

Answering The Call:
The History Of The
Port Washington Volunteer Fire Department

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Donald F. Curtin
Protection Engine Company No. 1

conducted in association with the
Port Washington Public Library Local History Center

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pertaining to the subject being discussed

Q: Today is December 3rd, 2004. This is an interview with Donald Curtin. My name is Sally Olds. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. Can you please tell me your name.

Donald F. Curtin: Don Curtin.

Q: And which fire company are you affiliated with?

DFC: Protection Engine Company in Port Washington. So, now, we're going to start, right?

Q: Yes.

DFC: Okay.

Q: What was it like growing up in Port Washington?

DFC: Well, I was born in Port Washington in 1937 on the ... [back of] ... 7 Mill Pond Road. And, of course, the houses down there were not in perfect shape. I mean, a little old, but they were old-fashioned and stuff. And we had the sandpits right down there by what was just the Port Washington Sewer District now, we had the sandpits back there. We had sandpits behind us, which was Port Washington North, Pleasant Avenue. And it was

great living down there, because we had the pond when I was a kid. I remember then in the wintertime the pond used to freeze up and be solid, full of ice, and a lot of people went ice skating down there. I was only a kid at the time--young kid. And they used to take the Christmas trees and pile them up along the shore of the Mill Pond and burn them to keep warm at nighttime, you know, after Christmas. And then we had one little old grouchy lady--which I don't want to mention her name--but she used to call the cops on it all the time, about burning the Christmas trees and everything. In those days, things were, oh, a lot, lot different. Of course, we didn't have as much traffic down there like that we have in Port Washington now. It was great. Great living down there. Good neighbors, good friends down there. The old families. Matter of fact, I have pictures home of Mill Pond back in the, I guess, the late 1800s, early 1900s, and the picture of it has some buildings hanging over the Mill Pond, and the pond itself -- happened to be my grandfather's blacksmith shop. So he was part of the history in Port Washington on my mother's side of the family.

Q: What was his name?

DFC: Charles E. Baxter. And they were, in the village, or in Port Washington, I should say, my mother's side was the Baxter family, which was over two hundred years. But, then, my grandfather was the founder of Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company, back I think..I believe it was..well, I think Atlantic was 1888. And also he was a charter member or one of the founders of Protection Engine Company in 1892. And I never met him and stuff.

Matter of fact, I was born in 1937. My grandfather--later--that was in January of '37; my grandfather lived, I think, till March of April. I can't remember from stories I heard. He walked to come to see me for the first time; he had a heart attack and died. So that's something there on that. But the memories of Mill Pond Road, that was the greatest place to live in Port Washington. It was--there were a lot of people I knew--the old families, except for now are mostly all gone, a lot of them, you know.

Q: Well, you were talking about how Port Washington has changed. What changes have you seen?

DFC: Well, just now--I was just coming in now, you know, now I live in Pennsylvania. And just coming into town, we seen where the sandpits were all over there on Pleasant Avenue where all the new homes are--condos or I don't know what they're putting in there. But everything has changed. I mean, with the traffic. There's a lot of very..traffic, a lot of bad traffic in this town now. And a lot of different nationalities in this town now. It's not like it was, you know, when we were younger right up till I left here in 1998. And--but it's a--it's a big change in everything. It's just--it's not the same Port Washington that you'd really expect to see. I mean, with the buildings changing, and from what they tell me, Roslyn West Shore Road down there has really built up with all kinds of stuff down there. Because that was all sandpits, too. It was great and stuff. Oh, it was great. But it's time to make the move. Everything got a little higher, and from when I talk to people they're telling me that the taxes are so high here in Port

Washington. And a lot of the older people, they tell me the same thing. That they, you know, see the town--the town changing so drastically that they don't know what to do. They're trying to make up their minds, do they move, sell, or get out, you know. It's a big decision. If you want to--it's really a big decision. I'll tell you, I moved to Pennsylvania now. It's nice up there, but it's not a Port Washington. It's not a Port Washington definitely. I mean, it's cheaper to live up there. I got a nice house, nice place and everything up in the mountains in the valley. But Port Washington for me, if we could afford it again, I would come back here. I mean, they say there's nothing like leaving the old town and come back again. So, it's great though. Port Washington's great.

Q: What are your childhood memories about fires, besides the Christmas trees?

DFC: About fires?

Q: Fires. Or of firefighting?

DFC: I don't know. I never really thought of joining the Fire Department too much when I was young till about maybe seventeen or eighteen years old and stuff. But, oh, when I was small, I remember these fire trucks used to go by when they had fire--you know, fire calls, you know, different parts of Port Washington. They'd go by, and, of course, the old fire trucks then, some of them had chain-driven trucks in those days. They never called a ...

Q: Chain-driven?

DFC: Remember, they had chain. Yeah, they had that chain on the outside of the truck; it was like a--I think Flower--I think Flower Hill had a Bulldog Mack truck, I think it was. It had a big bulldog on the front of it and everything. And it had that chain on the outside. I guess that the truck probably was from the--I would say it must have been from the '20s or early '30s, I mean, and this--it's quite – its quite a piece of apparatus. But it was quite a good thing to see here, you know, when you walk by and these guys are doing their jobs. And then later when I got a little older, of course, like at seventeen or eighteen, nineteen or something like that, then I went to sign up. I wanted to do something. So I joined it, and I was in there almost forty-two years, and I loved it. I loved it.

Q: What made you decide to join?

DFC: Oh, some of my friends were there. You know, we got out of school and stuff, some guys went in. But they didn't go in the same company. They went to Flower Hill; some went to Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company and stuff. But I had a good friend of mine that I knew all my life out on Mill Pond Road--Harry Hooper--and Harry Hooper sponsored me in Protection Engine Company and stuff, so -- Harry was good. He was-- still good. I seen him just recently. I was down here for a funeral and stuff, and he was quite a character. And he sponsored me in the company. And then, of course, I knew a

lot of guys in Protection Engine company, too, you know, a lot of the old families at that time were in. Actually I never knew my grandfather was a charter member of Protection Engine Company till I got in there and happened to look at the charter and see his name up there and stuff. So it was kind of surprising to me.

Q: You said Harry Hooper was a character. What was he like?

DFC: Oh, oh, geez. I don't know if you've talked to Harry. Have you met him? You must have met him ...

Q: I haven't.

DFC: You haven't met him? Well, ... [you've heard stories?] ... They called him "Dirty Harry." That was his nickname--"Dirty Harry." And, well, he does..he used to do a little swearing, and all. But the things he'd do--does, he (laughs)-- If I did it, I'd get slapped across the face by some woman (laughs). You know, I mean, he's just one of these guys. But he'd give you the shirt off his back and everything. He was just a lot of fun. A lot of fun. And he was from Mill Pond Road. His family was there all his life. And I think he's probably got about sixty years or more now in Protection. But good people. Good people. There's a lot of them that died down there, that I knew from Mill Pond Road that were firemen at Protection Engine Company, too. Alex Sonny Morrison across the water from me. He was very good. Very good. He was Chief of the Fire Department in Port

Washington. Lenny Seifts. He died. He lived on Smull Place, which would be right off Mill Pond Road there. He lived down there. He's an ex-Chief of Port Washington. There's a lot of them down there that were firemen and stuff.

Q: Do you remember who was the Chief when you joined?

DFC: I believe it was Johnny Duncan. I believe it was Johnny Duncan.

Q: And do you remember who the Captain of Protection was?

DFC: Protection Engine Company, at that time, was, I think, John Edmundson or Sassy Poole-- Arthur Poole. I'm not sure. But either one of them might ...

Q: So what are you own memories of when you first joined? Do you remember when you were first sworn in and what that was like?

DFC: It was a great honor, you know. I think, at that time, when we got sworn in, of course, you have a probation period. But I think it was--I think it was one or two years at that time, and stuff. So then, they'd help you know, you know, training you, and everything, and it was good. I mean, I loved the--most of the guys I got along very good. I was easy to get along with. Sometimes I'd get a little grouchy, but they all know me pretty good down there (laughs). But, no, it was great. Things--we lined up the things. And, of

course, met a lot of good men. At that time, we didn't have no women in the Fire Department, of course, you know. And it was good. And after, I think, it was in the fifties--'57, I got in. So I think it was 1959 I first got elected as a Fourth Assistant Engineer--an officer in Protection Engine Company, which had me in charge of maintaining the equipment when you have a fire or pumping the apparatus at a fire, or getting everything back to order when you get back from the fire, which is to make sure the truck and everything's all set up in case another call comes in and stuff. So I stayed in that--I moved up to foreman, we start at fourth, then I became third, second. Then I got married in 1962. My wife had nothing to say about it, but I decided to step down as an officer, you know, and stuff, but ...

Q: Why?

DFC: Well, sometimes it can be a little tedious for some people--you know, just things get a little tough sometimes. You know, sometimes you get a little mad or something. Something might have happened, I might have just said, "Oh, the heck with it." I had enough of it, you know, just stay as a regular fireman and stuff.

Q: Well, like what kinds of things. What kinds of things would happen then that they would be hard to deal with?

DFC: Oh, I don't know. Sometimes it might be you think you got everything straightened out

or something done on the apparatus, then you might have somebody come along and maybe just give you a wisecrack about maybe your job or something, like it's not the proper way of doing the stuff. So, you know, sometimes you just get that little bug in your ear and say, "Well, let somebody else do it." (Laughs). Okay on that?

Q: Yes. And what was the hardest thing about being an engineer when you were actually fighting the fire?

DFC: The engineer's job wasn't really that hard. It's just that a lot of times, too, they were short of regular guys at the firehouse. If I could help them, I'd go help them ...

[INTERFERENCE] ... go to one nozzle or something else ... [INTERFERENCE] ... But it was ...

Q: So, going to the nozzle wasn't part of your regular job.

DFC: Yes and no. Yes, I guess it would be if you didn't have enough manpower at the scene of the fire sometimes on a piece of apparatus in there ... [INTERFERENCE] ... The driver would stay on the truck, something like that, and they needed somebody, you know, as assistant, you'd go and, you know, help them, and stuff. And I liked working with the nozzle and stuff, and, you know, not to show off or anything, but, you know, just to, you know, because it was just something natural. It comes to you.

Q: That's hard to do, though, isn't it, to control the nozzle?

DFC: Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah. You get some water pressure coming off there. We seen, sometimes you go to a bad fire you'd have to use, maybe at that time, I think the biggest hose line we had was like two and a half inches in diameter. And the pump operator would give you sometimes a lot of pressure, and if you're on the end of the nozzle, that can take you--knock you right off the street. Your feet start coming up. You know, you have to have, sometimes two or three guys backing the man up on nozzle because of the pressure.

Q: Did you ever get knocked down?

DFC: I probably did, but I can't remember offhand, but I imagine that this happened, you know. But we've had some bad fires and stuff. I mean, where we had to have the pressure. And I was on nozzle quite a few times on them and stuff. And then we had that Manhattan Food Store on Main Street. That was back in the--I would say maybe early '60s, mid-'60s. That's up by-- the old Woolworth used to be up there, too, on Main Street, there.

Q: The old Woolworth?

DFC: Yeah, well, it used to be a Woolworth. But that would be up there just past South Bayles Avenue on the left-hand side up there. That was the Manhattan Supermarket.

Somewheres in that vicinity. I can't exactly remember. That was quite a fire; it was on a Sunday, matter of fact. I think it was a Sunday morning. Because then I was, at that time, living on South Street, and I was painting a house and was up on an extension ladder. And, in those days, we didn't have all these electronic stuff with the radios now that these guys carry now ... [people don't..they just go put the fire out] ... So I'm up on the ladder. I turned around, and I look up and I can see the smoke up through Main Street. So, when I came down, I'd parked my car by Brower's Hardware Store. It used to be on the corner of Bayles and Main Street. And as I was getting out of my car, I could look in the reflection of his window, and I could see the flames shooting from the Manhattan Food Store. So I knew we were in for a big one that day. That was quite a big fire there.

Q: Was that the first big fire you fought?

DFC: No. There were quite a few of them there.

Q: Well, okay. So, going back to that one at Manhattan Food Store, so what--what did you do there once you got to the fire?

DFC: Well, I got, well, when the pumpers start pulling up, of course, you have to pull the hose lines off if you're hooking them up to your fire hydrants. But I wound up on a two and a half inch line, and we were going through the front door and everything--everything was

fully involved in there. And there was a lot of flame, a lot of heavy smoke and stuff. So, I mean, so it was, I think there was probably three or four of us on that two and a half inch line. And I was operating the nozzle. And trying to knock down the fire. It took quite a while, because, like I said, there was a very bad blaze and stuff.

Q: But what do you mean "fully involved"?

DFC: A lot of flames. I mean, a lot of flames, like take this room, for example. If this whole room could be fully involved, your ceilings, your walls, everything, you know, coming up out of the basement, like the billows from the fire. It was really, really going. So we finally got it out, but we had to call Manhasset-Lakeville to help us out a little bit, which is unusual, because Port Washington Fire Department is a big fire department in those days. I don't know how they are now. Maybe they've--people are lax maybe now. I'm not saying lax. Things have changed. Put it to you that way. But it's a good Fire Department. They're really well trained here in Port Washington. I can say one thing about it, from what I see where I live now, forget about it. I mean, compared to ...

Q: Why? What's it like where you live now?

DFC: Oh, up there, they don't have the training. They don't have the training facilities. They don't have, and they have the apparatus, it's so old. I mean, OSHA has rules. After so many years, you have to get rid of the pumpers every something--I believe it's fifteen

years. I might be wrong on that. After fifteen years, because the truck is outdated. Up there, they've got trucks twenty-five, thirty years old, still using it. You tell them about safety stuff up there in the fire departments, they don't want to hear about it. They don't care about OSHA rules. They're up in the woods up there, so ...(laughs)

Q: And that's all volunteer also?

DFC: It's all volunteer. Oh yeah. Yeah, definitely. But volunteers are good. I mean, the volunteers are all right. Because, I mean, a lot of people don't realize that when they probably more into town that they are a volunteer fire department. I mean, they put their hours in, you know, going to school, training, and all that stuff. And then, of course, you've got meetings to discuss things, what they're going to do around here or anything. And you keep the apparatus, keep everything in there. And they don't get paid nothing. They don't get nothing. So, people don't realize that if they had to put a paid department in here now, you're talking about big bucks. Big bucks. It's, you know, so, even though, like I say, I'm in Pennsylvania now, I still back the volunteer fire department up one hundred percent. I mean, it's in my blood.

Q: You mean here or there?

DFC: Both places. Even though I don't agree on some of the things, though, but I help them out as best as I can. I help them out and stuff.

Q: What do you do up there?

DFC: Well I just joined it. I belong to two different departments there at a time there, because I get sick right after I moved up there, so I had to quit right away because I had open heart surgery. So I had four bypasses put in, so that ended my doing anything really. Just advice, so--doing things around, you know, things they want me to do. If they want me to do some errands and all, but I mean ...

Q: Some what? I'm sorry? Errands?

DFC: Yeah, they'll tell me to do something for them, you know, just nothing--nothing spectacular. Just to help them out. But just it wasn't the same as Port Washington. It wasn't the same at all, no way. But like I say, I miss the Fire Department here. It was always good to me.

Q: What do you miss about it?

DFC: Well, I miss the community and the Department, I should say. The Department, like I say, was very good, because I had a lot of friends in the Department. They treated me good and stuff. And we had good times. We had good laughs. We had bad times, even, you know. We all stuck together and everything. And, when you move, you know, it's

starting a new life all over again. So, there's times I sit back and just think about it and stuff a lot, you know. I try to even get them on my radio--my short wave radio, but I can't. Too far away. I lose the calls.

Q: So, was the social aspect of being a member of the Fire Department a--you know, a big, a big draw for you?

DFC: Yes and no. Well, I think with the Fire Department and companies, they had an annual dinner or something. And I would say, probably before I moved, about the last twenty years before I moved, I very seldom went to the dinners anymore. There wasn't nothing wrong with it, but just ...

Q: Why not?

DFC: I didn't go out and do the social stuff too big. But I mean years ago, we used to have our clambakes and stuff. We went--we went big for that. We used to have them down at Sands Point, at some of the estates down there--Swopes Estate down there. And, oh, geez, there was a couple more down there along the waterfront on Long Island Sound. They used to let us use their property for the day. You know, you got to go down there and, you know, set everything up with a tent. And get up early the next morning, five o'clock or something like that, and go to the firehouse to open the clams and making clam chowder. Because we had some good clam chowder. Well, Port Washington was a clam

town, you know, and some of the old-timers from Protection Engine Company, they were the clam-diggers then. They were actually the clam-diggers and stuff. And they--they knew how to make it. They really--no cheating on milk, cheating on your clams and all your vegetables. They made it good. I'd like to throw some down. Right now (laughs). But, no, they just--the social was good. It was good. There was nothing wrong with it and stuff. I guess for me, I just slowed down a little bit and stuff. My wife, she liked to go to them. She liked to go. My wife always enjoyed it. She--my wife never interfered with me with the Fire Department. And some guys', you know, wives, I guess, probably didn't--they'd have arguments through the years over the Fire Department, and being at the firehouse too much and all that. But my wife, she never--never bothered me about the Fire Department. She never..she knew where I was if she wanted me. She knew I was doing my thing, whatever, you know ...

Q: Did you talk much about the Fire Department work with your family?

DFC: I had two sons. At that time, they were young. They didn't seem to be very interested in it. I used to take them to the firehouse when they were starting to grow up and stuff. But they didn't seem to be interested in it or really into it, and stuff. So they never said anything wrong about it. They never condemned it or, you know, and they knew a lot of people and the guys. Because a lot of the guys from years ago were all the old families, you know. Because with different people moving in, I guess, things have changed on that part, but--which is good. At least you're getting some memberships and stuff.

Except now, I guess it's pretty bad, from stories I hear, it's not like it used to be, you know. But I see now if you have a house fire, a routine house fire, you hear the whistle go off, and, you know Protection Engine Company is, you've got it supposed to have a hundred membership, and we used to pull out like maybe about forty, forty-five guys for a fire call. That's just the one company, not counting Atlantic Hook and Ladder and Flower Hill. They probably, at that time, was probably doing the same thing. So, we wasn't doing anything wrong. We had the manpower. Because we--we had it. I mean we were a big department, Port Washington. They were well known all over the place, the Port Washington, the Fire Department, because of their skills and everything.

Q: Well, how did being a volunteer with the Fire Department fit in with your work life? What kind of paying work were you doing?

DFC: Well, I didn't work in Port Washington at all. I was--I belonged to the Operating Engineers Local 138 in Long Island, which is heavy equipment operators, which we build the highways and bridges and everything else on Long Island. It was a--you know, it was Union jobs. So I was out of town. But, there would be a call come in, say, two o'clock in the morning or something. Because a lot of times I'd leave here like five or five-thirty in the morning to go to my job. There'd be a call, one, two o'clock, three o'clock, even. I'd still get up and go to the alarm. And if it was a bad fire, I didn't get paid, so I had to get paid at my job, so I had to the job. You know, otherwise, I'd lose a day's pay, you know. So I used to tell them it's a huge kind of, you know, responsibility, which it was. But I

was very active on the calls. Right up to the day I moved from here, I think. I mean, I was pretty active. Matter of fact, I have (laughs), well it's part of the history--I won't mention names--but before I moved, like I think about a year or so before I moved, the officer of the company got up at a meeting one night and got talking about the manpower not coming--manpower coming out. So, he started to thank, like me, he said, "Don Curtin gets up, Rab Rankin," which is an old-timer here in Port Washington, he says, "He comes out." Bucky Lewis, he was another old-timer coming out. "These guys are going to fires two or three o'clock in the morning. All you young guys are sitting home." Well some wise guy got up and his mouth starts shooting at me and yelling at me, cursing me out a little bit on the floor, and I got a little (laughs)--I got a little upset. And so I started to go after him. You know, stood up. So I started walking towards him, because who's this young punk think he's talking to. And, before I knew it, the Captain yelled over to get me before I--he thought I was going to fight him. I wasn't going to hit him, because (laughs) I don't want a law suit (laughs). I did use my brain on that part. But, I don't know, a couple of guys jumped into it, because they thought there was going to be a fight. So I got thrown out of the meeting. It didn't bother me. At first it did, but then I said, well, he's the Captain, he runs the company, he's doing his job to prevent someone-- But when I got thrown out of the meeting (laughs), Frank Pavlak, he'll tell you, he says, "This is history," he says (laughs). So two of the officers walked out, on my side. They walked out also. Two old officers walked out. And, of course, the other guy, he got thrown out of the meeting too. But I never held it against anybody. I didn't.

Q: Well, what was he cursing at you for?

DFC: Oh, he called me a name. But he was telling me I was stupid, because I was stupid enough to get up two, three o'clock in the morning to do calls and stuff like that, which was a bunch of baloney. I mean, that call came in, when the whistle came in, I was--I took--I raised my right hand in 1957 to protect lives and save property. I'm not saying now you see these guys all not doing it. But some of them just think that they can do it. They just come in here and join it and have a little--just grand old time for themselves, you know. Because he's one of these type of characters. Of course, I was being thanked by the Captain, but just coming out doing these calls, me and a couple of the old guys and stuff. And what's the matter with you young guys ... [??] ... just give you a nice shot at it, you know. So ...

Q: Who was the Captain then?

DFC: Vinnie Costa. Vinnie. Yeah, he was--Vinnie Costa was the Captain then. Every time I--I run into Vinnie every once in a while when I'm in Port Washington. He tells everybody this whole story that I just told you, you know. "About the time I had to throw him out of the meeting and stuff." I think at first I was a little shook up, you know. But I never held it against him. I mean, I went home, explained it to my wife. She didn't say nothing. She just said, cool down and calm down and everything, and I did. And, I guess maybe I stayed away from the firehouse maybe for a week or something to cool down, then I went

back. I went back. And so--hey, things come out of you. I've got that Irish temper (laughs). Whatever happens, so.

Q: Did you ever have any other run-ins?

DFC: No. Not really. No, they were all great. So, nothing I could think of. I was..they have, you know, they have like the Fire Department has--I guess that they still have it--they used to have drill team, they called it--drill team. I guess you've probably heard about their drill team they have now. I used to be on the drill team. That was Protection Rangers. We had Flower Hill Runts, and you had Atlantic Hook and Ladder Rowdies. And Protection Engine Company was the Rangers. We had the Rangers team. I done that probably six, seven, eight years, somewheres around there.

Q: And so what was that like? Can you tell me about it?

DFC: Yeah, well, they had firemen tournaments, competition. They had it all through the State of New York, when they had the state--for the State championship. But they had the tournaments maybe about seven or eight of them a year in the summertime on Long Island and stuff. You know, firefighting techniques and stuff. Running the nozzles and hitting targets and see how many seconds you do this, and all kinds of stuff. Running with hoses. And had someone on the truck, and the truck would go down and drop some of the guys off, and they throw a ladder up and climb the ladder and all that stuff. And

that was--that was pretty good. That was pretty good. Then, finally, the three teams broke up, and now they have the Port Washington Road Runners. That's the drill team. And they won the state championship, I think one was in '69. I'm not sure. And the other one was in the eighties--early '80s, I believe it was, or something like that.

Q: When you were on the team, did you take part in all the activities, or were there different specialties?

DFC: There were different events. There were different events, and I didn't take in all of them, no.

Q: Which ones did you do?

DFC: I stuck to slow stuff (laughs). Just the slow stuff (laughs). Not the--I took the stuff, like we had a pump contest, and I was the man who threw the suction on the truck while the other guy hooked the end of the suction up to the hydrant and put the pump into gear. And you know, pump up and hit the target and stuff. And we had efficiency. We had hoses, and I think we had--this is going back now--maybe about four or five lengths of hose. I can't remember exactly how many there was. They were uncoupled. So we had to run with the hose, couple them together. The other guy had--the nozzle man, he would--had to put the nozzle on. The other guys would hit the hydrant and turn the water on, so you've got to make sure you have that nozzle on. Otherwise, water'd be spraying

all over. Because we had to hit a target. And I've forgotten exactly how many feet you had to run. But I know I was the back-up man for the nozzle man. I said, "What are they doing this to me for?" (laughs). I'm not the fastest guy going, you know, trying to make time. That was it mostly. Then we had a bucket brigade. You had to tow a--I think it was a fifty-five gallon drum you had to fill up with water. Then we would run with the buckets, get the water out and run the drum up on top of the arch. Guys had to run up the ladder and then stand there, keep handing up buckets over our heads. Just keep bailing water to the guys up there, and stuff. I think that was the only three events I ran and stuff. But it was fun. It was fun.

Q: Did you have to train for them?

DFC: No.

Q: ... [Were they in training?] ...

DFC: No, no. No, it was just something, you know. Then, of course, they had the baseball team, but I didn't play on the baseball team. So that was about the only thing I did on that, the special events they had and stuff.

Q: And can you tell me about some of the committees ...

DFC: That's what I was going to tell, yeah.

Q: ... that you were active in.

DFC: Yeah, I was chairman of the history committee for Protection Engine Company for quite a few years. And I worked with Frank Pavlak. He took over, then me and Frank worked on it, quite a bit.

Q: How did you get involved in that?

DFC: I knew some of the guys who had it before. Then, well, nobody doing it or anything. Sitting there, nobody doing it. So I volunteered for it. I said, geez, let me take a shot at it and stuff. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it, and stuff.

Q: What kinds of things did you do?

DFC: I mean, went out and I looked up the history of the company, mostly the Protection Engine Company. That's what I did it, for Protection Engine Company. And well, I came to the library here and looked at a lot of records and stuff in the library here years ago. This is going back to the early '60s, I think, when I started that. And pictures-- gathered pictures from people, and stuff. Talked to a lot of the old-timers. That was the biggest thing. We'd sit there, and we'd just start talking, like we are now and start

bringing up questions, and then I'd start asking questions about old times and stuff. And I kept them in my mind, you know.

Q: And did you tape them or take notes?

DFC: No, I didn't tape anything. No, I wish I did. But like the only thing I got now in the last few years, I did a lot of taping in the firehouse, but that was a videotape. I've got a lot of that home right now. And I got fires. I did a lot of that in the last ten years or so, before I moved--a lot of fires I took in Port Washington.

Q: You videotaped the fires?

DFC: I videotaped the fires, yeah.

Q: Which ones, in particular?

DFC: Well, well Sands Point Nursing Home. That was a bad one they had a few years ago. I've got beautiful tapes on that. I got that pretty well taped. And then--so a lot of different fires in Port Washington. I can't exactly remember them all. But, see, when I used go on a call, I'd ride the pumper. And then the Fire Department knew I was taking these pictures for--I'd give them to the Chiefs of the Department and stuff. And I used to take my camera with me all the time. I had a Camcorder, so--so when I got off, the first

thing I'd do is I'd help them. I always stuck with the pump operator first and help them make sure you've got the water hooked up to the hydrant. And if he needs help and everything. Then when I had the free time, I'd take my camera and go around and start taking the pictures and stuff. I've got quite a few of that, the same way with Protection Engine Company. I'd take pictures of that. When we had our hundredth anniversary in 1992. And I took a lot of videotapes of that. We went down at the old Guggenheim Estate down in Sands Point down there. What's it called? The Falaise now, is it?

Q: Falaise.

DFC: Falaise. I never could remember the name. Okay. You got that straightened out. We had the background of the castle and the old house up there, and it was really beautiful, all in our uniforms and stuff. And I took a lot of video of that. Then when Protection Engine Company had their hundredth party going on at Protection Engine Company, which they had open to the public, and it was beautiful. It was a beautiful thing to have, and I took a lot of video of that.

Q: Where was that?

DFC: At Protection Engine Company house, the main firehouse on 14 South Washington. Then, when Protection finally--we had a hundredth anniversary dinner. We had that at the North Hempstead Country Club, and I shot that--all that, too, the video on that. A lot

of times I didn't get in any of the pictures. I'd laugh, I'd say, you know, "That's why I say I have got a lot of pictures, but hardly nothing of me in them" (laughs) because not anybody was involved taking my picture, you know, and stuff.

Q: Does the Department have copies of your pictures?

DFC: Some of them do. I have them home. I was thinking about making some more up, because I think the Port Washington Fire Department's--well, we're talking about it now. They're celebrating--going to be celebrating their hundredth anniversary--when is it?--in 2007, is it? And I've got a lot of tapes home, and I think if I make up different parts of different things going on into one tape or something. Now if the library wants a copy or something, I can send them down some stuff. I've got, you know, quite a bit of it.

Q: Maybe you should check with Frank, see whether Frank ...

DFC: Yeah, Frank--a lot of the tapes, a lot of things that you've got here, I gave to Frank, too.

Q: Yeah, but I mean, I don't know how much more they want, because they are the ones who are directing the project.

DFC: Yeah, right.

Q: The library's working for them (laughs).

DFC: Well the library, though, itself, like say they want something or stuff like that ...

Q: Okay, fine. I'll tell Elly. Yeah.

DFC: It could maybe take some time, because I'm not the fastest worker. But I've got quite a bit of stuff. I took the pictures and I enjoyed taking the pictures for the guys. It gave me something to do. You know. I volunteered. I told them, I said, you know, it's for the Department. They ended up buying me the tapes and stuff, things like that. But after a while I said "don't worry about it." Just let me do it for you, and I'll give you a copy of it and stuff. And they come out pretty good. And I enjoyed it.

Q: And what other committees did you work on?

DFC: Well, I was chairman of the Grave Committee.

Q: And what did you do for that one?

DFC: Well that was all over Long Island, learning about firemen that died, you know, not necessarily killed with a fire, but just died of natural causes, just being buried in Port Washington, Queens, or wherever it may be - Elmont. I know we used to go all these

cemeteries on Memorial Day, about maybe a week or two before Memorial Day. I couldn't do it all in one day, because we had so many cemeteries. We always had to do it like on Saturday. I had a crew with me. I was the chairman of it. And we'd go out and put a plaque from Protection Engine Company on the grave, there, up on the headstone. And also a geranium on each one. And we'd say a prayer or something, you know. But we always decorated them every Memorial Day weekend, and stuff. And they still do it. Protection's the only one in, I think, in the Port Washington Fire Department that does it. So, at least as far as I know, they still do it. I'll have to ask who's doing that. I was laughing at some of the places when they..you know, they give you a record sheet for the graves, and so we used to go to one in Queens. I can't--I don't remember which cemetery it was. And they used to tell you the graves, you'd go in through the gate. And you'd come to a burnt-out tree stump, it probably be this way. Well, when we first started doing it, that tree stump was there, and we found it. But then the tree stump disappeared now (laughs). Same thing with Holyrood Cemetery in Old Westbury. We went over there to see the graves. I don't remember the name of that one street. It was a side street there, right across, you know, your Holyrood over there, they've got these big lion statues there. So--so they say, well, you're going to look for such-and-such grave, you look off through the fence over there on the side street, and there's business areas there. I don't know if it's a factory or a store. It's got a name on it. And you'll be right opposite that. And all of that. Well, like I say, it worked. But now somebody else bought the place (laughs). So, I guess, today they have a better--better knowledge out there doing that stuff, you know. It was good. and the company gave me some money to do it. You had

to be finished that day on Saturday, and I'd take the guys out and stop in a little restaurant, have a little dinner and maybe a couple of sodas or something else, you know. I enjoyed that. I was on the picture committee with Frank Pavlak and stuff. We'd just--we would take the pictures, of course, and hang the pictures up and stuff. I was on some other committee, and entertainment, which was when they had something going on where they're going to have a little party or something like that, I'd help them on that.

Q: What would you do on that?

DFC: Oh whatever they wanted me to do. There was nothing in particular. I mean, if I had to go out and get--order certain things. Say if the committee wanted to give a certain thing, maybe somebody--so much soda, beer, or wine.

Q: You didn't have to entertain?

DFC: Huh?

Q: You didn't have to entertain?

DFC: I didn't have to do no entertaining. No, no thanks. They'd be throwing rocks at me (laughs). But on the hundredth anniversary, I was on the entertainment committee. You know, helping set up for that, doing things, and running around. And we had a lot of

little committees and stuff, you know, just doing different things.

Q: You were on the sick committee, too, right?

DFC: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q: Can you tell me about that?

DFC: Yeah, I was on the sick committee, yeah. That was very good. I was glad to see they had that, because somebody who was sick and confined to the home, after so many days, we used to go out and get a basket of food for them. And maybe five or six of us were on the sick committee. Go to the house, and visit him. So it was very good. And I was on that committee. I joined some other committees, but boy, some in my mind right now is a little ...

Q: Were you ever involved with the Exempt Association?

DFC: Oh, yeah. I'm a lifetime member of the Exempt Association. I must have at least thirty-five years now. Maybe forty. Oh, I'd say about thirty-five. I've been on the Exempt Association for thirty-five years. So that's like they give you a little gold, or they gave me a gold card saying, at that time, I got twenty-five year member life card. You had to pay like a dollar or two dollars a year dues. So, after that they stop. You didn't have to

pay the dollar or two. So, yeah, I was in that. I'll have to come down there one of these days, come to one of those meetings here too, because they them once a year. Get to see some of the older guys again. So you get to meet the people there, you know. I don't see too many of my friends anymore.

Q: As an associate member, how involved are you with the company?

DFC: Well, me and Frank, we still talk about different things. I mean, like if he has something on his mind about the history or something, we'll talk to each other about it, you know. When I think back about some of this stuff and give him some information, or something like that. But the rest of it, I don't really come down here that much, to Long Island anymore, since I've been up there. Maybe two, three times a year. But there's nobody around anymore, like especially weekdays, you come down and everybody's working, of course, you know except for some of the older guys and stuff. Of course, you don't see that--a lot of them are passing on now. But, yeah, me and Frank, we still get together on different things, if I need information or something, just from thinking about somebody or something. Now, like, I don't know, just one of the guys, Arthur Poole. They just put him up at the Firemen's Home in Hudson, New York just recently. So, of course, Arthur Poole and me, we were good friends and stuff. He went up there, so Frank told me he was up there, so me and my wife, we went up to see him. He was so glad to see us. Real glad to see him, of course. It's not that far a drive--maybe an hour and a half away from my house, something like that. Maybe a little less. Yeah, we go up there. We do it--me

and my wife. We'll probably drive up there maybe for Christmas, you know, to see him again. But Frank lets me know what's going on, or if anything comes up, you know, he asks me something, or I ask him stuff. We both have always had a really good thing between me and him.

Q: Good. Excuse me. I have to turn the tape over. ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B]
... What were the biggest changes you saw in the Department over the years that you were a member?

DFC: The biggest change? Well, there used to be only three companies originally, of course, when I got in--Protection Engine Company, Flower Hill, and Atlantic Hook and Ladder. Then, I guess it was back in the, I would say mid-'60s or late '60s, I think, the Fire Medics squad came in. So that was a big change because--it was a change in a way--it didn't ever bother me--but it was a change in a way, because then you had a lot of women come in too, and at that time, we didn't..I think we had a woman in our company at the time. I'm not sure if she was in there before the Fire Medics or not. But it made no difference to me, because I got along with them all. But I..I used to be very active, when you mention I'm talking about the Fire Medics now. Years ago, we didn't have the Fire Medic Company. So I was very active on the ambulance also in Port Washington. In those days, you could go out with fire calls all day long, but the Port Washington Police was our dispatcher at the time in those days, and they used to call at your house, directly call me up and say they got an ambulance call at such-and-such street, and at that time we

kept the ambulance up on Irma Avenue. Bill Hewitt used to have a garage up there. I think there's a gym up there, at least right before I moved. I think there was an exercise gym or something up there on Irma Avenue there. And the ambulance would be up there. So, we used to get called two or three o'clock in the morning, and sometimes you'd get four or five calls a night and it'd be the same couple of guys that took the call. Maybe two guys, three guys, according to what the call was, you know, and stuff. So, yeah, I was very, very active in that.

Q: Well, had you gotten training?

DFC: Yeah, well, we didn't have the training like they have today. Today, they've got excellent training and stuff. But we had Red Cross training, which would have been mostly a little First Aid and stuff, and with the use of oxygen and all that stuff, but ...

Q: And with what?

DFC: We had to put, you know, use oxygen masks on people, or something like that. And I don't know. I guess we did take up some CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation] in those days, too. I guess up towards the end, things started improving a little bit more. But then, I guess they figured that the town needs a more active squad, because, you know, you couldn't depend on them guys all day long to handle it. But we did. But today, they have excellent training now, because they train at the hospitals and everything else. They

go to the CPR class--not CPR classes, but EMT [emergency medical technician], AMT [advanced medical technician] and all that. And so -- You know, they've got excellent-- and now, I don't know how many ambulances they have here in Port Washington now. I think somebody said three, maybe possibly four. But there's times there, you'd be having a hard time getting the ambulance out, even with all the membership you have to have down there. I mean, I don't know why. I mean, they sleep--I think they--I believe they sleep down there at the headquarters at night-time and stuff, which we never had that stuff, you know.

Q: What are some of the ambulance calls that you remember, in particular?

DFC: Well, the one--one was a combination ambulance call with a fire, but I went and got the ambulance. It was-- we had a fire down, I think it was North Drive. I think that's off Plandome Road, down here along the bay. They had a house fire that night, and it was a real bad one, really bad. We lost three kids in that fire. So, when we got there, I was on the pumper, and the ambulance didn't roll. Well, actually it didn't roll, but it didn't--and it didn't make any difference because what happened, and they'd send me up to go get the ambulance to come down. But, then I think they believed the children were dead when we got there. So it was a real sad thing. I mean, I mean, I've been at plenty of auto accidents and attempted suicides, or something like that. But that one down there, that done me in. I know that night, you know, was a really sad thing to see three young children. And that was like two or three o'clock in the morning.

Q: Well, how--how did you deal with that kind of trauma?

DFC: Well, you have it on your mind there for a while. You know, it hits you a little bit at that time, and stuff. The same thing when Bobby Dayton got killed on a fire up here on Main Street back ten, twelve years ago, or somewhere around there. I'm guessing. And I was on the first pumper, too, from Protection. It was a Saturday morning around eight o'clock--somewhere around there. And I actually was on nozzle again at the front door and stuff. And then Bobby, later on, we found out he was trapped and he got killed. But they--I can't remember the word, correct word for it--it's after the fire was put out, the Nassau County had a--remember there was an expert that come in?

Q: For crisis intervention?

DFC: Yeah, right, right. He come in to talk to all of us and explained to us, you know, because all--a lot of us were all shook up then, you know, and stuff. So, it calmed you down, I guess, some, but then still you'll never forget it as long as you live and stuff. It was something that you--you've got to live with.

Q: Were you there when he was brought down?

DFC: Oh, yes. I was--yes, I was out in the front of the building when they brought him out the

rear door and stuff.

Q: And did you know right away that he had died?

DFC: At the time, I didn't know too much, because we--you know, it was such a fire. It was a bad fire. And if you're working in the front of the building, and you had guys working inside; you've got guys working out in the rear. So you don't know what's going on back there, of course, you can't see what's going on. But we knew there was some kind of a commotion going on there, because the word got spread around to us and finally caught up with us that, you know, that he was missing and they were searching for him, and they found him. But he was already dead when they found him and stuff. Smoke poisoning, I guess, killed him and stuff. And it was a shame. Something you don't know.

Q: So then, as soon as you finished working on the fire, what did you do? Did you go back to the firehouse, or did you go home or ...

DFC: We went back to the firehouse, because we had to go straighten out the equipment, of course. You know, we had to straighten out the equipment. Then, they announced that we were going to have this session later on during that night. That the county was going to give us and stuff. So, I went home, you know, talked to my wife. Then later on, a couple hours later, we went and all got everybody from the whole department. But they talked to us about it and stuff. It was sad. It was very sad and stuff. But, there's a lot of

bad fires, too. I mean, we had one back in, oh, maybe 1962, '63, down in Sands Point. It was on a Saturday morning maybe about eleven o'clock in the morning. Started out as a brush fire. I think it was off Hills Dales Lane, and it was--you know, it started out as a brush fire, and I guess the wind picked up and it really started making a real big brush fire. Well, it burned a house down that was called the Van Warts Estate. But it was an abandoned house. I mean, nobody was living in there. But it was a big, big old one--old wooden one. Matter of fact, we had to cut trees down just to get in there with the apparatus, because everything was growing all around the thing. And that was--that was quite a place.

Q: Was anyone injured in that?

DFC: No, not that I can think of. No, I don't think so. Because the way she was going, we was outside fighting it--fighting the fire from the outside, and we couldn't put nobody inside of it, you know. Of course, we had a hard time getting water, because it was--you had to go down the road to Sands Point. We used to have, a lot of times, lay three, four thousand feet of hose just to get to a house fire down there before they put the water mains in. These fires, all the hoses (laughs), sometimes we'd have five thousand feet of hose we had to pack on the trucks, you know. And just that had to be done, but we did it. And we had a fire--Bradley's Restaurant. Yeah, and at that time, I lived on Covert Street, on Covert and Jackson. And, like I said, we didn't have none of this pocket pagers, and the horn goes off. We had no idea where the fire was. So, you got to go to

the firehouse up here on South Washington Street, Protection, right. So I jump on the first truck, and because I was the driver that night, with the pump operator. So they told me where it was, located at Bradley's Restaurant down there. Of course, I didn't see any fire when I came out. I wasn't even looking, because all I wanted to do is get in the car and come to the firehouse. So, drove down there, and that was--that was a spectacular fire. That was a really--at first it didn't look too bad, but I believe the gas service erupted inside the flame and fed it--fed the fire where we couldn't shut down. But then it started snowing that night. And Protection had, at that time, a 1937 American La France Pumper. I think it was a five hundred gallon tank pumper. And they put it on the edge of the town dock and dropped in a suction hose and started, they call it drafting, where they suck the water out of the bay. And compared to some of these new trucks they've got today, that old truck was pumping the water through, feeding the rest of the pumpers up there at the scene. And you were like idling the engine. The engine was idling. Just so quiet. Nice little sound of the engine going. Not racing like sometimes you hear pumpers, they're racing. But this truck was just idling. That truck was doing its job. 1937, a little thing; I'll never forget that. And speaking about the fire trucks, now I'm going to tell you a story. This one here, this was a cute one too. We had a 1948 American La France. And I went to a meeting down there. We used to have our meetings--I don't know if they still do--I guess, on Thursday nights, once a month, the first Thursday. So, I'm walking into the firehouse, and they had a sign on the 1948 American--"Truck out of service." So they'd disconnected the batteries and everything so nobody could take it. So something was wrong with it, and they didn't want to use it. So,

we're at the meeting. We're at the meeting, and the horn started blowing, general alarm for a house fire. I can't remember exactly where the fire was. Thank God, it wasn't--I don't think it amounted to anything. Because we had maybe sixty, seventy guys at the meeting. Now, we had--at that time, we had three pumpers over in the firehouse over here on South Washington Street. So the horn's blowing, and the guys all run, they're all jumping on this--we called it "Number Fourteen," American La France. Were all jumping on it, and there's signs all over it--on the windshield and everything. "Don't start truck." "Truck won't start." It's out of service. That ain't going to stop them. They open the door. They got a bunch of guys behind it, and they're pushing it. They pushed it down and make a right turn, and go down Prospect--Webster Avenue here. Now, they're going to--trying to push it down the hill going down Prospect, and they're trying to get that truck started. No way they're going to get that truck started, right? I just stood there just looking, I'm saying, "What a bunch of ..." (laughs). It was funny. It was funny. It was really good, you know. But things--things like that happened, you know, and--but I couldn't believe what I seen (laughs). But ...

Q: Remember any other funny things that happened?

DFC: Yeah, one guy came in with the same truck. I think it was the American La France--the '48 American La France. And he put it in reverse, and he almost went through the wall. Just misjudged himself or something. And there was other things, too, but I just--I just can't remember a lot of them. I mean, I wish I could tell you some more.

Q: Like any jokes that the guys would play on each other?

DFC: Well, I had a nickname, then. I used to take a lot of kidding about it. And it didn't bother me. In a way, sometimes it--I'd get a little--I wouldn't say I got upset about it, because--but I think back in 1955, before I joined the Fire Department, I was ice skating here on Baxter's Pond. And I wasn't--I wasn't a good ice skater. And I fell down and I smashed my arm up real bad, and I had it operated on, but they couldn't do nothing with it, and it was--everything was going with the elbow, so I can't move my arm. This is the best I can do it.

Q: You can't straighten it out.

DFC: Yeah, right. Correct, right. So, even though I knew that the Department knew about it, they still let me come in, because I can do things. I can do things. I mean, because I'd work around and everything next to you. It's just that I can't move it, but I'm not--I'm not handicapped. I'll put it to you that way. Well, they gave me the nickname of "Crooked Arm," you know. And you had the guys, you know, all the time making fun of my arm--"Crooked Arm," and stuff. And sometimes it would bother me once in a while, because, you know, I'd say, geez, you know, I don't, you know, feel like being called that. But, I mean, it's something I lived with. I probably could have it operated again on today, but that's over fifty years now. I don't know how many more years I've got to live; I might as

well leave it alone, right (laughs). But, the name--that's the name they gave--"Crooked Arm." We had a beer mug made up that had said Protection Engine Company on it, but also "Crooked Arm" written on top of it (laughs). But I requested that, because they were calling me that, so I said, well, you know--they said, "Well, you want to put a nickname on it?" I said, "Well, you call me that all the time." And then, when me and my wife got married, and we were walking up the aisle--we got married out in East Northport, Catholic church over there--and walking around --Dirty Harry was at my wedding, he didn't care where he was. He's going to make that wisecrack when we walk up the aisle about that crooked arm. So (laughs), and with a few choice words with it too (laughs). But, no, that's--I had the nickname. That stuck with some of the guys. It stuck with some of the guys. And some of the guys did, I enjoyed them saying it, because I--and now they're dead and now I miss them. I miss them. I mean, Al Weyant, he was an ex-Chief in Port Washington, and he was good. He was a good Chief, and he was a good Captain, and, you know, sometimes they'd discuss something at the meeting, and there'd be something petty and they'd be arguing over it. And he used to bang the gavel down and say, "I've got till three or four o'clock in the morning. I'll stay here all night," because he ran the meeting, you know. He didn't care. He'd just bang the gavel down and say, "Just keep talking. I've got all night. I don't care," you know, but.. Yeah, we had good laughs, and, like I say, there was--still, still miss it, though.

Q: What would you say was your best day as a firefighter?

DFC: What was the best what?

Q: The best day as a firefighter?

DFC: As a firefighter or as a ...

Q: Or in the Department?

DFC: In the Department itself. Well, when I first got--when I got my twenty-five year plaque for twenty-five years. Then they gave me another plaque for thirty-five years, and a jacket and stuff, you know, with my name and everything on it. And, of course, that was a honor. So, now, when they asked me to come here and talk to you about the Department and then Protection and all that stuff, and it's--of course, that's an honor to me, too, to have it done, because I'm not a regular member anymore. And I don't know how they arranged this and stuff, but, you know ...

Q: Well, the companies chose ...

DFC: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q: ... all ... [the people] ... they wanted ...

DFC: Yeah, I know Peter Zwerlein.

Q: ... to do these interviews.

DFC: I think Peter Zwerlein or Frank Pavlak, I guess, recommended me or something, you know, so I'm glad they did, you know. Because it means a lot to me in a way. At least, I know that somebody still thinks of me (laughs).

Q: I'm glad you did, too, because you have a lot to contribute.

DFC: Well, there's probably more I could contribute. I had written some things down, I guess, I should have. But I, you know, it--there's so much stuff. A lot of history, I guess, in Protection Engine Company. Years ago, it must have been quite a--quite a thing. Like now, I hear stories around here with the generation today. Like I say, I don't live here, but, of course, I hear the different stories. And, oh, they say they, you know, they can't make the calls because they've got to work two jobs, you know, to support the family. And they probably do. But, I come from the old days. I mean, I was born during the War years. World War II was going on. I mean, we didn't have nothing. We all had rough times in those days and stuff. And, from what I've found out from a lot of the guys who were in World War II, I guess Protection Engine Company, probably, and probably altogether throughout the whole Port Washington Fire Department, they probably had maybe fifty, sixty, seventy guys maybe even in fighting--fighting during World War II.

So what they did, they had members come and stay in the firehouses during the night. During the night. They had to do so much fire duty once a month, or something like that, come in, you know, because they were scared something was going to be sabotaged or something like that. And these guys, they come in, and there was guys that had to work two or three jobs, and they still did their fire duty. Today, these ones here, "I can't do this because I've got two jobs," and I got one job. So, hey, I don't know. I mean (laughs), they did it back in those days. You know what I mean? So it's a different generation. That's all it is. I mean, today, I guess they want everything handed to them, and they get nothing but the best. I mean, with the training. They get the best training. They get the best equipment and everything. Now ...

Q: Did you serve in the military yourself?

DFC: No. No, I broke my arm, smashed my arm up a year before I wanted to go in, because I was going to join the Navy, but it just happened, and that was it. And then, I'm sorry to say that the old-timers told me, too, was back in the '30s, I guess it was, and '40s, to raise money for some events. They used to go down to, I guess, Sands Point, back a few years ago, they used to have polo games down there. So the firemen used to go down there and park the cars for the crowds that would come down there on weekends, I guess, for the polo games, I guess. In those days, that was the big stuff going on down there. And they was always out doing some kind of fundraising stuff those days. I don't know if they have fundraisers here anymore, you know, and stuff, but the old-timers, they used to tell

me, you know, a lot of stories. I mean, when I first got in Protection Engine Company, like I said, my grandfather was a charter member. And then I met another older guy in Protection Engine Company. His name was John Coles. So I introduced myself to him, and I told him, and he says, "Yeah," he says, "I'm a blacksmith in Port Washington." I said, "Yeah," I said, "geez," I said, "my grandfather was a blacksmith here in Port Washington, too." So he said, "Who is your grandfather?" "Charles E. Baxter." Well, of course, he got all excited. He says, "Charles E. Baxter?" He said, "He was the greatest blacksmith shop I've ever seen," and he, you know, as a blacksmith. He taught John Coles to be a blacksmith, you know, so we got pretty friendly and stuff. But he died. He died in early '60s, I think--'62, '63, somewhere around there.

Q: What did you learn about your grandfather in terms of his being a firefighter?

DFC: Not too much. The only thing I was surprised when I told, I said earlier, that he was a charter member of Protection Engine Company, because I seen that on the charter, myself, which they hang up on the wall at Protection. But then, when the Port Washington Fire Department had their seventy-fifth anniversary, then they had a list on, because the book--they had a big book made up of it, and they had at the Port Washington Fire Department. So they had the names on there. And there's all different stories of the companies. So, I see my grandfather also, it said he was the founder of Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company in 1888. I think it was 1888, Atlantic was--yeah. And Flower Hill's going to have theirs this year coming up--ninety-ninth year. There'll

probably be a year following, you know, the hundredth year. It's hard to keep up with these things (laughs) and stuff. Yeah, I used to have a lot of –my mind was sometimes working real good on there. I have all that knowledge ... Frank and I got along good on that part. We had another guy years ago, he was really close to Frank, too. Reggie Bedell. He did a lot with Protection Engine Company and a lot for the Port Washington Fire Department, you know, the different committees. But he was a smart man, very smart man. There was a lot of them. There was ...

Q: Well, what did you do yourself for the various anniversaries? You were on the committees, weren't you?

DFC: I was on the seventy-fifth. There was probably different committees and stuff. I know like when we had our anniversary, I was on the entertainment; I was on the different things, setting things up and getting this and getting that, and, you know, all of that. The same way then, when they had the committee, they had--Port Washington had a firemen's tournament here back in, oh, I don't know, I'm going to say in the '70s. '70s. Late '70s, maybe. And we had it down there by Thomson's down there. And then we had a big parade here in Port Washington. So, my job was setting up for the committee, on the committee, lining up for the parade, marching, where each department would line up on each certain street. This band would be in this division, and all that stuff. And it worked out good. Everybody worked good on it. Everybody worked real good.

Q: You wore your uniforms for that?

DFC: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Do you still have your uniform?

DFC: What's that?

Q: Do you still have your uniform?

DFC: I still have mine. Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I asked the company already, I said, since I'm only an associate member if I die. I said, oh--they told me I could be laid out in my uniform. They'll give me permission. They usually don't. But I--I got along, like I said. So we got--me and my wife's got our graves up here in Port Washington, so if anything happens, then we'll be laid out in Matamoras, Pennsylvania for one night, because I know a lot of people up there, and then same here with the wife, like you have vice versa, you know. They'll come--be laid out here in Port Washington one night. But, no, I still got my uniform hanging up in the closet, you know. I look at it every once in a while, still. And I finally got a picture of me in the uniform here. I brought some pictures here for you and stuff.

Q: Good.

DFC: But, yeah, what else have we got there?

Q: All right. So, let's see. Did you ever have a narrow escape yourself, fighting fires?

DFC: Yes. I was in Plandome. We had a fire over in Plandome--a house fire. And it was on the second floor. I was upstairs. And sometimes we went up there and we search to see the extent of the fire, where it's travelled. And I got all the smoke in there, but that wouldn't--wasn't too much of a narrow escape. But it was--I got lost in there. The house was--you know, you don't know the house, of course. I opened the closet. I thought, that wasn't a closet. It had stairs. I don't know which way it was taking me. And I got all mixed up there. Now, I was getting a little--you know, your heart starts pounding a little bit, you know, and stuff. And then, that was about the only thing that really scared me.

Q: Did somebody else save you, or did you figure out ...

DFC: No, no. No, I finally found a window, and I just got out by the window, and I started gasping a little bit for a little bit more air, then got my head working again a little bit. I got out and come down. And I came down, there was a ladder, I think, outside the window, and came down the ladder.

Q: Did you ever make a rescue yourself?

DFC: No, no. No. I know we had some big restaurant fires down in Port Washington, down there, down in Manor Haven down there. The Club Capri. There was a French restaurant down there; I can't think of the name of it, years ago. And that thing--that thing was really going bad. I mean, we was inside in the main room, and there was like a flashback. The flames were just rolling across the ceiling. Just like the movies. Just like the way you see on some of these movies they have (laughs). Like Back Draft and that. Well, actually, you could see the thing rolling. You could see it rolling all along the walls. And that was a little scary, but we got out. We got out and stuff. The Riviera fire, at the Riviera Restaurant. You probably don't even remember that down there. That one was a bad one. That was another snowy night. It seemed like we always got a lot of the bad fires on snow storms or something. Sands Point Country Club, that was another one. That's another snowy night.

Q: Do you think there was any connection between the ...

DFC: No, no, no. It just happened. Something went--the one in Sands Point, the country club down there, that was on Easter Sunday, and boy did it snow. It really snowed that day. Yeah, it's funny how you can go back and think about certain days these things were on there, so--but if you're active, I guess, then you see this stuff all the time, and, of course, we used to talk about it a lot of times at the firehouse. A lot of times, like we would go to a fire, too, and if something went wrong, or somebody sees somebody do something

wrong, I mean, if they're not fighting it right, we'd just sit there and discuss it, you know, so we could clear it up.

Q: You would discuss it right at the fire or ...

DFC: Mostly in the back at the firehouse or something, you know. Because sometimes we'd split up, then after a while, we'd have to find him, like the other guy might go work somewheres else at the fire, or something.

Q: Do you remember a particular example, when that happened?

DFC: No, not offhand, I couldn't say.

Q: Like what kinds of things would they be doing that you talked over?

DFC: Oh, could be the guy is ripping down the ceiling the wrong way or something, you know, like swinging the ax the wrong way. Or he's not using the proper tool, because if you use a fire tool, you might do some damage, and even damage some of the equipment ... [?] ... equipment and stuff. So, if you catch him, you know, you try to straighten it out or something like that. That's happened. I mean ...

Q: Usually a newer firefighter would be doing that?

DFC: Well, no (laughs). I've seen some experienced guys do it. For example, now, I seen a fire one night up on South Bayles Avenue. No, North Bayles Avenue. We had a house fire up there. And we was walking on the second floor, and we had equipment, we had axes, we have pike poles and stuff that do certain things, like I said. So, I won't mention the name, but it was our Captain of Protection Engine Company at the time. He's up on the roof there on the second floor. It's got windows there. And sometimes--most of the time, he's trying not to do any damage. These guys, they're pretty good. They try to prevent doing any damage unless they have to. A lot of people say, "Why're they cutting a hole in there?" "Well, they're ventilating it for the guys to get in there to fight the fire. You have to cut the holes. We try to protect the windows." Well, a lot of times we'll have guys go in and they'll open the windows by hand, if they can, you know. There's times where you have to bust the glass out, too. So, of course, you have equipment for that. Well, I was watching the Captain. Matter of fact, I got it on my videotape (laughs). The Captain's up on the roof, from Protection, and he's looking up there, and he's got a flash light. Nice big brand new flash light. And he's busting the windows out with the flash light. And I'm--I said, "I've got to get pictures of this," and I says, I've got to get him. He's our leader, now, right, and he's doing this fine example for the rest of the guys, you know. But, yeah, there was things like that. Little things. A lot of guys, though, would get nervous sometimes when I had the camera around, because (laughs) they didn't know where I was or what I was doing. Because I've taped the pictures of them, so...

Q: Was anybody ever disciplined for doing something wrong at a fire?

DFC: I don't know offhand that I could think of. A couple of guys might have got chewed out. Maybe they did have something done to them. I don't know. I forget who the Chief was at the Port Washington Fire Department at the time. But they had rules that the guys would go to the scene of the fire, but with their cars, you don't put your car on the street where the fire is. That's so the apparatus could get in and out and all that stuff. And they made a rule, I think two hundred feet or something, you can't be within two hundred feet. But he was a real character, the Chief. I mean, he'd come down with a tape measure, measuring. And now, that's really getting a little out of control, too, on his part, you know. And--and the guy would say it's a hundred and ninety-eight feet, he'd ream him out for it, or something. I mean, to me, I mean, that was (laughs), things like that. But it was--well, every once in a while, if somebody would do something, and probably get suspended or something, but I can't think of, off-hand, who it was or anything. But they--they had strict rules. Port Washington Fire Department, that's one thing; they do have very good--good rules. Port Washington Fire Department really stood the--like I said, they were a great department and stuff, I mean, like I said, it was in my blood all those years and stuff. So, you sit back and, like I say, think about it. It's good guys. It's good guys. But, well, what are you going to do (laughs)?

Q: Is there anything else that you think we should talk about?

DFC: You have anything else you want to bring up maybe get me started?

Q: Let's see. Well, was there anything special you did for good luck?

DFC: For the what?

Q: Good luck.

DFC: For good luck?

Q: Anything you'd carry with you or think about?

DFC: No. No, not that I can remember, no.

Q: Do you ever dream about fires?

DFC: Not too much. No, no, I wouldn't say so. Not too much. No.

Q: And what do you think the value is of this oral history project--the whole project?

DFC: What do you mean? The way it's going? The way they're doing it and stuff?

Q: Yes.

DFC: I think it's great. I think it's great. I think they should have done this years ago, including myself. I mean, when I was in charge, I should have done something like this even. I never thought of it even, you know. But I think it's good to have it, and, like I--just matter of fact, said to my wife when we were coming down, I said, "Geez, Lee," I says, "if anything happens to me," I said, "you know, I've got a lot of videotapes here." I says, "Make sure Frank Pavlak gets them, you know, because Frank will take care of them." He does a lot of this stuff, so I said, but I gave, like I said, I gave Frank a lot of videos and stuff. Before we moved, they had a storm here a couple of years ago in Port Washington. It was a snow storm that turned to rain, then turned back to snow. And I went down at Mill Pond to take some pictures where the water came up over on the road down on Shore Road down there. Car--there was a car parked there under the water. So I took a picture of the house I was born in on Mill Pond Road and stuff. And then the next day I went back and the water went down. It came through--changed to snow. So, then the fire truck was on a call, so he was coming along Mill Pond, a Flower Hill pumper, and I took a picture of that. And I made a little speech on there. Well, look what happened twenty-four hours later, you know, how it changed. The weather changed drastically. And so, but there's a lot of pictures people didn't even see now, I mean, that I've taken of fires, of different events and stuff in here. I've got a couple of hurricanes that I took down there by the town dock, different things and stuff. So, like I said, I'm

going to make up some tapes and put together, try to make something up for the Port Washington Fire Department, for the hundredth anniversary. I'll probably make a two or three, four hour tape, even, because I've got a lot of them.

Q: That's great.

DFC: And the library, I think I'll try to make them up and I don't know who's in charge of the tapes there. Who's in charge? Are you people in charge of that or ...

Q: So, on this picture, you're cooking ...

DFC: Right.

Q: ... and Arnold Kelly was ...

DFC: Yeah, Arnold Kelly, he had a--I believe he had cancer of the nose and the eye, and they had to take his eye out and put an artificial eye in. It was really something to look at. But anyhow, he used to make the clam chowder for the guys at the picnic, which was excellent clam chowder. Very good cook, and he could really go. And when we had our hundredth anniversary, Peter Zwerlein was asked to the ceremony. So he started talking about Kelly making the clam chowder, and how he was always searching for his glass eye in the chowder, and which drew a big laugh from the crowd, of course, especially the

other guys that knew him, you know, and stuff, there was ... [END OF RECORDING] ...