

Thirteen Separate Fires Give Fresno Department Severe Test

Mutual Aid Response Provides Sufficient Apparatus and Personnel to Handle Major Fire Problem

By GAYLE V. COGER
Chief, Fresno Fire Dept.
1953

ON Friday afternoon, July 10th, the fire defenses of the City of Fresno, Calif., experienced their severest test in a series of fires in thirteen of the major downtown buildings, mostly hotels and apartment houses. In addition to that the department was called upon to check on many exaggerated and erroneous calls occurring between the hours of 1:45 P.M. and 8:00 A.M. the following morning.

The sequence in which these alarms were received is as follows:

1. 1:45 P.M. Hughes Hotel, Tulare and Broadway.
2. 1:54 P.M. Adams Hotel, Kern and Broadway.
- 1:55 P.M. Golden Hotel, Kern and Broadway.
3. 2:06 P.M. Gottschalks Department Store, Kern and Fulton.
- 2:07 P.M. Californian Hotel, Van Ness and Kern.
4. 2:29 P.M. Sequoia Hotel, Tulare and Van Ness.
5. 2:40 P.M. Alta Apartments, Kern and M Sts.
6. 3:27 P.M. Brix Apartments, 2311 Fresno St.
7. 3:49 P.M. First Christian Church, Tuolumne and M Sts.
8. 3:54 P.M. Mission Hotel, 1200 Blk. Broadway.
- 3:55 P.M. Roslyn Hotel, 1200 Blk. Broadway.
- 3:56 P.M. Art Gallery, 1200 Blk. Fulton.
9. 5:34 P.M. Bonner Packing Co., 2000 Blk. Parallel.

10. 6:32 P.M. Fresno Air Terminal, Hammer Field.
11. 8:33 P.M. Inyo and M Sts.
12. 8:42 P.M. California and Channing.

Three of these fires were major in nature and required substantial fire fighting personnel and equipment over a sustained period of time. Statistical report follows:

Hughes Hotel Fire

1. The Hughes Hotel, at Tulare and Broadway, was a large 4-story, 3rd class hotel, 66 years old, oblong in shape and occupied about a quarter of a block. Telephone call was received from a lady that there was a fire in hotel. Also two street boxes were pulled simultaneously.

1:45 P.M.—Box 2232 transmitted, with Engines 2, 3 & # 1; Trucks 2 & 1; Water Tank 1 and Chiefs 2 & 1 responding.

6-6 at 1:52 P.M. for Engines 7 & 4.
6-6 at 1:53 for Truck 3.
6-6 at 1:59 P.M. for Engines 9 & 5.
2 Mutual aid pumpers responded (Mid-Valley Fire District).

Number of engines worked.....	7
Number of Trucks worked.....	3
Number of 2½" lines laid.....	23
Number of 3" lines laid.....	4

Total footage of 2½" lines.....	12,200
Total footage of 3" lines.....	1,600
Engines pumped a total of 36 hours	
Number of deck pipes used.....	3

Number Multiversals used.....	4
Number ladder pipes used.....	1
Ground ladders used.....	621 ft.

Number of men on duty responded.....	71
Number of men off-duty responded.....	77
Total.....	148

Total amount of water used, 1,875,180 gallons.

Total amount of water used.....1,875,180 gal.

Brix Apartments Fire

2. 3:27 P.M. Phone call, Brix Apartments on fire, Fresno and M Sts. A large 4-story, wood joist, tar paper roof, oblong in shape, about 300 ft. x 150 ft. apartment house.

Fresno Reserve engine with off-duty firemen dispatched and six Mutual Aid engine companies sent by telephone. Three Truck Companies responded (two Fresno Fire Department trucks sent from the Hughes Hotel and one filled in from Madera, Calif.).

Number of 2½" lines laid, 12; total hose used, 7,600 ft.

One hundred ninety-six ft. ground ladders used.

One Multiversal used.
Forty-two tarpaulins used and everything on second and third floors completely covered, and suffered very little damage.

Number of firemen responded, 73.
Number sent from Hughes Hotel fire, 12; total, 85.

Gallons of water used, 562,600 gallons.
Companies began to shut down at this fire at approximately 5:30 P.M. By 9:00 all companies were removed with exception of one Fresno City Reserve pumper, which stood by throughout the night.

In addition to above equipment which worked, there were seven pieces of equipment standing by and the personnel assisted in salvage work at the Brix and a few moments later were dispatched from the Brix to the First Christian Church.

First Christian Church Fire

3. 3:49 P.M. phone, First Christian Church on fire. This church was an old brick church.

Six Mutual Aid pumpers.
A total of 1,500 ft. of 2½" hose laid.
Personnel—24.

31,000 gallons of water used.
Basement of church fully involved and fire was confined to the basement and



Hughes Hotel fire, Fresno, Calif., shortly after fire fighting forces started operations. This was the largest of thirteen fires which occurred within a seven-hour period. Arson is suspected.

the floor and walls immediately above.

On arrival at the Hughes Hotel it was apparent from the nature of the structure and the progress the fire had made that the Fresno Fire Department would be very busy for several hours. Calls were immediately made for additional help, including all off-duty firemen. Also calls were placed for the North Central Fire District and Mid-Valley Fire District, with which we have mutual aid agreements, for all available equipment for standby purposes in our Stations should other fires occur. As the situation developed, additional calls were made to various Cities within a radius of 40 to 50 miles from Fresno for help, and in every case the equipment and personnel, responded in amounts greater than we expected.

At 3:27 P.M. we received the call that the Brix Apartments was on fire. A few moments later the Assistant Chief informed us by radio that we had a major fire in the Brix Apartments, and that we had a life problem and needed ladders, resuscitation equipment and masks. We immediately dispatched two truck companies from the Hughes Hotel to the Brix Apartments.

At 3:30 P.M. we had all local radio stations called and asked them to announce over the radio a request by the Fire Department that the public shut off all water in their vicinity. People were very cooperative and our water pressure began to increase immediately and rose steadily from an average of 29 lbs. to 40 lbs. in about 1½ hours. We checked this report for accuracy and found that the city of Fresno used approximately 79 million gallons of water on Wednesday and Thursday prior to the fires and only used 59 million gallons on the date of the fire. We had hundreds of calls the following day asking if it was all right to resume normal use of water. We are more than pleased with the action that we took in securing our water supply and we feel that no Chief should overlook taking similar action under similar circumstances.

During the first hour and a half at the Hughes fire we used the strategy of offense. The fire was fought entirely during that time by 2½" lines inside the building, room by room, hallway by hallway. On receipt of information on the fire at the Brix Apartments and the necessity for dispensing some equipment and personnel from the Hughes to the Brix, it became necessary to go on the defense at the Hughes. Heavy stream appliances had already been located in anticipation of this change in strategy and were very quickly put into operation. We cannot say too much for hose clamps, which were used very freely in making this transition.

Later in the afternoon the problem of getting companies back into service and relieving equipment and personnel of those communities which had so graciously furnished us same began. We were able to use several commercial trucks belonging to the Public Works Department of the city and volunteer help was put to work breaking and draining hose lines and retrieving fire equipment of all kinds at the various fires which was no longer needed. All this equipment was loaded on the trucks and removed to a central depot located on the Drill yard near our shop, where minor repairs could be effected when necessary. When pumping engines were no longer needed at various fires, they were taken from hydrants and sent to

the central depot where they were outfitted again and put into service. This procedure was very satisfactory from a standpoint of time.

We began to shut down some engines at both the Hughes and the Brix fires about 6:00 P.M. and by midnight all equipment was removed from the fires with the exception of two pieces at the Hughes and one at the Brix apartments, which were being used for standby purposes during the night. All Mutual Aid equipment and personnel were returned to various communities beginning early in the evening and finished by midnight. We received, from various communities and fire districts 31 pieces of equipment and a total personnel of 133 men. The total pumpage provided was 15,020 g.p.m.

This equipment began arriving in Fresno at about 2:05 P.M. and continued arriving until about 4:00 P.M., at which time we did not need any further assistance. Several cities, including Bakersfield and Sacramento, were standing by and were in contact with us by telephone to send further aid if the City desired it. All this equipment, including our own, did not suffer a single accident in its movement into and through the City. However, some minor equipment was lost.

Our communication system worked well and at no time during this entire period was our Bureau of Fire Alarm out of touch with the Chief or any other fire fighting equipment or personnel within the City of Fresno. We used our radio and alarm system in handling Fresno City equipment. Mid-Valley and North Central supplied us with receivers and transmitters for the movement of

their equipment. The benefits derived from a Chief's Operator equipped with a walkie-talkie can not be overestimated. He was able to give the answer to every question concerning the additional fires.

All in all, about 39 organizations took active part in this emergency, including about 200 police officers, augmented with 250 Legionnaires and auxiliary police, and 175 National Guardsmen. All places of assembly were shut down and emptied and kept closed during the night. The radio stations warned all people to be on the lookout and not permit people not properly identified to enter hotels or elevators in the prominent buildings. All restrictions relative to assemblage and the normal conduct of affairs was restored at 8:00 A.M. the following morning. We feel that this was a very sound move due to the fire consciousness of the people. Due to this action, we had no signs of panic or hysteria on the part of our civilian population during this crisis.

There was no serious injuries to any civilian or fire fighting personnel during the entire period. However, approximately 25 firemen were overcome by smoke and heat exhaustion. The temperature at the time of the fire was approximately 102° with a 12 or 15-mile per hour northwest wind. Entire off-duty personnel responded, except those sick and on vacation and all were held on duty until 12:00 noon the following day. At that time company strength was reduced to its normal complement.

Too much cannot be said for special appliances, such as resuscitation equipment, masks, hose clamps, walkie-

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Initial fire control efforts were carried on entirely within the Hughes Hotel until succeeding fires made necessary the withdrawal of some equipment and personnel. Thereafter heavy streams were put into operation from outside.



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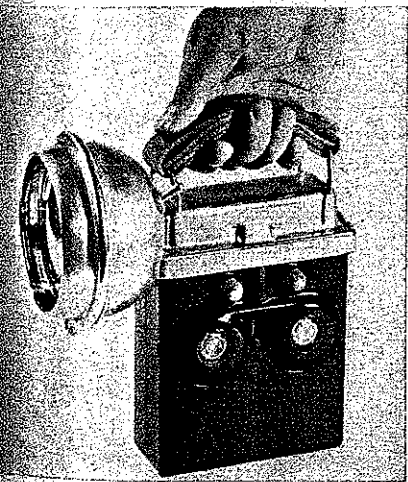
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glass windows and the mere fact of reinforced concrete construction were not proof against such a concentration of fuel of very high heat energy content. Even higher standards of protection and a smaller subdivision of fire areas would appear necessary for buildings of "high B.T.U." content occupancies if total losses are to be avoided and the fire department given a fair chance at extinguishment.

The value of private fire protection systems, such as automatic sprinkler systems, is somewhat problematical in an instance such as this, but it is of interest to consider the possibility that automatic sprinklers might have held the fire in check at its point of origin long enough for firemen to concentrate against it. As it was, the few wheeled extinguishers on hand were useless at the time the fire was discovered.

Fresno Fires

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talkies, heavy appliances, etc. Every chief in a metropolitan area should check his supply of this type of equipment.

The City of Fresno has a contract with a private ambulance company. They were notified of the situation and responded immediately and were able to remove firemen as rapidly as it became necessary. Also the city physician, with a staff of 3 doctors, was at the scene all afternoon.

Puerto Rico

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tion over the past 10 years has amounted to 25.9%, which means that Puerto Ricans are paying \$1,020,000 a year less than they would have had to pay under 1945 rates.

We visited Puerto Rico last year. We saw the great improvement in the fire-fighting facilities. We saw the firemen going through their drills in the morning and, during the rest of the day, working as masons, carpenters, plumbers, painters, and electricians, in constructing new fire stations. And the firemen are proud of their new stations because they were built with their own hands; enthusiasm was mixed with the concrete that went into the buildings. We also saw mechanics, welders and everybody that could help, working in the repair shop on fire trucks. And when we talked about all this and congratulated Chief Gándara on his amazing accomplishment in developing a highly efficient fire service for the entire island, he just answered with his Spanish accent: "Well, you know it gives great pleasure to do things for others. We try to do as many as we can just so we can have more pleasure." And he really meant it.

New York Wants Five New Houses

Requests for appropriations for five new firehouses were made August 19 at a budget hearing of the City Planning Commission New York City.

Fire Commissioner Jacob Grumet also asked for money for a combination Manhattan headquarters and firestation. Plans call for housing 14 department bureaus and divisions in the new headquarters.



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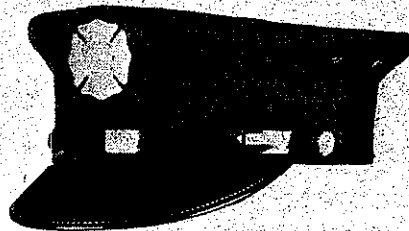
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