



A Historical Account of the Fire Halls and Vehicles of the Alberni and Port Alberni Fire Departments

Author:
D.W. Phillips, (Fire Chief Retired)
Port Alberni Fire Department
1976 - 1995

Alberni - Pre- Amalgamation

The Alberni Fire Department was first organized in April 1909, during a meeting held in Mr. M. Tebo's office. Sixteen attendees agreed to be fire fighters and five attendees agreed to be a Management Committee. The first Chief was E. M. Whyte (although it is also suggested that Mr. G. Forrest was the first Chief). There were two Deputy Chiefs - A. Waring and G. Ward.

The first practice of the newly formed Department was in May, 1909. The first firefighting equipment was a collection of buckets. Forty-eight buckets were used in this first practice. "Water was dipped out of the north side of Kitsuksis Creek by the bridge and was passed about 75 yards in the direction of the Alberni Hotel".

Approximately 1910, a hand drawn hose reel, complete with some hose, was obtained. The first man to get hold of the reel and pull it to the fire scene was paid \$5.00. This was a lot of money in those days and ensured competition to get the hose to the fire. (Competitions of that era involved races with hose reels).



Above is a photograph taken approximately 1915 - 1916 showing a team ready to go. Location is Johnston Road and Victoria Quay - on the southeast corner).

A second hose reel was obtained prior to 1920, but exactly when, is not known. Both reels were stored in the "combination school and Firehall" on the northeast corner of Elizabeth Street, and Burke Road. (Again no exact date is known as to when this building was built, but it was obviously built after 1910). (See also the following story entitled "The Firehall School" on pages 21 - 23). The only photographs of this building available are shown on page 20 and were taken in the late 1930's or early 1940's, (Alberni & Port Alberni firemen with truck) and approximately 1951 (buildings in background with children and one adult male in foreground). Unfortunately, the emphasis of the photographs is on the people rather than the firehall.



View of Alberni Firehall looking north from Burke Road. (circa late 1930's, early 1940's).



View of Alberni Firehall looking east on Burke Road from a little bit west of the corner of Elizabeth Street and Burke Road. (Square building is Alberni City Works Building. Firehall is in the background. Note bell tower on roof.)

Box 2264 Squamish, B.C. V0N 3G0

September 11, 1995

Dear Rusty:

The following is an excerpt from a series of articles my father wrote for his family. As a result, they do not pertain to your project, but I thought you might find them interesting and useful. I have removed some of the personal comments from the excerpt. If you want anymore information you might contact him directly at his home in Victoria:

Mr. W. F. Ramsay #39 - 1255 Waine Road Sidney, B.C. V8L 5R4

THE FIREHALL SCHOOL

"When we came to Alberni in December, 1922, one of the first things that had to be done was to establish Peter and me in the community Public School. Indeed this was one of the reasons that my parents made the decision to leave the prairie farm in Saskatchewan to return to Alberni. A

family had to be educated. At that time a school building programme was needed but funds were not easily available so that temporary classrooms had to be found. Grade Five to Eight were located in the two room school building at the top of the hill on the Nanaimo Road which was, and still is, Johnston Road. Grades Three and Four were housed in the old Post Office building on Johnston Road between Elizabeth Street and Adelaide Street. But Grades One and Two were housed in the Firehall at the corner of Elizabeth Street and Burke Road and only a block and a bit from our house. The building rested on posts on the edge of a swampy piece of ground with the result that there was a sizable space underneath it in which frogs and skunk cabbages thrived. It was a fine place to play. The dominant feature of the building itself was the bell tower which rose above the rest of the structure and was capped by a pyramidal-type roof which housed the firebell. The fire equipment which consisted mainly of large-wheel hose reels which could be trundled by manpower or horses was sheltered on the ground floor behind large doors. A wide plank ramp gave easy and speedy egress for the equipment. The building was a grey colour as the cedar shingles which covered roof, walls, tower and all, were grey with weathering. Our school room was on the second storey. Annie Croll was my first teacher. She was a wee body, very conscientious, strict and probably over conscious of the important part she played in the community as she was the daughter of a well-known and respected Alberni family. I can remember the children lining up in rows of two abreast on the ramp over which the hose reels emerged from the building when the alarm was sounded: girls first and boys second, marched up the winding stairs which had one bend in them to the classroom. I can still smell the blended aroma of stale lunches, oiled wooden floors, plasticine and chalk dust which created part of the atmosphere of the school. Heat was provided by a wood heater at the back of the classroom. Blackboards, and they really were blackboards, ranged over three of the walls. The fourth wall was mainly windows. The desks were arranged so the light, very properly, fell over the left shoulder and did not create a shadow on the paper for those who wrote with the right hand, and in those days the expectation was that everyone would write with his right hand or be considered anything but normal. The command "Go to the blackboard" struck panic in every school boy's and school girl's heart. It propelled him from the security of anonymity onto the harsh glare of publicity and put him on his metal to reveal to the whole world his knowledge or ignorance. It was one of those devices of the teacher that either scared them silly or scared them smart. But the great adventure occurred when the fire bell was rung. The whole building swayed and reeled to the point where we were sure it would topple off its post into the swamp. We could not be evacuated because we would then spill out onto the ramp and interfere with the movement of the fire reels. We stayed there: trapped, shivering and frightened. I spent three years in that school, and as a consequence lived through many fire alarms. Some renovations were made to the firehall school. A long ramp was built over the swamp to provide access to a

new classroom on the ground floor. Grades Three and Four were moved from the Post Office building onto these new premises so that it was not through retardation that I remained so long in the firehall school. One of the great events that I remember so vividly but cannot be sure of the exact date was the year of the big snow. I think it was in early March of 1923. It snowed all night. The great heavy wet flakes piled up phenomenally. When morning broke there was four feet of snow on the ground. Roofs groaned and some collapsed. The town was immobilized. My Dad, assisted by neighbours or visa-versa, dug a trench four feet deep past the school to Johnston Road where the shops were. School was closed until the roads could be opened up. In those days this usually meant until the thaw came. For many days we had decimated classes. The children from McCoy Lake area and River Road could not possibly get to school. I can remember my brother and I making our way through the deep trench that had been dug out past the school. We were so small that we could barely see above it. Picket fences were completely covered. The West Coast General Hospital on Redford Street was isolated. Even milk trucks could not get to it, much less the doctors, all two of whom lived at some distance from the hospital. The valley was completely cut off from the rest of the world. Today's readers will realize that communications in Alberni were not what they are now. The government telegraph office operated by Mrs. Haslam out of her home on Gertrude Street was the only really reliable source of news from the outside world in the deep snow. The only practical means of getting from Alberni to Port Alberni was by boat on the Somass River. On one occasion some years later when the snowfall was equally as bad, boats had to come to the rescue of Alberni residents marooned at Port Alberni. A New Year's Eve dance had been held in the old Memorial Hall which was located on Argyle Street where the City Hall now stands. When the dance was over the snow was so deep that it was impossible to get through by land to Alberni. Charlie Clark's boat came to the rescue. Crowded with the night's revellers it made it's way from the wharf at the foot of Argyle Street to the wharf at the foot of Johnston Street, from whence the Albernians had to battle their way through the snow on foot to their homes. The firehall school served the children of Alberni for many years. John Howitt who taught the Grade Seven and Eight Class in the school on the hill was the principal. It was not until the early 1930's that a new six room school was built at Helen Street and Johnston Road. All existing school premises were then abandoned in favour of the new school and all Alberni children in Grades One to Eight came under one roof."

I hope the above is useful to you.

Yours very truly,

Robert J. Ramsay

1. Ramsay, William, F; *Recollections of My Childhood Days in Alberni*; 1995

As cars and trucks became more common, often the hose reels were towed to the fire scene by citizens' vehicles. It became very apparent that the Department should get a motorized fire truck.

In 1926 the City Council of Alberni was persuaded to fund a fire truck and in 1927 a new Chevrolet truck was purchased. It's size is thought to be a 1-ton. It's primary task was to take men and hose to a fire scene. The photo below shows the truck laying hose in a competition in the early 1930's.



The 1927 Chevrolet shown during a Competition in the early 1930's.

This truck served for about 10 years, and was then replaced with a new 1937 Ford which had a front mounted pump on it. This was Alberni's first "pumper" truck. (The 1927 Chevrolet was given to the Alberni Water Works Department).



Alberni's - 1937 Ford Fire Truck with front mounted pump.

During the mid 1940's it was decided that a newer, larger, more centrally located Firehall was needed for Alberni. Also, it was decided that a second fire truck was needed because of the growth of Alberni, and to provide a backup truck.

The Firehall was approved in 1947, was built and completed in early 1948. On July 6th, 1948, the new Firehall was dedicated.



Photo above taken in 1968 shows a Fire Department vehicle parked in front of the new Albarni Fire Hall.

Shortly thereafter the new 1949 pumper was received. The photo below shows this truck undergoing its acceptance pumping tests.



1949 Pumper shown undergoing its acceptance pumping tests.

On December 15th, 1960, the Department took delivery of a 1960 Commer Van. This was purchased to carry the extra equipment that the Department had been acquiring and for which there was not compartment space on the pumper trucks. The best photo available of this van is one showing it at a street fair, approximately 1969 (after amalgamation, and thus with the Port Albarni Fire Department insignia on it).



1960 Commer Van

There were two other vehicles that, over the years, were in the Alberni Fire Department lineup. One was an ex W.W. II Studebaker Army Ambulance. This unit was bought by the Alberni Firemen's Association (with the City of Alberni paying for the ongoing licensing and maintenance). The reason it was bought was as a backup unit for the first line ambulance owned and operated by a local taxi company - United Cabs.



Ex - World War II Studebaker Army Ambulance



Photo showing the Alberni Firehall and 3 vehicles that were operated out of the Hall between 1948 and 1954.

In 1954, the local Kinsmen Club bought a new 1954 Pontiac Ambulance, which was then donated to the City of Port Alberni, who was now the owner of the Ambulance operation, although it was still United Cabs who operated the ambulance service on the City's behalf. This new Pontiac caused the previous first line ambulance, still owned by United Cabs, to become surplus. United Cabs sold this unit, a 1948 - 7 passenger Dodge sedan, converted for ambulance usage, to the Alberni Firemen's Association. The Firemen's Association sold off the old Army Studebaker at this time.



The photo taken approximately mid 1960's, shows the Dodge Ambulance at the Alberni Firehall.

After amalgamation of Port Alberni and Alberni in November 1967, the Alberni Firehall, vehicles and equipment were rolled in with those of Port Alberni. The Alberni Firehall was then called the "North Port Alberni Hall" and was kept functional for a one year interval. The former Alberni Fire Fighters continued to man the two former Alberni fire trucks and were called out by the staff in the new Port Alberni Firehall. During the next year or so it became apparent that the paid staff on duty in the new South Port Alberni Firehall could respond quicker to any call, due to being on hand when the call first came in.

Therefore, after this year's experience, the Alberni Firehall was closed down and the equipment and vehicles were moved to the new South Port Alberni Firehall.

During 1969, Kelly Douglas Limited bought a large block of property from the City with the intent of building a new super market complete with some associated stores. The property bought included the lot on which stood the closed Firehall. Thus the Firehall was torn down in late 1969 and the Super Valu supermarket plaza was built on the site.



Dismantling the old Alberni Fire Hall.

Port Alberni - Pre-amalgamation



The Port Alberni Fire Department was first organized in March 1912, during a meeting called by the new City Council's Public Safety Committee. Fifteen men attended the meeting, held at the home of alderman J.A. McIntyre, and agreed to form a Volunteer Fire Department.

The first Fire Chief was Richard Venables. His Assistant Chief was Peter Johnson. Two Companies were formed under Captains W. Holt and D. Rowley. The first fire practice was held June 26, 1912, at 8:00 p.m., at the C.P.R. wharf.

What follows is primarily an account of the evolution of and acquisition of equipment, vehicles and firehalls. Further chapters will document accounts of Personnel enlistments, social events and major fires.

The first firefighting equipment was a horse drawn wagon fitted with a 60 gallon soda-acid chemical tank, a ladder wagon carrying two dozen buckets, a few nozzles, axes, crowbars and an assortment of wooden ladders, and two hand pulled hose reels each containing 500 feet of 2 1/2 inch hose.



The photograph shows a retired fire wagon in a parade on July 1, 1926. The horse drawn wagon is shown stripped of equipment due to replacement by a new motorized vehicle.

The fire apparatus was housed in Sam Roseborough's Livery Barn on Second Avenue (now the 3100 block). A fire bell tower was erected on the northeast corner of 3rd Avenue and Argyle Street to alert the firemen. When a fire was reported by telephone to the nearby telephone exchange on the east side of 3rd Avenue (3000 block), Mr. Harry Mertz, the manager of the Telephone Company, would run to the tower, ring the bell, and then run down to the livery barn to tell the incoming firemen where the fire was.

It was the custom, at the sound of the fire bell, for the closest teams of horses to the livery barn to be unhooked from their loads and be hooked to the fire wagons. As an incentive to assist the Fire Department, the first team to be hooked up was paid \$10.00 by the City.

Until November, 1913, when a water system with hydrants was installed, the fires were fought by bucket brigade. After that the hose reels were taken to the fire scene, most often by hand, where the hose was hooked directly to the hydrants. Chief Venables reported that the water pressure in the new system was "very good", and some wags of the day claimed that it was so good that there was a danger of the buildings being knocked down if they weren't burned up.

During the First World War years it is recorded that the Department often had difficulty obtaining manpower as so many men were away overseas.

After a positive experiment, August 23, 1916, when Fire Chief Holt used his private car to carry firemen and to pull a hose reel to the scene of a bush fire and substantially beat the time of a team of horses pulling the second reel, City Council was persuaded to purchase "mechanized equipment". A truck was ordered.

By November 22, 1916, the new fire apparatus was expected within 30 days and a new hall for it's housing was erected at Argyle Street and 5th Avenue. The truck was a ¾-ton Chevrolet, and the chemical tank complete with it's hose reel, together with 2½ inch hose and all equipment that could be carried was, loaded on.



The photograph taken in 1921 shows the 1916 truck and the firecrew of the day at the firehall on 5th Avenue. The first fire the new truck attended was on February 4th, 1917, in the Carmoor Block at the foot of Argyle Street. Charlie McNaughton was the driver. There is no record of the fire damage.

When the new firehall was built, the fire bell was hung in a tower at the rear of the Firehall. The bell was rigged up to be rung by a homemade electric powered device controlled from the telephone office. All calls were transferred to the Firehall bell by the telephone operators. This service continued right up until the dial system came into effect in 1964.

In 1928, two new Chevrolet one-ton trucks were purchased, as was a 33 foot extension ladder. The hose and chemical tank, plus the new ladder were fitted to the new trucks.



Photograph shows the two trucks at 8th Avenue & Burde Street. Photograph taken in 1932.

Since the 1916 Firehall was a single-bay hall, and the City was expanding to the north and northwest, and, in 1928 the City had purchased two new fire trucks, there was need for a second location to house the second fire truck in the expanding area. This expanding area, known as the Calgary area, bounded between Dry Creek and Roger Street - (south to north) and Third Avenue to 17th Avenue - (west to east). This area was called the Calgary area because the first people to build in the area were from Calgary

One of the trucks was housed in Pete Muller's garage at the northeast corner of 8th Avenue and Burde Street from approximately 1928/29 to 1939.

It is not known precisely when, but obviously during these years the 5th Avenue single-bay Firehall was rebuilt to be a two-bay Firehall, as evidenced by the photograph below.



When the new firehall was built, the fire bell was hung in a tower at the rear of the Firehall. The bell was rigged up to be rung by a homemade electric powered device controlled from the telephone office. All calls were transferred to the Firehall bell by the telephone operators. This service continued right up until the dial system came into effect in 1964.

In 1928, two new Chevrolet one-ton trucks were purchased, as was a 33 foot extension ladder. The hose and chemical tank, plus the new ladder were fitted to the new trucks.



The photograph was taken approximately 1939.

In 1941, a new three-bay Firehall was built at the 5th Avenue & Argyle Street site. The photograph below, although taken in 1957, is the best photograph available showing the new Firehall in it's entirety.



New Firehall, built in 1941. Photograph taken in 1957.

Shortly after the new Firehall was built, the first custom equipped fire truck was purchased. It was a 1942 2-ton International, fitted with a 400 gallon per minute pump, a booster tank with a hose reel and was able to carry 1,000 feet of firehose. One of the old 1928 Chevrolet trucks and the chemical tank were then retired.



The new truck is located to the left in the above photograph.

During the Second World War years, Civil Defence authorities supplied the Fire Department with extra equipment - trailer pumps and tanks, hose and portable pumps. Also an old Chevrolet truck was obtained and outfitted as an auxiliary fire truck. An old car was pressed into service as an equipment and crew carrier. This car was necessary as there was also two companies of auxiliary firemen formed to assist the Fire Department during the war years. What became of the Chevrolet truck, the car and the trailer pump is unknown.



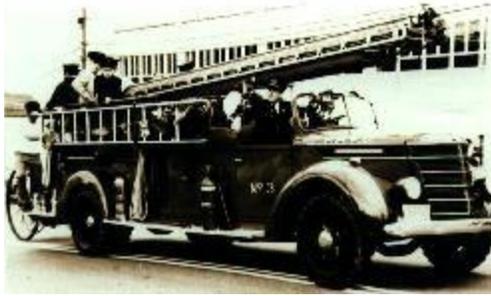
This photograph is the only one available showing the truck and car, albeit they are obscured by the auxiliary personnel.

After the war ended, surplus fire equipment became available from the War Assets Corporation. Through the cooperation of Mr. Frank Kitto, the City Clerk, who pressed City Council for fast action, the Fire Department obtained first (on January 10, 1947), a 1941 3-ton International (an ex-Air Force truck) for \$2,300.00. This truck served as a regular fire truck from it's purchase until 1953.



Photograph shows truck in a parade, approximately 1953.

Between 1953 and 1960, this truck was retrofitted to carry a 53 foot Nemco, 2 fly aerial ladder. This ladder was partly manually operated and partly electrically operated.

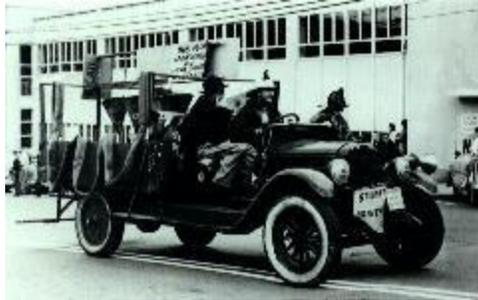


Photograph shows retrofitted truck in a parade in 1960.

Shortly after the purchase of the 1941 ex-Air Force 3-ton International, on May 2, 1947, the Fire Department obtained a 1942 2-ton Ford custom fire truck, fully equipped, for \$2,000.00. This truck was obtained from the Army Camp area adjacent to Port Alberni. The photographs below show it in use during army camp days. It was manned by army personnel. The building served after the war years and until the mid 1980's as the School District's school bus barns, after which, and still, at this writing, serves as the workshop for the Industrial Heritage Society. The building is located in the 4600 block of 10th Avenue.



When the 1942 Ford fire truck was put in service at 5th Avenue, the second 1928 Chevrolet truck was retired. It was given to the Port Alberni City Works Department where it was used to haul water and sewer pipes until the early 1950's. It was then put into storage for several years. Two volunteer firemen recovered it and made it into a Clown wagon, with offset wheels. It was used by the Fire Department in parades for several years before it again was put into storage. Approximately 1987, the Fire Department re-acquired it and commenced restoring it to it's original 1928 condition. At the time of writing, this res- toration is about one half complete.



The photo shows the clown wagon in a parade in 1960.

Appearing in various pictures of the Fire Department equipment since the early 1940's and until 1965 is a car, then a sedan delivery, which were obviously the Fire Chief's official vehicles. In the written accounts there is no mention of these vehicles until 1965, when there is reference to a 1956 Ford Chief's Car (sedan delivery). However, for the record, it should be noted that there was a Chief's Car evident in photographs taken in 1941. The vehicle shown here is a coupe of approximately 1940 vintage. The photo- graph was taken in 1942. This vehicle was in use until 1955 or 1956 when it was replaced by the sedan delivery.



Fire Chief's vehicle shown is approximately 1940 vintage.

In the first week of November 1946, the City bought, for \$70,000.00, 237 acres "more or less", from the Federal Government. This land, at the northeast corner of the City was used during the Second World War as an army camp. The land had on it many army-style buildings, e.g. barracks, offices, mess halls, vehicle repair shops, drill hall, etc. The City wanted the barracks buildings to help relieve the demand for housing created by the returning veterans and their young families. After the purchase, many of the barracks buildings were sectioned off and then occupied by several families. (This area is now known as the Glenwood area of the City).

To protect this property and the buildings thereon, the City, in March of 1948, purchased from the Federal War Assets Corporation, a 1939 3-ton Ford fire truck. (It had been used during the war years to protect an army camp at Terrace, B.C.). Upon delivery, the truck was stationed at

the Army Camp's previous firehall located on the northwest corner of 10th Avenue and Roger Street. (Obviously this Firehall was built during the early 1940's).



Chief Venables shows the newly acquired truck to a reporter outside of the Army Camp Firehall.

The next two photographs taken later in 1948 or in 1949 show the truck with the City's initials now painted on the hood, a number assigned to it (No.4), and more equipment attached (helmets). The second photograph shows the truck in front of "No.2 Firehall". The truck is thought to be decorated to participate in the 1949 May Day Parade. It should be noted that a special brigade of seven volunteers who lived in the area, were recruited to man this vehicle.

The fire truck was sold in 1952 to MacMillan, Bloedel, Stewart & Welch. The Company moved it to the Great Central Lake Logging Division townsite (Camp 8).

See story following (old No. 4) for the subsequent history of this fire truck.



No. 4 fire truck complete with City initials and equipment



No. 4 decorated to participate in 1949 May Day Parade.

About 1952, the now surplus N0.2 Firehall at 10th Avenue and Roger Street was used by many community groups for offices and/or storage by agreement with the City.

Finally, in 1995, the land was sold by the City to a private developer who did not want the Firehall building. So, on June 13, 1995, a contractor commenced demolishing the building. Within two days it was completely gone.

The photograph below, taken on the morning of June 13, 1995, shows the first stage of demolition with the knocking out of the interior walls.



First stages of demolition, June 13, 1995. Within two days the entire building was gone.

OLD NO. 4

The following information and photos are presented strictly to track the history of the 1939 Ford Fire Truck (No. 4), because it has gone full circle, from the City and back to the City, as follows:

1952 - Because the truck was to be used to protect an active logging camp/townsite, and as the menfolk were most often away during the day, a women's brigade was formed to "man" the fire truck during the men's absence. The following photographs show the ladies of the brigade practicing with the truck in 1953. No photographs are available of the men's brigade with the truck.



Truck leaving Camp 8 Firehall c/w crew for a practice.



Ladies brigade practices with hoses, e.g. both suction and delivery.

The phasing out of the logging townsite commenced in the late 1950's and proceeded into the early 1960's. As people moved away, membership in both the ladies' and men's brigades dwindled to the point where the truck would have been operated by the M & B repair shop personnel, who would have been the only people around the area. The buildings in the townsite were being moved away or dismantled, so that by the mid 1960's and until 1973, the only buildings left were the M & B repair shop buildings. This was where the fire truck was stored until, in 1973, it was moved to the new M & B Sproat Lake Logging Division H.Q. and shops at Shoemaker Bay.

In the Spring of 1975, M & B Sproat Lake Division donated the fire truck to the Sproat Lake Volunteer Fire Department, a fire department located around the shore of Sproat Lake, with two distinct areas (Lakeshore Road & Faber Road), and a need for fire fighting equipment to cover the two areas.



L - R: Jack Moore, Manager of Central Services Division of Sproat Lake Division, and Bill Grey, Fire Warden of Sproat Lake Division, hand over the truck to S.L.V.F.D. Fire Chief Harold Bishop.

The truck was housed in the Faber Road Firehall and was used in that area from its acquisition in 1975 until 1988.



Photograph taken in 1988 of 1939 Ford fire truck with other S.L.V.F.D. vehicles.

In 1988, S.L.V.F.D. took delivery of a new fire truck and surplused the 1939 truck. On February 8, 1988, S.L.V.F.D. donated the truck to the City's Industrial Heritage Society (a volunteer group that works under the umbrella of the Museum, and who restore and maintain heritage industrial vehicles and equipment). The fire truck is part of a small fleet of heritage vehicles (15 in number), and is housed at one of several City owned buildings, e.g. E & N Station, ex-bus barns on 10th Avenue, McLean's Mill, etc. It is displayed at various public functions such as the Fall Fair.

Early in 1947, a fire on the fishpacker, Loyal No. 1, prompted a request to City Council from the Fire Chief, Bill Venables, for a fireboat. Council concurred with the request and a 1942 - 30 foot, steel hulled, jet propelled fire tug was purchased from the American War Assets Corporation in Seattle. The vessel was registered in Nanaimo on March 29th, 1947, and obviously was delivered to Port Alberni at about the same time.



Photograph shows the Port Alberni Fire Department personnel operating the vessel while an engineer from the Provincial Fire Marshal's Office takes readings of water flow to establish the vessel's official pumping capacity.

Not long after, on May 24th, 1947, the fire boat was used at the C.P.R. dock fire, then again, on July 24, 1947, it was used at the disastrous Assembly Wharf fire. The cargo ship "San Pep" was moored to this wharf and was also badly damaged by the fire.

Moving on to 1965 - A new Chief's "Car" is purchased to replace the 1940 vintage coupe. A 1956 Ford Sedan Delivery is bought.

There is no photograph available showing this vehicle in its entirety. What follows is a composite of two photographs wherein the front end and the back end (taken at different times) are put together to create a fairly good picture of this vehicle.



A composite photograph of the 1956 Chief's Car.

In early 1964, a new 1963 Ford Custom equipped pumper was received and replaced the 1942 2-ton Ford in first line service. The new truck had a 625 GPM pump and came with a 300 gallon water tank, hose reel, and ladders.



Photograph of new Ford fire truck. Photograph taken in the Fall of 1965.

The next vehicle replaced was the Chief's 1956 Ford sedan delivery, which was replaced with a 1966 Plymouth station wagon. Note the start of a two colour paint job on the Fire Department vehicles - the new Chief's car is red on the bottom with white on top.

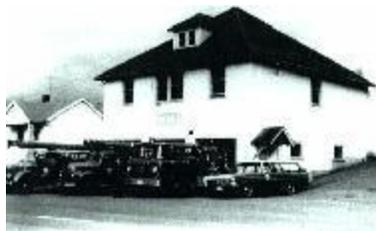


Photo of Fire Department apparatus in front of Port Alberni Fire Hall (taken late fall 1966).

In early 1967 the Department purchased another new custom fire truck. This was a 1966 International, with a 1050 gallon per minute (GPM) pump, a hose reel, a 500 gallon tank and all other small equipment, e.g. hose, axes, fittings, wrenches, etc.

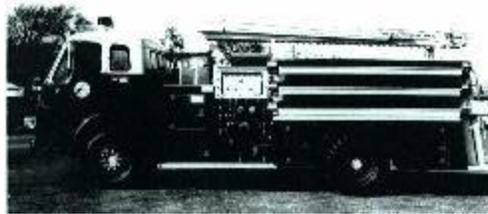
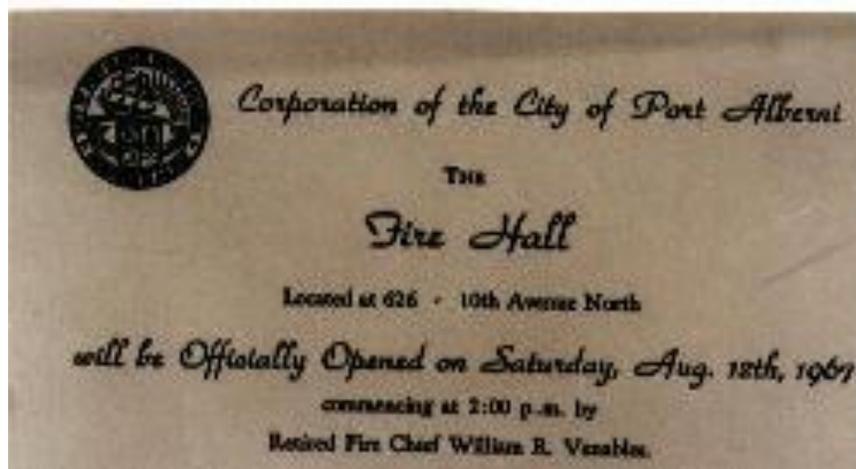


Photo shows new fire truck just days after it's arrival in Port Alberni.

At this time the 1942 International K-5, 420 GPM pumper was traded in to the new pumper supplier (This truck was quickly sold to Chetwynd Fire Department, having lost it's firehall and fire trucks in a late night fire!). This now gave the Department three pumper trucks, e.g. 1966, 1963, and 1942, plus, the 1941 Aerial ladder truck. In 1966, the pending amalgamation of the two Cities of Alberni and Port Alberni resulted in the construction of a new Port Alberni Firehall. It was known that the two Cities' Fire Departments would join forces and that neither of the existing Firehalls was big enough to hold the combined equipment and vehicles, and further, the locations of the two halls were not conducive to a fast response to both areas from either one. Thus a decision was taken to construct a new, large, centrally located Firehall. The new 7 bay hall was officially opened for business, August 12th, 1967. The location - 10th Ave & Bute St.



An open house for dignitaries and the public was held. Tours and demonstrations were put on by the staff.



The above photo was taken August 12th, 1967 - on the official opening day.

Port Alberni - Post Amalgamation

With the official amalgamation of the two Cities in October of 1967, the Port Alberni Fire Department acquired Alberni Fire Department's Firehall on the corner of Adelaide and Johnston Streets. The Firehall contained a 1937 Ford Pumper, a 1949 Ford Pumper, a 1960 Commer Van and a 1948 Dodge car/ambulance.

Due to the amount of duplication of equipment and vehicles, several vehicles with some older equipment were sold: eg; in 1968, Alberni's 1937 Ford Pumper was sold to Coal Harbour, in 1968, Alberni's 1948 Dodge car/ambulance was given to the City Works Department for use as a runabout vehicle, in 1970, Port Alberni's 1941 Ford Pumper was sold to Cherry Creek Fire Department, as shown in the photo below.



Photo above shows Personnel from the Cherry Creek Volunteer Fire Department with their newly acquired 1941 Ford Pumper.

In 1968, City Council decided to turn the City owned ambulance operation, being run by a private enterprise (Miller Motors), over to the Fire Department. This transfer of service became effective July 1, 1968. The Fire Department thus received two more vehicles - a 1966 Mercedes Benz ambulance and the 1954 Pontiac ambulance.



Photo shows two Port Alberni Fire Department Personnel with the 1966 Mercedes Benz Ambulance.

The Pontiac was in rather poor condition, and was sold within a year. The photo below shows members of the full time crew touching up the Pontiac as it was to be offered for sale.



Touching up the old Pontiac Ambulance.

The Pontiac was replaced by a 1968 Ford Econoline van, which was outfitted by the Port Alberni Fire Department's paid staff as a second ambulance and a rescue vehicle.



1968 Ford Econoline Ambulance/Rescue Van.

The next to be replaced was the Commer Van. It was replaced in 1969 with a Dodge Sportsvan. This van became a backup (3rd) ambulance and served primarily as the Fire Inspector's vehicle.



1969 Dodge Sportsvan - serving as a backup ambulance and station runabout.

In 1970, a 75 foot elevating platform/pumper was ordered. Due to the complexity of it's construction, delivery was not made until 1972. This vehicle was fitted with a two stage 1050 GPM pump and carried hose and equipment so was a self contained unit. Photo below shows the elevating platform being operated by F.D. staff in a drill at the Pioneer Towers.

The 1941 International truck, fitted with the 53 foot Nemco ladder was traded in to the elevating platform supplier, who promptly sold it to the Nanoose Fire Department.



75 foot Elevating Platform.

In late 1973, the Department took delivery of a new Fire Chief's car. It was a 1974 Chevrolet Nova, four door sedan (pictured below). The 1966 Plymouth Station Wagon was retained and became the Deputy Fire Chief's vehicle.



On July 1 1974, the Provincial Government took over all ambulance services in B.C. The City sold the 1966 Mercedes Benz ambulance and the 1968 Ford Econoline to the B.C. Government Ambulance Agency. Shortly after, the agency took these vehicles out of service and supplied a standard type vehicle (used province wide). Similar vehicles

were supplied at intervals to the Department when mileages got very high or vehicles became worn out.



Photo shows the two B.C. Government supplied vehicles. Photo taken: approximately 1975.

By 1976, the 1941 Fireboat was in very poor condition due to rust and corrosion, and City Council agreed that a new vessel was in order. A 27 foot fibre glass vessel was commissioned from a shipyard in North Vancouver. This vessel was delivered in November, 1977, and officially christened and put in service December 1st, 1977. The old Fireboat was sold to the Bamfield Fire Department. It should be noted that the Port Alberni Harbour Commission contributed 50% of the purchase price of the Fireboat and the shed that was subsequently built to shelter it.



M.V. Frank Harrison

Also received during 1977 were: a new International 1050 GPM single stage pumper which replaced the 1948 Ford Pumper (which was sold by the City to the Town of Pouce Coupe); a new Chevrolet Chevelle station wagon which replaced the 1966 Plymouth station wagon (which was traded in).



Keys for new 1050 GPM Pumper Exchanged in 1977.



Keys for new Chevelle Station Wagon exchanged in 1977 as well.

At about this time, the Fire Chief convinced City Council that a regular cycle of replacements for pumper trucks would be wise for budget purposes and to comply with the expectations of the Insurance Underwriters. It was decided that the oldest of the 3 pumpers would be replaced after 21 years of service. By adjusting the timing of new truck purchases a new pumper would be bought and placed in service every 7 years. Thus, the next pumper replacement took place in 1985 when a new 1984 diesel powered 1050 gpm single stage pumper was purchased and received, replacing the 1964 Ford pumper. (This 1964 pumper was traded in on the new 1984 pumper and was sold by the supplier to Conquerall Bank Fire Department in Nova Scotia).



Port Alberni's first diesel truck - a 1984 International.

It should be noted here that for several years now, smaller Fire Department vehicles, eg: Chief and Deputy Chief vehicles plus the Inspector's van were on a 10 year replacement cycle. Then in 1979 the 1969 Dodge Sportsvan was replaced with a 1979 Chevrolet van; in late 1984 the Chief's 1974 Chevrolet Nova was replaced with a 1984 Chevrolet Cavalier; in 1987 the Deputy Chief's 1977 Chevrolet Chevelle station wagon was replaced with a 1987 Ford half ton pickup complete with a canopy. the following photo shows all the 3 new vehicles noted above.



Photo Shows the Fire Chief's, Deputy Fire Chief's, and Fire Inspector's van.

In 1989 the 1979 Inspector's Chevrolet van was traded in on a 1989 Ford Econoline van.



Keys exchanged for the 1989 Ford Econoline Inspector's Van.

In 1991, the Department took delivery of a new diesel powered, 2 stage 1050 GPM GM/White/Volvo Pumper. It replaced the 1966 International pumper, which was sold by the City to the Beaver Creek Recreational Association.



New 1991 1050 gpm GM/White/Volvo Diesel Powered Pumper with enclosed crew cab.



In the Fall of 1994, the Fire Chief's 1984 Chevrolet Cavalier was traded in for a 1994 Plymouth Acclaim.

This concludes the accounting of the Firehalls and the vehicles to the October, 1995