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The Consolidation of the Jacksonville Fire Protection Division

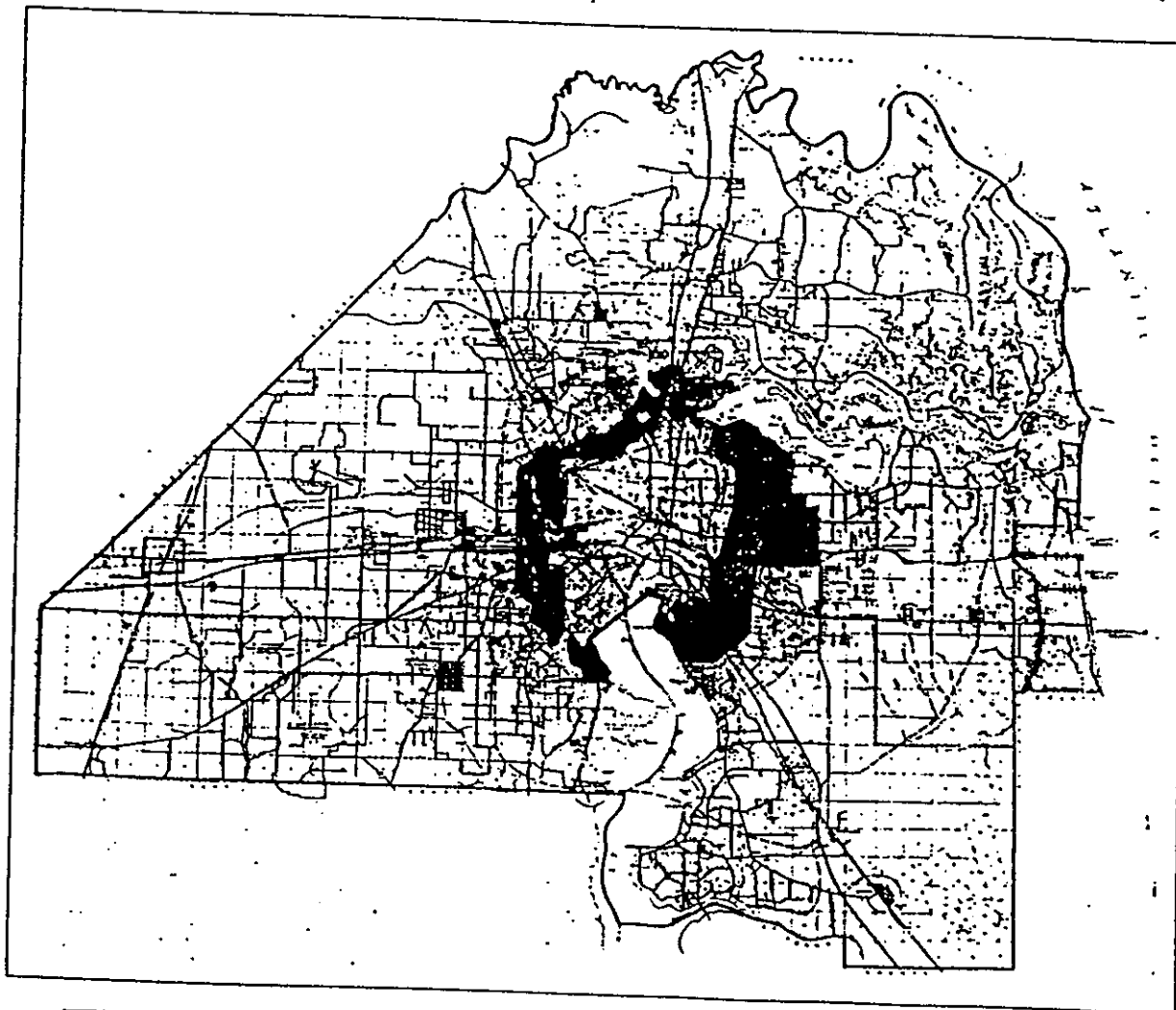
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SF-Consolidation-Regional

ON OCTOBER 1, 1968, THE CITY OF JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA, AND SURROUNDING DUVAL COUNTY were consolidated into one government unit and the old county government was abolished. It now appears that consolidation of cities and counties will mount steadily throughout the nation, because of the economy and the

increase in efficiency achieved by eliminating duplicating and overlapping levels of government. The experience of Jacksonville in merging the county and city fire units into one Consolidated Fire Protection Division in the Department of Public Safety may be useful to others who will face many of the same problems.

Map showing the consolidation of the City of Jacksonville and Duval County. Center area: former city limits; dark area: extension of professional services on the first day of consolidation; remaining area: former county area merged in February 1969. Scale: 1/2-inch equals four miles.



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THE LARGEST of the Department's seven divisions, the Fire Protection Division is also the oldest. On Consolidation Day numbering only 495 paid men in the Urban Fire Department and 33 paid men and 325 volunteers in the County Department, the Consolidated Jacksonville Fire Division has in a year and a half expanded to 714 professional firemen and 350 volunteers. The greater part of the buildup has gone to provide better fire protection in the outlying former county areas.

Before consolidation Jacksonville had an excellent Fire Department with a Class Two rating. It was also a very expensive department. A study of 25 departments in 1964 showed Jacksonville's per capita fire protection cost to be \$16.10,¹ exceeded only by Worcester, Massachusetts, and Providence, Rhode Island. By 1968, the last year before consolidation, the per capita cost had jumped to \$18.57. Yet the fire fighters' starting pay ranked in the lowest third of a group of cities studied; the Marine Branch was in sadly obsolete condition; and the Airport Company was severely undermanned and inadequate. The fire communications center located at Station No. 1 was crowded and badly outmoded. The headquarters staff, consisting of the Chief, the Deputy Chief, and two administrative aides, was inadequate, with the result that there were no long-range improvement plans and the rules and regulations were out of date. The Rescue Ambulance Service, started in 1967, had reached only 60 per cent of its planned size and its training was lagging badly. There were no in-service fire prevention inspections by fire companies, despite the admittedly inadequate size of the Fire Prevention Bureau.

Despite the handicaps the 198,000 citizens inside City Limits were receiving generally excellent service from their well-trained professional land combat companies. The 327,000 citizens of the county, however, had to rely primarily on volunteer service. Although the volunteers rendered yeoman service, their companies were badly understaffed in paid men and pitifully underfinanced. County paid firemen worked an 84-hour week but received less pay than city firemen working a 56-hour week. The financial support for the county volunteers fell far below that given comparable volunteer organizations in other parts of the country.

In the county the per capita tax expenditure for fire protection was only \$1.97, compared with \$18.57 in the city. In most of the county area the water supply was inadequate. Reliance had to be placed on tankers, most of which were obsolete. One paid fire department provided service to the city; 20 different and somewhat autonomous volunteer companies looked after the

county, under the supervision of a fire coordinator who had administrative but not operational control. Control at the scene of a multiple-response fire was conducted on an ad hoc basis, because no district chiefs were provided in the county and the mutual aid with the city was often less than satisfactory. The county's loss rate, which was approximately triple the city's, reflected the contrast in services between the city and the county. In the area of fire prevention only two men were provided in the county, and only two others were assigned to maintenance for 20 volunteer stations and equipment. In retrospect one can only wonder that the county men did as well as they did. Their accomplishments must be attributed largely to the dedication of the personnel involved. But it was obvious that the vast differences in services between the urban and outlying areas could not be allowed to continue under consolidation.

At that point the new consolidated government ran into a "hooker." During the development of the Consolidated Charter by the Legislature, some of the county paid firemen and certain county volunteers, historically jealous of their independence, successfully lobbied to have a provision inserted into the Charter to keep the old county volunteer fire department separate from the Consolidated City Department. That political compromise proved to be a crippling one that not only violated the spirit and intent of consolidation but left matters pretty much as they had been in the matter of providing an integrated fire protection system. However, until the problem could be solved it was essential to take all possible steps to upgrade county fire protection.

Each county station kept one paid regular fireman on duty at all times to receive the alert and start the equipment rolling. The volunteer members, alerted over portable battery-powered monitor radios, would proceed to the station or directly to the fire. The weaknesses in the system were the shortage of paid men and the absence during the day of many volunteers who worked at distant jobs. Sometimes at midday the one paid man would have to fight a fire singlehanded. To help remedy that weakness, top priority was given to providing additional paid men at the former county stations, so that there would always be two professional firemen on duty at each station. But there was still great need for active and dedicated companies of volunteers. In many sparsely settled areas of the city, which covers 842 square miles and is in area the nation's largest, professional companies cannot be justified, and volunteers must meet the need for years to come.

"I just cannot say enough on behalf of those men," says Chief J. J. Hubbard.

¹ This figure is very low today.

The writer agrees. This special breed of men not only love the business of fire-fighting but give unselfishly of their time and of themselves for their neighbors. The world is better off because of people like them.

Nevertheless it was essential that the largely volunteer former county companies be integrated completely into a single city fire division at the earliest possible date. In the interim other actions could not be delayed, and many of them affected the county volunteer stations.

ACTION AFTER CONSOLIDATION

TWO MONTHS BEFORE CONSOLIDATION a number of groups consisting of city and county fire department senior officers were set up to study such problems as pay, waterfront protection, training, fire cadets, recruiting, merger of communications and garages, and long-range plans. The resulting recommendations were later used to implement a number of changes.

On Consolidation Day city professional fire protection was extended to an area 1.5 miles outside the old City Limits, providing an additional 100,000 people with professional protection besides the previous existing volunteer services. Before consolidation, city companies could enter the outer belt only on request by the county.

The merged city and county fire communications centers were moved into the new Fire Operations Center at City Hall, with a marked increase in efficiency and an annual saving of \$25,616 in personnel salaries. Street emergency telephones replaced the old pull boxes, with a resultant phenomenal drop in false alarms.

The city and county fire prevention bureaus were merged and fire prevention inspections by in-service fire companies were started (the latter have provided many thousands of man-hours of added inspections).

Fire Division rescue ambulance service was extended into the old county area. Deployment was completed in December 1969, with assignment of four new ambulances. Ninety per cent of the city's population is now within seven minutes' response time.

Fire Division Headquarters moved to enlarged space in the Lanier Building, Headquarters of the Department of Public Safety.

After a complete operational analysis of its work load and problems, the Marine Branch was reduced from 40 to 26 men, at a savings of \$72,000 annually.

The two fire garages were transferred from the Fire Division to the Central Services Department's Motor Pool Division. Though suffering from growing pains, this arrangement over the long haul should produce in-

creased economy and efficiency of operation.

A separate Rescue and First Aid Branch was established in the Fire Division and an intensive training program was initiated. This Branch is now receiving nationwide recognition.

In January 1969, as a result of many demonstrated drawbacks and one serious fire, the city and old county fire divisions were finally merged by City Council ordinance. The merger gave the new city one integral Fire Division. At the same time the reorganization gave the Department adequate headquarters staff and district and battalion chiefs, and operational control through the newly established post of Chief of Operations of all the combat units in the Consolidated City. County firemen were integrated into the new Division; the work week of the paid men was cut from 84 hours to 56 and their pay was raised to equal that of the former city firemen. Fifty-one unneeded billets were abolished and 48 new ones were established in the reorganization. Fire engineer's pay was provided for all engineers in the former county stations. The merger required a great deal of persuasion of the volunteers, who felt their independence threatened. A year later, however, I believe, the great majority feel that it was a wise move and enjoy working in a larger and more efficient organization.

After the reorganization the Fire Division had more recruits and more promotions than during any comparable time in its history. Besides the addition of 58 paid men from the old county department, 172 new recruits were inducted and trained, and over 200 promotions have been made.

In February 1969 firemen's pay was raised an average of 18 per cent, retroactive to October 1, 1968. An additional 5 per cent raise and some fringe benefits were granted on October 1, 1969. In salary scale the Fire Division is now among the top quarter of city departments in the South.

The Airport Company was moved to the new International Airport when the Airport opened. After extensive remodeling of quarters and upgrading of equipment, 15 more men were assigned, doubling the strength to 30 men. That Company, long neglected and undermanned, is now in a position to afford quality crash fire protection.

Annual citywide hydrant checks by fire companies were started, and the first go-round has been completed. This inspection is in addition to maintenance by the Water Division.

A professional company was put in at Arlington Station No. 19 to replace the volunteer engine company, because of rapid buildup of construction in that area, while the volunteer company at Arlington Station No. 27 was strengthened by additional paid men. Later a

volunteer hook and ladder company was activated at Arlington No. 19, with six paid men assigned — the first hook and ladder on the east side of the St. John's River, and the first ladder manned partly by volunteers. All that was done without extra expense through cutbacks in less essential programs.

The long-range equipment replacement plan and the long-range station-building plan have been completed. Three new diesel pumpers and six new diesel tankers are on order for the first year (all new pumpers will be diesel, with large, 1,000-gallon water tanks).

The most important single item in fire protection is an adequate water supply. Part of a forthcoming \$90,000,000 bond issue will provide for additional water in the city; but certain sections had such critical needs that the delay in the bond issue could not be accepted. Economy in certain areas yielded \$57,000 to be used to install 125 new hydrants on existing mains. That added water supply, combined with the availability of professional companies, should in the near future provide insurance savings to some 25,000 more citizens. An additional 80 hydrants are on order. A city policy has been established that hydrants shall be included with all future water main construction, thus halving the hydrant installation costs.

A new volunteer company was organized and commissioned in the Floradale area in June. The new building for the company will be completed this month. In the interim a house trailer was used. Most of the company and all its officers are black. Six professional firemen are assigned as watch standers.

The Fire Division is concerned at the small number of black firemen in its complement. Before consolidation there were none. While recruitment of firemen is a Civil Service function, over which the Fire Division has no control, there is an obvious need for more black firemen. There are now over 35 blacks in volunteer companies. To provide candidates with adequate background and training to pass the Civil Service exam, a fire cadet program has been started, under financing by the United States Department of Labor. All 19 cadets, who are attending Florida Junior College for one year and receiving on-the-job training at fire stations, are black.

A new performance report system has been started to evaluate firemen's performance. We hope that it will provide the foundation for an improved system of promotion based more on demonstrated merit and less on written tests.

During the year over half the professional firemen voted to join the International Association of Firefighters (AFL-CIO). The union local now represents the firemen in collective bargaining involving working conditions, hours, and pay.

Over 50 fire fighters are enrolled at Florida Junior College in evening fire-fighting courses that will lead to an Associate Arts degree in fire science.

New base radio stations and backup units have been provided for fire and ambulance communications.

ACTION DURING THE SECOND YEAR

THE SECOND BUDGET UNDER CONSOLIDATION has accomplished or will accomplish the following during the present fiscal year, ending October 1970:

Provide enough men to keep all the professional stations with four men on a pumper and five men on a hook and ladder, with necessary reliefs for illness and vacations. The reason for this reduction to a minimum crew, which is being widely used in other cities, is the city's necessarily tight economy.

Provide two paid professional firemen on watch at all times in all volunteer stations. This was a key move in bolstering the volunteer companies. Now, with two professional firemen on duty at each volunteer station and with booster lines or 1½-inch preconnected hose operating off a 750- to 1,000-gallon tank, the two regular men can generally do a competent job of handling house fires until additional men arrive.

Two volunteer stations will be converted to professional stations next July.

The men at Fire Control Center were shifted from a 56-hour week to a 42-hour week (12 hours on, 36 off). This was found necessary because of the strain of an increasing load, and it follows military and FAA watch system practice.

A 65-foot all-aluminum replacement for the fireboat *Sutton* is being built. The new craft will be capable of 25 knots and have 6,000-gpm pumping capacity.

A new boat station is being built to replace both the old station at Washington Street and the Ford Dock station.

Altered crash protection has been provided at Craig Field, and the protection at Herlong Field is under study. Both fields are used primarily by private pilots.

The Fire Prevention Bureau has been augmented by additional men.

The new Cardiac Resuscitation Program has been put into service, with new cardiac equipment installed in all ambulances.

An increased clothing allowance enables firemen to buy by requisition items of clothing that they actually need. Formerly they received an annual issue of four shirts and two trousers.

There is provision for 10 emergency medical technician billets for the rescue service, equivalent to lieutenant in land companies, and special-duty pay for rescue men.

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Rexford Wilson of Fenwal, Inc., discussed industrial applications of this agent.³ Dr. Manuel L. Runza of Montecatini-Edison SpA of Milan, Italy, presented a film report on his product Fluobrene (Halon 2402) that indicated widespread application for this product. Dr. Nicola Rainaldi, also of Montecatini-Edison SpA, Milan, gave an extensive report of the research work with Halon 2402.⁴ Daniel MacKay of Advanced Safety Systems, Inc., gave a paper decrying the lack of imagination by fire protection engineers and concluded by giving a live demonstration, using a co-worker, of the safety and effectiveness of Halon 1301.⁵

This month the NFPA Committee on Halogenated

³ Rexford Wilson, "The Extinguishing Thing," *FIRE JOURNAL*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 1970), p. 17.

⁴ See "Advancements in Extinguishants: A Symposium," *FIRE JOURNAL*, Vol. 63, No. 6 (November 1969), pp. 37-38.

⁵ Daniel MacKay, "Solving Fire Problems through Imagineering," *FIRE JOURNAL*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (March 1970), p. 52.

Fire Extinguishing Agent Systems is presenting Standard No. 12A, *Halogenated Fire Extinguishing Agent Systems*, for Official adoption at the NFPA Annual Meeting in Toronto, Ontario.

There are also two very hard-working Subcommittees. The first is the Subcommittee on Halon 1211, whose work has reached the stage of a Proposed Standard printed for Committee use. It is expected that adoption of a Tentative Standard will be requested in 1971. The other Subcommittee, dealing with Halon 2402, was appointed only in December 1969 but is already well along in the development of a Proposed Standard.

The Halogenated agents have come a long way and they still have far to go. They are moving with such great speed that before very long we shall add more exciting ammunition to our arsenal of fire protection.

JAMES M. HAMMACK

NFPA Fire-Extinguishing Systems Specialist

The Consolidation of their Jacksonville Fire Protection Division (continued from page 59)

A special overtime fund has been provided to pay men for the overtime watches required to keep companies at strength. The overtime, paid at straight time rather than at time and a half, is very popular with the men and is assigned equally on a system recommended by the union.

Installation of high-intensity lights and a drafting pit and commencement of night training sessions at the Fire School permit volunteer as well as regular companies to receive training at the School.

New VHF radios for all former county equipment are being installed to place those units on the same frequency as the urban ones.

Additional radio monitors for volunteer firemen are being provided to increase the number of men on call.

IMMEDIATE PLANS

OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS the city plans to build three new stations, of which two will be professionally manned. One will be a two-company station. Next year will see the addition of a third man on watch at each volunteer station having a tanker assigned, to allow rolling a pumper with two men and a tanker with one man following an alarm. This will place a minimum of three professional men at the fire scene until volunteers arrive. High priority will still be placed on installation of adequate water supplies and hydrants throughout the many areas where they are now lacking. Through the cooperation of the American Heart Association, the State Board

of Health, and the Fire Surgeon, an annual physical screening is being set up for all firemen (none has existed in the past).

THE FIRST 18 MONTHS OF FIRE PROTECTION UNDER CONSOLIDATION have seen some giant steps forward, and the Fire Division is ahead of schedule on nearly every phase of its long-range improvement plan. That we now have a far more cost-effective operation is evident. A lot of fat was trimmed, a few people were hurt; but with the money saved a lot of muscle and a lot of fire protection have been added. The protection afforded to the former county areas during this second year has taken a tremendous jump that otherwise would have required years and without consolidation might not have been accomplished at all. That this considerable increase in fire protection could be accomplished in a short time and with a relatively limited increase in budget is one of the prime examples of the efficiency obtained by merging county and city facilities in a consolidated government. The Mayor and the City Council have fully backed the Fire Division in meeting the great challenge presented by consolidation. As a result the people of this city are far safer from fire than a year ago. Fire losses dropped 18 per cent the first year. I think we can safely say that few fire departments have progressed as far as the Jacksonville Fire Protection Division during the past year. Our experience offers living proof of the advantages of consolidation, and a pattern for the future in fire protection. ▲