

Reflecting on a new breed

The world of the firefighter has changed in many ways.

I observed that fact last week at two meetings of firefighters.

The first meeting was a critique of the Klugetown (KLOOGEE) Shopping Center Fire with Mutual Aid departments taking part.

Chief Al Evangelista asked me to attend and to bring our videotape of the fire.

I was really impressed with the serious learning that was taking place at the meeting. We listened to the 911 tape and viewed videos of the fire while all conversations on the fire radio band played in the background.

Firefighters who had been inside the roof of the Acme market at first alarm told what they saw as the chiefs outlined the procedures.

Chief Mike Wanklin of Bloomingdale described the overall Mutual Aid callout and the mobilization of county forces. It was impressive to see and hear how many agencies cooperated in the firefight.

I don't want to diminish the memory of old-time firefighters, but this new breed is to be honored for the knowledge and ability. At the critique I heard well-informed peo-

Bits and Pieces



By Howard Lee Ball

ple making intelligent comments on the conflagration.

One note of humor was struck by a young firefighter who told former Chief Tom Duffy and I to "talk about the Butler Rubber Company fire now, It's your last chance."

It was more appropriately the Pequannoc Rubber Company fire and has been the topic of firematic conversations for two-score years or more.

They will be talking about Klugetown well into the next century.

My second meeting was actually a ceremony. Macopin Fire Chief Steve Pellington picked me up Friday night to attend the Graduation of the Passaic County Fire Academy. I am chaplain of the Academy and had some duties to perform. The evening was under the

direction of Assistant Academy Director Bill Schmidt who is a friend of long standing. The ceremony was inspiring, but the young graduates were more so. One generation has taken over for the old smoke-eaters, and now a new generation was sitting there getting ready to climb life's ladders.

Around me on the stage were a dozen or more chiefs, many of whom had white hair under those white hats. Many of us never had the luxury of formal training. We learned at drills and actual fires what we could to protect life and put out fires. The new generation has built a system of scholarship and training which produces top-notch firefighters.

These young firefighters are joining a special family. The friends they make today will be friends for life.

As the cadets passed by to receive diplomas, I glanced down the patch on my sleeve. The initials for Volunteer Fire Department were translated to the motto Valor, Fidelity, Duty. I looked around me in the auditorium and saw that motto reflected in every firefighter. I was home, and the family was getting bigger.