Adelaide Fire Brigade 1950

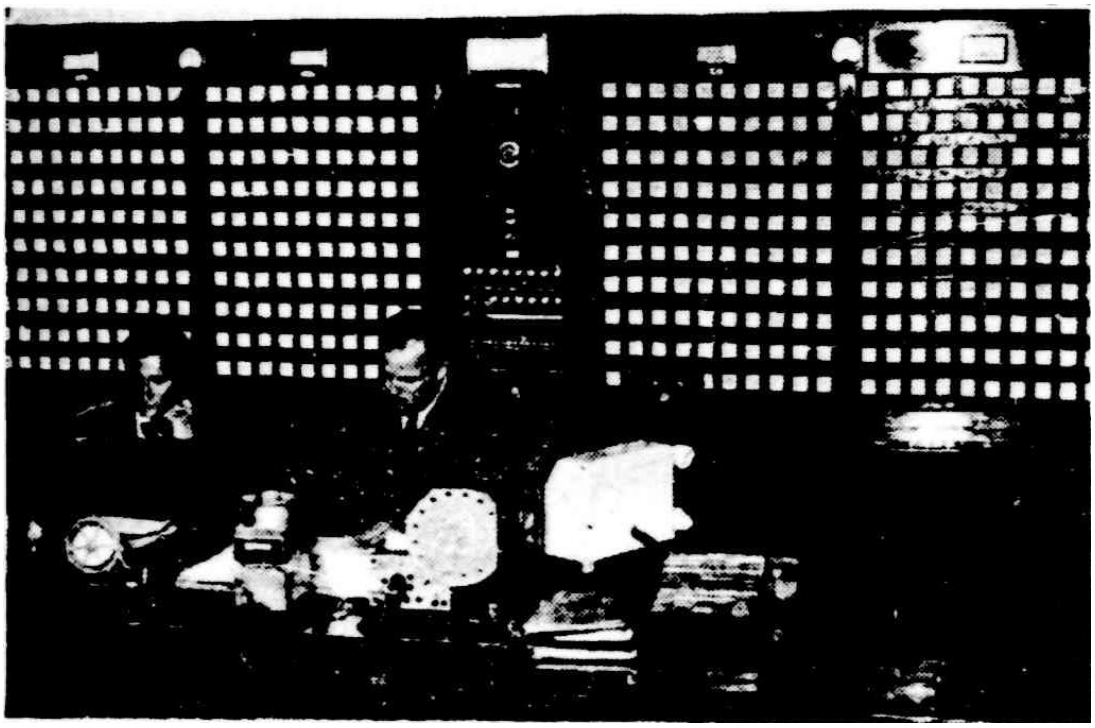
Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954), Saturday 7 January 1950, page 6

What happens when the Talk Alarm glass is broken and the button pressed

Fire-Fighting As A Science

by ALBERT E. FARRELL

NOT so very long ago Talk Alarms were installed at key points throughout Adelaide. For a few days the vivid red pedestals that housed them aroused curiosity; today they are accepted — all 500 of them — as part and parcel of our everyday life. But to the South Australian Fire Brigade these alarms engender a justifiable pride for they have gained a world-wide reputation with their outstanding efficiency. The Home Office, London, and several official bodies in the USA have requested details of operation. Such a tribute speaks for itself and justifies the confidence placed in them by the brigade. How do these alarms work, and what machinery is set in motion when the glass is broken and the alarm given? Their keynote is absolute simplicity. A call through any set is tantamount to a personal call at brigade headquarters with first-hand information of an outbreak of fire. A visit to Wakefield street leaves one with a sense of complete efficiency, that has its source in Chief Officer 'Jock' Whyte, a quietly spoken Scot, who regards firefighting as a profession. A normal day at Fire Brigade HQ begins at 9 a.m. with the "fall-in" (carried out with all the efficiency of a crack regiment), followed by a period of strenuous physical jerks. This training has one objective— complete physical fitness. Without such a foundation the unceasing and arduous training in the art of firefighting could not be sustained.



Fire control panel. — White squares indicate location of individual Talk Alarms. The ticker tape machine in glass enclosure records time of each individual call.

In the early days of Adelaide's Fire Brigade a number of men were paid a retaining fee, for which they held them-selves in readiness for any emergency. But, as they followed their private occupations and lived at home, their preparedness must have been problematical. Today, the first appliance, fully manned, is rolling out of HQ in less than 30 seconds. What happens when the Talk Alarm glass is broken and the button pressed? Each separate alarm

has its own corresponding indicator on a vast panel which acts as the "switchboard" of Fire Control. These indicators are 2 in. squares of frosted glass, each carrying the exact location of the alarm signal — street, business premises or hospital.

The slightest pressure of the button is sufficient to call the brigade. In fact, the whole mechanism is so sensitive that the mere breaking of the glass is sufficient to secure response from the duty Control Officer. The pressing of the button illuminates a 50 volt lamp fitted to each panel, thereby ensuring swift detection. Then follows the routine question, "Why are you calling?" But, in addition to calling Control, the pressing of the button has also rung the house bells, turned on station lights during the night, operated the station street traffic lights as a warning to approaching motorists, and finally, recorded the exact time of the call on ticker-tape. Five seconds after receipt of call the control-panel light is automatically extinguished in readiness for further calls. During the sounding of the alarm and the few seconds occupied in the firemen's dressing at night, the duty Control Officer has received details and pin-pointed the site of fire. This information is broadcast through the house loud-speaker communication system; thus, by the time the men have reached the appliance they know their destination. Should the officer in charge of the first appliance have the slightest doubt about the locality of the fire, he calls for a "locality card." These cards carry all relevant details of the particular area, route to follow, locality of turncock, size of water main, nearest police station and telephone, and any other information likely to assist in firefighting.

Should the route be north, along King William street, the Control Officer sets the fire traffic signals in operation, thereby sealing off all cross traffic. Another duty man climbs the watch tower and reports, over a talk alarm to the officer in charge below, any signs of the fire that may be visible. It is these reports that may instigate a "general call." In the training of his men Chief Officer Whyte stimulates realism to a marked degree. Particularly does this apply to the use of the oxygen apparatus, which, in itself, weighs 45 lb. — a stiff handicap without the hazard of fire. Practice in its use is carried out in a shed specially sealed off to prevent the escape of smoke fumes, which are created by burning different materials and solids in 40 gallon drums in the shed. The course is hazardous and arduous, consisting of a tunnel fitted with obstacles such as odd-shaped openings which must be negotiated in full oxygen kit and dragging a hose along. Ladders lead up to the rafters, where a catwalk has been built. Various types of obstacles litter the walk, which, coupled with the dense smoke, can send little apprehensive ripples down a trainee's spine. As confidence grows, so the training intensifies among the acrid Fumes. The shed becomes a ship's hold, full of smoke. To reach the seat of the fire it is necessary to climb one ladder, negotiate the walk for a short distance, climb down another ladder and up again, down once again, through the tunnel and on to the fire. Such training as this can be undertaken only by mentally alert and physically fit men, and serves to underline the reason for their stiff physical training and strict regimentation. The fire alarm system and electrical equipment under the supervision of Mr. J. H. Thyer, Chief Brigade Electrician, is one of the main nerve centres at headquarters, as all emergency calls are received through its efficient operation. Under the guiding genius of "Jock" Whyte the Talk Alarm, first introduced to Adelaide in 1934, was overhauled and vast, far-reaching improvements introduced. The new equipment, now functioning throughout the metropolitan area, was designed and built entirely in the Brigade's electrical department. Four stations, including headquarters, are now equipped with the Talk Alarm, and the demand is so rapidly increasing that it portends a rapid change-over throughout the entire SAFB. In addition to the alarms installed in the streets, there are also alarms throughout the GPO, at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, and the Civil Aviation at Parafield. A recent test at Parafield brought fire appliance, ambulance and crash appliance with 17 men to the scene in less than a minute. Another far-reaching innovation that is an evolutionary brain-child of the Brigade's electrical department is the electrical watchman's clock. Still in process of construction, this clock not only protects the building in which it is installed, but the watchman. Each time the night watchman punches the clock points placed at strategic points throughout the premises, the master clock checks his route, and should any deviation occur the Brigade Control Operator will receive a signal. The Talk Alarm fitted to the clocking system gives the watchman direct

and instantaneous contact with head-quarters control officer. Any failure to punch-in at the stipulated time will cause the clock, after an interval pre-arranged between the firm and the Brigade, automatically to call the control officer. A call is then put through to the watchman. These watchman clocks are being installed throughout the GPO in addition to the alarms. An emergency evacuation call system is also being installed at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. Still another weapon in the never-ending search for efficient fire-control is the key system. The brigade has been supplied with keys giving access to the principal business premises throughout the city. This saves time, but also eliminates forcible entry and subsequent damage. It is quite impossible for any unauthorised person to identify any bunch of keys, while any attempt at pilfering would meet with surprising results. A fascinating appliance at headquarters is the Monitor or deluge-set. This resembles an anti-aircraft gun, with comparable elevating and traversing gear. In necessity it can deliver 1,000 gallons of water a minute under intense pressure. Equipped with quick release gear, it can be removed from the appliance and transported to any position to attack a serious block fire at close quarters. What is there in the Fire Brigade that brings men to embrace this hazardous occupation? There is a spirit of comrade-ship, paralleled only in the services, where a man's life may depend on his mates holding fast. There is adventure unknown to the man in the street but there is also service to the community, a spirit that permeates the whole brigade. A recruit's training is stiff; it takes six or seven months to produce an efficient and reliable fireman who, armed with the most modern equipment, and with a sound knowledge of chemistry to enable him to deal with dangerous fires, serves Adelaide in time of need.

Oxygen apparatus used to penetrate smoke-filled buildings. The use of this apparatus prevented what could have been a disastrous fire at Kodak Ltd. during Christmas week.

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Wednesday 21 June 1950, page 28

Firm's employes learn to use fire engine

AN OLD FIRE ENGINE, complete with pump, formerly used by the SA Fire Brigade, has been bought by Lightburn and Co., Ltd., Camden, for use in the event of fire at their factory. Employes today were instructed in the use of the engine. They later gave a demonstration.

Mail (Adelaide, SA : 1912 - 1954), Saturday 8 July 1950, page 52

Fire alarm charge

A man was taken on a fire appliance to the City Watch-house late this afternoon. He was charged with having tampered with a fire alarm at the corner of Pirie and Wyatt streets. The Fire Brigade had turned out. They chased and caught the man.

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Wednesday 30 August 1950, page 1

Fire seen from city station

Flames from a fire in a garage at Toorak Gardens at 2 a.m. today could be seen from the watchtower at Fire Brigade headquarters. The fire was at the rear of the home of Mrs. Katherine Jane Hill, Watson avenue. Occupants of the house awakened shortly after 2 a.m., saved a new car. Fire appliances from Norwood and Adelaide quelled the outbreak, but the garage and neighboring fences were damaged to the extent of about £200.

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954), Friday 13 October 1950, page 14

CALLED FOR HELP ON FIRE ALARM

Answering calls for help from a talkie fire alarm at the corner of Grenfell street and East terrace at 2.10 a.m. yesterday, firemen found a man, aged 69, shouting into the microphone. He told police he had been taken for a ride in a car and dumped on a footpath. The man, who had been discharged from the Royal Adelaide Hospital on Wednesday, was readmitted for observation.

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954), Wednesday 20 December 1950, page 4

FIRE BRIGADE COSTS

Because of the basic wage rise an extra £15,000 a year would be needed by the Fire Brigades Board for wages next year, Councillor J. H. Parkinson, a member of the board, told Burnside Council last night. As the Government had already paid its fixed contribution, this amount would have to be found by the insurance companies and the municipalities.

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Wednesday 27 December 1950, page 1

Hospital fire from cigarette

When a fire call was received from Calvary Hospital, North Adelaide, at 8.40 a.m. today, Chief Fire Officer Whyte made a 75-m.p.h. dash to the scene. Mr. Whyte located the fire in a bedroom in the nurses' quarters. By the time firemen arrived he was able to direct them with chemical extinguishers and prevent the blaze from spreading. The fire was caused by a cigarette falling from a cabinet, starting a fire in the skirting board. Several pieces of the

furniture in the bedroom were severely damaged. Mr. Whyte said later all calls to hospitals were treated as emergencies and there was a full turn-out of brigades.