



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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FIRE DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS

William J. Cremins
Chief

April 26, 1976

At a recent budget discussion with the City Manager, he proposed to eliminate aides to Deputy Chiefs and also to eliminate around-the-clock aides to the Chief of Department, thus restricting him to one daytime aide. After a discussion with him, he agreed not to eliminate the Deputy Chiefs' aides as noted above.

I have been asked a great many questions of late in reference to "Aides" and I find that there is a good deal of misconception regarding their duties. It is my personal feeling that amateur advice is being given to the City Manager, and the advice is sometimes tinged with a bit of malice.

It is my strong belief that aides as presently assigned in the Cambridge Fire Department are an integral part of an efficient department and contribute to proper fire suppression and other fire-related services of this Department. Thus, I will attempt to list a summary of duties, functions, and contributions of the aides assigned within the Fire Department.

To begin with, an aide is more than just a driver or chauffeur, as is the popular belief of those unacquainted with Fire Department procedure. An aide is a driver only to the same extent that a driver of an engine or a ladder truck is called a driver. All are expected to drive to the fire or emergency and then assume other duties incidental to the emergency.

An aide is a fire fighter. His training is identical with that of any fire fighter assigned to apparatus. He is trained in all basics - is experienced before assignment as an aide - takes part in all training programs. He is required, as have aides in the past, to use this training should the occasion arise on his arrival at any and all emergencies.

In addition to the above training, the aide must be proficient in the operation of radiological testing equipment - explosive gas meters - first aid equipment - etc. He must know the City thoroughly - response routes, target buildings, private fire protection, sprinkler shut-offs, etc. Further he must be knowledgeable in equipment carried on the various apparatus - to possibly assist in this use if needed.

The aide to a Deputy Chief, while on duty with his superior, responds to every alarm or emergency received during his tour of duty. To this extent, therefore, he is not a loss of manpower, but more accurately he is an additional fire fighter responding to an alarm anywhere within the City. It is not unusual to see an aide assist in a rescue, help place a hose line in operation, or help raise a ladder - while at the same time coordinating his other duty requirements at the emergency. At the major emergencies the Chief of Department's aide assumes similar roles on a larger, more responsible scale.

Upon response to any fire or emergency, optimum duties fall to the aide. He becomes the communication link between the Chief Officer and the fire companies, fire alarm, utility gas and electric companies, Police Department, ambulance, special equipment, etc. He must supply the Chief with mutual aid information - backup coverage for the rest of the City - inform companies of their point of attacks on the Chief's orders, etc. It is only through this vital link - through a knowledgeable responsive aide - that a Chief Officer can properly and successfully execute his plan of operation for prompt and complete accomplishment of the assigned mission, whether this mission be low scale, such as trapped victims in auto accidents, or a fire or disaster of major proportions. It should be obvious that in no way could a Chief Officer convey by himself his orders in such widely diversified areas.

Additionally, aides are routinely engaged in other fire-related areas. They assist administratively at headquarters. They obtain all the data necessary to compile the records and reports required on all Fire Department responses, up-date records, perform research, pre-fire planning, etc.

It should be noted that, upon receipt of an alarm, a Chief Officer must immediately concentrate on the area whence the alarm originated: what type of building, water supply, what company first due, is the building heavily populated, in a congested area, type of occupancy, etc.; and plan of attack. This thinking is essential to expedite attacks - pre-planned - upon arrival. Enroute he must be in constant communication with fire alarm by Fire Department radio. Obviously, in the best interest of public safety, he should not be expected to concentrate on driving in this, one of the most congested cities in the United States, anymore than a company officer for the same reason does not drive fire apparatus.

National Fire Protection Association statistics indicate that in cities of over 50,000 population the City of Cambridge ranks number 2 in the United States for the number of responses per thousand capita. If ideas and types of operation are adopted from town fire departments and volunteer fire departments, as is this plan to eliminate aides, then the Fire Department of Cambridge will eventually revert to this type of performance with resultant loss of life and increased property damage. Make no mistake about it, Cambridge has one of the busiest fire departments in the country and any plan to curtail its effectiveness will be a detriment to the City.

We have all the serious hazards of any city. The potential for serious fires, emergencies, conflagrations does exist. A well-run, coordinated, and fully operational fire department is, of course, the answer to proper fire defenses. Such a fire department requires the assignment, within its table of organization, of personnel to those classifications that provide the operational function that insures prompt, efficient, and effective fire protection and suppression. In my opinion, as outlined above, aides to Chief Officers are a justifiable assignment within this Department.

These positions are not new and have been a part of the organizational structure for more than 50 years. Approximately 20 years ago, this Department responded to about 2800 alarms a year. Today, we are responding to about 9000 runs a year. If those positions were necessary

at that time, then certainly there is more justification today not to cut Fire Department services.

Very truly yours,

William J. Cimens

Chief of Fire Department

Copies to: City Manager James L. Sullivan
Each City Councillor

17. S-167

Comm. from Chief of the Fire Dept.
re: to the elimination of Aides to
the Deputy Chief.

S-167

In City Council,
April 26, 1976

4/24/76

Placed on File