady!

Each fire engine had to pass a pumping test every year as proof of its capability. This was generally conducted by driving the truck to a location near where the Little Valley Nursery is now located. One end of the hard suction hose was connected to the pump and the other end submerged in the pool of the creek where clear, sand-free water could be freely drawn. The flow rate or pump discharge quantity was metered through a calibrated orifice, and the engine speed adjusted so an output in excess of the required amount and slightly above the test pressure was continuously delivered for a minimum time of four hours. During this time there could be no stopping for anything or the test would not be approved. One year during the test, one of the engine valves stuck and before the engine had time to stall or lose pressure, Leif Ness removed the valve cover and got the stuck valve working.

The engine of this behemoth required considerable time and attention in the repair shop. Ole Berg's auto repair garage was the place and, should the fire truck be in his garage when the alarm sounded, he would mount to the driver's seat, start the roaring engine and drive down First Street. The firemen would hear the deafening exhaust noise echoing from the building and as the truck passed, each would make a flying jump and grab hold of something, get his feet on the running board, and go off to the fire. If the run was out of town, they might stop in front of the station to allow a change of drivers and the men to get a better location on the truck.

These were happy years for the men in the Fire Department. Every year they held the spring Firemen's Ball, the largest dance event of the year. Also, in early December on a Saturday morning, the men would take one or two large trucks out into the woods and fill them with evergreen boughs. Sunday was the big day! Right after breakfast everyone would gather in a vacant lot along First Street. Naturally every wife and all the children came for the day of fun. Someone would have procured heavy wire and lengths of these were set up on saw horses and the evergreens were trimmed and secured to the wire to make garlands of green that were then carried down the street and stretched from building top to building top on the opposite side of the street. Colored lights were attached and the electric power wires going to various buildings were tapped ahead of the meter, lighting all of the lamps. The town was dressed for the holiday season, there being 12 to 15 of these evergreen garlands stretching across the street. The project took all day, after which all returned home to clean up and change clothes and at the appointed hour enjoy a- sumptuous dinner in a local restaurant. The festivities and fun were part of what made being a fireman a great joy. This dressing of the town for the holiday season continued until sometime in the 1960s when the merchants hired a commercial firm to do the work, much to the disappointment of the firemen.

The 1940s and & Period of War

The 1918 American LaFrance fire engine continued to service the City of Poulsbo as the only pumping unit (with a splendid record) until 1940, when a brand new truck was ordered. This was a 1941 Ford equipped with a 95 HP Mercury engine and fitted with a 500 gallon per minute American LaFrance pumping unit, plus a 200 gallon water tank, 150 feet 'of booster hose, aluminum ladders, 650 feet of 2-1/2" hose and 200 feet of 1-1/2" hose in the hose bed, (4) 5-gallon backpack-type canister hand pumps, 10 hard helmets, a first aid kit, and many other items, making this unit strictly up to date. The driver's seat was on the left, as is the custom in all American highway vehicles; however it had an open cab without a roof over the driver or assistant riding with him up front. A new fire hall had been constructed at the present location of City Hall including two truck bays and a hose drying tower. Construction was of reinforced concrete and a most welcome home for the Fire Department. By this time there had been accumulated considerable additional fire hose, all tested and approved to 250 psi and in sufficient quantity that all wet hose returned from a fire could be hung in the tower to dry and the truck hose bed reloaded with fresh dry hose. No longer was wet hose kept on the truck. Also, additional water storage tanks had been added in the city and water mains were extended.

The tranquil days of the late 1930s, especially 1938 and 1939, were happy as the great Depression that began in 1929 and extended until about 1935 came to an end; unemployment was a thing of the past. Then, in September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and World War II began. When intense fighting began in Europe and the Mediterranean, activity at the Naval Stations at Keyport and Bremerton was greatly intensified. Kitsap County experienced an enormous influx of people working at these facilities. Day by day there was news of the war, but it was in Europe and Kitsap residents felt safe. The U.S. Navy purchased a large tract of land on Hood Canal to develop into a new ammunition depot on the west side of Clear Creek Road, the facility now known locally as Subase Bangor. The hot breath of war was inching a

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little closer to home month by month. Late in the summer of 1940, the huge British battleship WARSPITE limped into Puget Sound Naval Shipyard having been heavily damaged in the Mediterranean near the island of Crete. Now we could see first-hand some of the destruction of war. Then, on December 7, 1941, a day recorded by President Roosevelt as "a day of infamy", the Japanese Navy airplanes bombed Pearl Harbor; War was upon us and we in the distant northwest corner of the U.S. were possibly the next target!

A national program for home defense was organized and referred to as Civilian Defense. Under these overall auspices, the Poulsbo Fire Department undertook a program of local instruction. The former meetings of the men of the Department had been held monthly but now were increased to weekly and in some cases to twice weekly. Local area first aid stations were set-up and many civilian defense drills were held to include the public. The threat of aerial bombs being dropped here or submarines entering Puget Sound and shelling the Naval facilities was on everyone's mind and people had to be prepared. The news media gave graphic accounts of the destruction being experienced in London and throughout Europe. First aid schools were set-up under the direction of the Poulsbo Fire Department with Leif Ness as the head and classes were held at the local schools, grange halls, fraternal lodges, and wherever necessary. A huge air raid alarm horn had been installed in the center of Poulsbo to alert the people in the event of an air raid. Air raid lookout stations were established on the tops of the surrounding hills and these were manned 24 hours a day, although not by the Fire Department. Additionally, a night patrol with a deputized armed guard stood watch each night at the telephone building to prevent sabotage.

These changes did not all occur overnight but over a considerable period of time. The Poulsbo Fire Department acquired additional equipment as funding became available. The official membership had increased from thirteen in 1937 to fifteen in 1943. However, there were many non-members that responded to fire calls when the alarm sounded.

In 1943 it became apparent that one fire truck was insufficient. New fire trucks could not be purchased, as the automobile and truck factories were working overtime producing war materials. To meet the need, a used 1937 Ford truck rated at 1-1/2 tons was purchased. Also a 500-gallon portable pump built by the Chrysler Company had been obtained from the Office of Civilian Defense. These were taken to George Knudson's garage and the Fire Department members worked many nights installing the pump on the truck, constructing a hose bed and salvaging what other items they could from the old 1918 American LaFrance engine that was now retired. This gave the Department two trucks equipped with dual rear wheels and four-wheel brakes that could respond to a fire either in the City or outside. Still, the entire department manning was made up of volunteers, responding to the loud fire alarm horn. No one remained at the station overnight but still the first truck was rolling onto the street usually within three minutes after the alarm sounded during the night, and in less time during the day.

The war ended in August of 1945 and the area returned to more quiet conditions. Employment in the Naval stations was drastically reduced and many people left Poulsbo and the vicinity.

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The City had grown tremendously during this first half of the 1940's and the last half saw extended City limits. There was now a system of fire alarm pull boxes located throughout the City so that an alarm could be activated from any of these. The water main system had been improved and extended and by 1951 there were 51 fire hydrants in the City. The water storage and supply had been increased so that a test during the 1951 inspection indicated a flow of 860 gpm could be obtained and still have 60 pounds pressure in the mains on First Street; or a flow of 2600 gpm with 20 pounds in the mains. Further, the number of registered volunteers in 1951 was 31.

During this decade one incidence is worthy of mention. Sometime between 1943 and 1945, a fire broke out in the high school/grade school in Silverdale. Help was requested and Poulsbo responded with the open cab 1941 Ford truck. On arrival, Chief Rudie Iverson asked the Silverdale Fire Chief where they were needed. He replied "Get us water"; there was not enough available from the hydrant. Silverdale had attempted to draw water from the creek but had sucked sand and gravel into the pump until it failed. The boys from Poulsbo took the tarpaulin from the cover of the hose bed and, with the ladders and pike pole stretched across and the tarpaulin laid in the creek with one end supported by the ladders and pole, a dam and pool was made. The draft hose from the truck was lowered into this pond and clean, sand-free water was obtained. The crew laid all of the available 2-1/2" hose from the creek to the Silverdale pumper truck and with this water the school building was saved. Ingenuity had paid off.

During this decade, i.e. 1940-50, an ambulance service was established in Poulsbo by the American Legion, starting service in 1948 with a 1942 Ford panel delivery truck, somewhat akin to a station wagon without side windows. The crew was trained only in first aid and/or how to place a splint over a broken bone and then transport the patient to the Bremerton hospital.

From 1950 to 1960

In 1950, the Poulsbo Fire Department was able to purchase a more modern fire engine in the form of a closed cab 1951 Ford with dual rear tires and fitted with an American LaFrance fire unit consisting of a 500 gallon per minute pump, 500 gallon water tank, 1000 feet of 2-1/2" hose, 200 feet of 1-1/2" hose, a booster hose reel with 300 feet of 3/4" hose, 20 feet of hard suction hose, and many other items. This unit was placed in service early in 1951. The 1918 American LaFrance pumper had been disposed of with some parts and equipment going onto the reconstructed 1937 Ford, and this in turn had been placed in reserve. Furthermore, the 1941 open cab Ford had been sold. There were by then 25 fire alarm call boxes, 23 of which were on five circuits and the other two had individual circuits. These had performed fine except during the Halloween season when it became necessary for a few days to de-activate all call boxes due to the rash of false alarms. W.E. "Crackers" Kobelin was the Chief of Police with Stephen Billings affectionately known as "Jersey", as assistant along with one patrolman. Thus the City of Poulsbo then had a night watch. By 1951, Poulsbo had also been elevated to Class 5 by the Washington Surveying and Rating Bureau, the first all volunteer department in the State of Washington to be so rated. This made a considerable reduction in fire insurance rates for those living within the City.

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The following decade, 1950-60, was a period of steady growth, improvement of facilities and equipment, as well as increased membership. Rudie Iverson remained as Chief and Clarence Paulson, the Public Works Superintendent of Poulsbo and Assistant Chief was responsible for the maintenance of all of the equipment. Volunteers came and went with a very stable nucleus group, mostly men with at least 20 years service with the Department, including Chief Rudie Iverson, Clarence Paulson, Selmer Myreboe, Leif Ness, Bjarne Rindal, Martin Anderson, Ole Serwold, and several more recent acquisitions including Charlie Olson who later became Chief, Glen Haskins, George Knudson, Jimmy Johnson, and others.

A used oil tank truck was acquired and served well to carry up to 750 gallons of water to a fire. It did not have a high pressure pump but was used merely to re-supply the water in the tank on the engine pumper when no hydrant was available. At times this truck would travel several miles between the fire site and the water supply from a City hydrant or a creek.

The City of Poulsbo continued to grow and the corporate limits were extended here and there as new areas were annexed. Water mains were extended and improved, new housing was constructed, the first phase of Anderson Parkway was undertaken by dredging material from the harbor in front of the downtown area and filling in adjacent to the shore line, thus extending the dry land into the former harbor area. The Port of Poulsbo expanded and added additional moorage space. New and replacement buildings were constructed in the downtown area in compliance with up-to-date fire codes and non-combustible fire walls to prevent fire from one structure escaping to the adjoining one. Also, Highway 305 was constructed, thus relieving First Avenue in Poulsbo of through traffic and creating a main thoroughfare for vehicles traveling from Suquamish and Bainbride Island to Bremerton and the Olympic Peninsula.

This new highway also provided a better route for fire equipment traveling to rural locations. A very spectacular fire, one of the few in downtown Poulsbo, occurred near midnight on a Saturday in August of 1957. A fire broke out in the Johnson Drywall Company store on the east side of First Avenue. It was first noted by Mrs. Lois Hood who lived in the apartment over the store, being awakened by her dog. She called the telephone operator who activated the alarm siren on top of City Hall and the volunteers immediately responded. All of the available equipment in Poulsbo was put to work. Hoses were strung from one end of the street to the other to utilize as many hydrants as possible. Most hoses were connected directly to the hydrant and the pressure was sufficiently high. They did not use the engine pump for additional pressure, other than some high pressure hoses and nozzles used for fog. Flames were leaping from the store front through openings where the glass windows had been. The light from the fire illuminated the entire area. The heat was terrific, the fire being fed by paint cans that had exploded and several barrels of paint solvent.

The well trained Poulsbo team knew their ropes and finally extinguished the blaze without allowing any adjacent structures to become engulfed. Even the restaurant adjoining the paint store in the same building was able to open for business the next morning. The damage to the building was extensive however and it was not repaired, but rather was later demolished. During the conflagration, there were so many fire hose streams being directed into the paint

store that cans of paint and other products were flushed right off of the shelves carried out into the street by the outflow of water.

By 1960, Chief Rudie Iverson, who had served in that capacity for 24 years since the official and formal organization of the Department in 1936, stepped down and the Mayor of Poulsbo appointed Clarence Paulson to be the new Chief. Clarence was well qualified, having been a fireman for many years and additionally he was the Public Works Superintendent for the City.

The Decade from 1960 to 1970

This was a period of great expansion and change within the Department. First, in May 1960, a brand new American LaFrance advanced model pumper/engine fire truck built from the ground up was ordered having a 1000 gallon per minute rated pump. The truck was constructed in Elmira, New York and in order to save costs of delivery and also to provide a pleasurable trip to two long time members. Chief Rudie Iverson and Leif Ness flew to the east coast taking their wives along. The drive across country with the new fire truck was a wonderful sightseeing journey all the way, although sitting four wide in the cab was slightly crowded. No undue events or breakdowns occurred. However, one morning the troupe was getting into the cab for an early start from a motel at about 5:00 a.m. On entering the cab, one of the ladies accidentally stepped on the floor button, setting off the siren. It was not long before every motel door was open with people flocking out in night clothes expecting to see a fire and not happy to be awakened so early. The fire truck quickly departed with the driver hiding his face from the on-lookers.

This new truck was a great addition. It was paid for by the City of Poulsbo and therefore was reserved for fire calls within the City limits. The older 1951 Ford pumper truck was used for all out of Poulsbo calls and as a secondary unit within the City. Both trucks would therefore respond within the City limits with two crews working to extinguish the fire, but using only the equipment on the larger truck, the smaller Ford being held in readiness should there be a need to answer another call.

By 1960, the need for an organized fire district outside the City limits was seen. The cost of the equipment required to properly cover the area both in and out of the City was more than the tax base of the City of Poulsbo and the donations from the annual Firemen's Ball could support. Tax money from outside the City limits was necessary if the commitment to properly protect this area was to be fulfilled. Rudie Iverson, together with Charlie Olson, Martin Anderson, and others began holding a series of meetings in the grange halls, fraternal halls, and churches to acquaint the residents of the desirability of forming fire protection districts that could elect fire commissioners and levy taxes for fire protection purposes. Accordingly, in 1961, Fire District 17 in Lemolo was formed and immediately contracted with Poulsbo for fire protection. The next year, 1962, Fire District 18 was formed, comprising most of the area north of Poulsbo (but not the town limits of Port Gamble), east to Suquamish, and on the west side from Keyport north and west to Hood Canal except for the Navy Base at Bangor.

With this additional tax base, District 18 was able to purchase a new Ford truck fitted with a

1,000 gallon per minute Curtis pump. Then, in 1965, a Boardman 1,200 gallon tanker was purchased on a Ford truck chassis.

As the number of people living in and around Poulsbo increased, so did the capability of the Fire Department. The men within the Department were taking greater pride in their duties and many were attending firefighter's schools as well as classes taught at the regular Monday night meetings. The Chief and others were attending schooling for fire chiefs and directors. With all the additional rolling stock, it was determined that a new and enlarged station was required in Poulsbo. Fire Commissioners Vince Prouty, Jack Oas, and Nick Lakeness acting for District 18 together with the City Council of Poulsbo signed an agreement and the new quarters were constructed adjacent to the former. The work was accomplished without need for a special or additional tax levy.

More people continued to move into the north end of the County and were constructing much larger and higher value homes. Quicker response in the north was indicated. A site at Surfrest Park for a new station was selected but it was not completed and operational until 1971. By this time the Poulsbo Fire Department was comprised of two fire-proof construction stations/ one in downtown Poulsbo and one at Surfrest Park, three engine pumper trucks each with 500 to 1000 gallons of water in tanks, and one tank truck with 1200 gallon capacity.

The Decade of 1970 to 1980

The changes occurring during this time period were far too many to enumerate. The continued rapid expansion of the northern portion of Kitsap County was occurring, especially due to the U.S. Navy construction of the ultra modern Trident submarine base. This Naval facility was the largest shore construction project for the Navy during this period of time any place in the U.S. The local impact was terrific. The Navy had prepared a very extensive Environmental Impact Statement as required by Federal law. Accordingly, the Navy lessened the financial impact on the community by providing extensive funding to local governmental agencies, so they could provide the necessary local support facilities. These included public schools, State and County roads, Poulsbo and Silverdale Fire Departments, and other agencies.

Growth within the greater Poulsbo area as well as Central Kitsap in and around Silverdale continued. New houses were being constructed and additional business structures were springing up. The area of Poulsbo along Highway 305 experienced many new stores. The Poulsbo school system had expanded with construction of additional buildings on the hill behind the City, including a new elementary school on Noll Road, a new middle school and community center on Serwold Road. All of these additional buildings in the Poulsbo area required fire protection. The scope of the fire and medical aid requirements were exceeding the capacity of the existing Poulsbo Fire Department which was composed entirely of volunteers. Medical aid was furnished by the American Legion Ambulance up until 1975 when the duty was taken over by Poulsbo Fire Department and the fulfillment of this additional service taxed the volunteers to the limit.

In the later part of this decade, the decision was made to change from an all volunteer

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department to one with a full-time paid fire chief as well as full-time paid medical crews for the ambulance. (See the special section on Medical Aid for details of that function.) The first step in implementing this new concept was the hiring of Larry Dibble as full-time paid Fire Chief, reporting for duty on September 10, 1979, when former Fire Chief Charlie Olson stepped down. The advanced medical aid concept was authorized but was not implemented and in operation with licensed paramedics until 1980, the ambulances being operated by qualified EMTs up until then.

Additionally, during this decade, the decision was made to construct a second satellite or outlying fire station, this one on Clear Creek Road slightly north of the intersection with Finn Hill Road. Both this station and the other satellite at Surfrest Park, made possible quicker response to the scene of a fire or accident. Volunteers did not have to drive all the way into the Poulsbo main station and then back out again on a fire vehicle, but rather could now respond to a closer station and drive the fire engine from there to the scene.

A considerable portion of the available Federal monies from the Navy Trident impact account was utilized to purchase additional equipment, including new and more powerful fire trucks, several medical unit type ambulances, additional tank trucks, a special rescue truck complete with tools to cut a vehicle open when necessary to extricate an injured person, and much more.

The former loud siren on the top of City Hall had been removed and a new County-wide command network known as CenCom (Central Communications) was established. Each fireman, either paid or volunteer was issued an alerting receiver and these were fitted with a special device whereby CenCom sending an alarm to Poulsbo would only alert the Poulsbo crews while other districts on the same radio frequency did not hear the call. Concurrently, the nationally accepted call number of "911" was established whereby a person anywhere in the county desiring to call for assistance would dial these three numbers, the operator would answer and, based on the need, dispatch the necessary emergency units.

The 1980s through Today

This was generally speaking a period of consolidation and strengthening of forces. Considerable additional equipment was purchased and added to that existing on all of the various units of the Department. This included better radios, additional two-way hand held radios for the officers, special tools, an inflatable boat with outboard motor that could be carried on top of the rescue truck, larger (4,000 watt) engine/generator plants on the trucks to operate smoke fans and scene illumination, high pressure air tanks for breathing gear in smoke-filled buildings, to name a few. The load of equipment tucked into the various compartments of each truck is fantastic, but when needed is available.

In 1984 Poulsbo had a department consisting of a paid fire chief, assistant chief, fire marshal, paramedics, firefighter, secretary and a considerable volunteer crew of firemen. With this expanded staff and the new equipment purchased, the Washington Surveying and Rating Bureau considered Poulsbo in far better condition relative to fire protection, but still not

sufficiently improved to warrant a change from Class 5 to Class 4.

In 1985, Chief Larry Dibble left the Department to return to Olympia and Jim Shields was appointed by the City of Poulsbo and Fire Districts 17 and 18 as the new Chief. The budgets had been increased until in 1986 the Department consisted of the paid Chief, Jim Shields, one Assistant Chief, Bob Lord, in charge of support services which includes the medical units (he is also a paramedic), three Paramedics, Chris Morrison, George Epperly, and Jeff Cowan, one Lieutenant/ Firefighter, Mike Walsh, and two Firefighter/EMTs, Steve Behal and Bob Brooks to complete the medical portion of the force. Additionally, one Fire Marshal, Bob Nordnes, who conducts site plan reviews on new construction and heads the Fire Prevention Bureau, one Fire Inspector, Jerry Cooper, one Firefighter/Mechanic, Eric Quitslund in charge of vehicle maintenance as well as being on call during the days to respond to fire calls, and a secretary, Karen Lord. There are also about 50 volunteers. The organization is now such that the daytime calls are answered by the on-duty medical crew of one paramedic and one firefighter/EMT driving the medic unit. The Assistant Chief, Fire Marshal, Fire Inspector, Firefighter/Mechanic and available volunteers respond with the fire engine or rescue unit. Additional equipment, if required, is manned by volunteers. During the nights and weekends when the paid firefighters are not on duty, the paid medic crew responds with the medic unit and the fire trucks are manned by the volunteers. The paid personnel all work out of the main station in downtown Poulsbo. The two satellite stations are manned by volunteers at all times.

In 1986, the list of rolling stock consists of: Station 71 in downtown Poulsbo: (2) medic vehicles, each fully equipped and capable of transporting up to four patients; (2) 1,500 gallon per minute pumper engines with full hose bed load and other equipment; (1) 1,600 gallon tank truck to haul water to a fire; (1) rescue vehicle fitted with a multitude of equipment and extrication tools, portable pumps, and inflatable boat suitable for marine rescue. Further, there are staff cars consisting of the Chief's command car; Assistant Chief's medical command car with some medical equipment; Fire Marshal's car with investigative equipment; Fire Inspector's car, and one utility vehicle.

Station 72 at Surfrest Park: (1) fire engine of 1,250 gallon per minute capacity and 500 gallon water tank; and (1) 1600 gallon water tanker truck. Station 2 has two vehicle bays, a small kitchen, day room and two bedrooms.

Station 73 on Clear Creek: (1) 1,000 gallon per minute fire engine or pumper, and one 1,250 gallon tanker. Station 3 has three vehicle bays, small office and restroom.

Kitsap County Fire District #3: A third medic unit operated cooperatively with Fire District 3 (Keyport) is also available for medical calls and as a transport vehicle for non-life threatening medical incidents.

The Poulsbo Fire Department receives most of the alerts through CenCom via radio except for an occasional case when a citizen calls the station to report a fire or medical emergency, or where a patient is brought to the Poulsbo station for aid. By pre-arrangement, when CenCom receives an emergency call they alert stations and vehicles appropriate to the type of incident.

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An auto accident usually is answered by the medic unit, rescue unit, a command unit, and one fire engine. Depending on the location of the accident, the aid unit stationed in Keyport may also be dispatched. In the case of a small brush fire, the dispatcher at CenCom would notify Station 1 and the closest outlying station. However, should there be a reported structure fire, such as a house, school, or commercial structure, the dispatcher would notify all three stations for response. It is at times like this and during the nights and weekends that the list of volunteers is called and performs a most necessary community service. Without these volunteers the Poulsbo Fire Department, including District 18 outside Poulsbo, would require full-time fire personnel on the pay roll, a cost that cannot be funded.

In 1988 a joint operating agreement was signed by the now consolidated Board of Commissioners and the Poulsbo City Council to fund the department 50/50; although the paid staff would be city employees, responders were responsible for both the city and the district. Over the next few years more firefighters and paramedics were hired in addition to two more administrative support personnel. By 1997, there were three shifts of six, with minimum staffing of four per shift, each shift having a captain and two paramedics and four firefighter/EMTs. The department had now been converted from a few paid staff augmenting the volunteers to a few volunteers augmenting the paid staff.

In 1998 serious talks began regarding annexing the City of Poulsbo into Kitsap County Fire District #18. By this time the City of Poulsbo was ready to retire from the business of fire and the fire department was ready to be managed by one entity, not two. The balancing act had become increasingly difficult and both sides agreed it was far better for the citizens if the district took over the department. A campaign was launched and in November 1999, 86 percent of the City of Poulsbo citizens as well as 86 percent of the KCFD #18 citizens voted "YES!" to annexation. As soon as the election was certified, all the equipment converted over to district ownership, as did the headquarters station. In January of 2000, the employees of the department became, for the first time in its history, solely district employees.

The history of Poulsbo Fire Department is long and colorful. As we continue into the future, every one of us will continue to carry out our responsibilities with pride and the level of professionalism the citizens of Poulsbo and District #18 deserve.