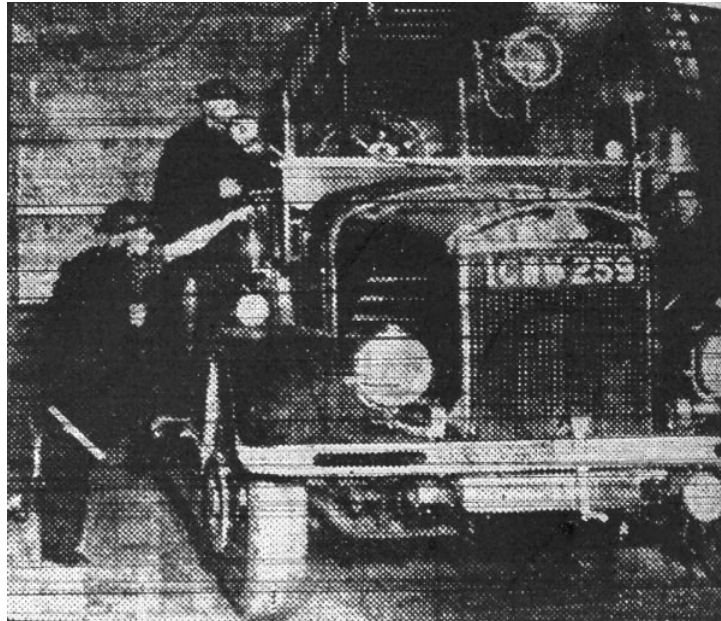


“All Clear” is Their Call to Action Says Ernest Taylor

The “All Clear” still sounds in many districts of South Yorkshire - but its peace time message is different. It is used by the National Fire Service as a call to action for local firemen.



The “All Clear,” calling them to action, has sounded, and the crew truns out

It is a most effective signal and the men veteran fire-fighters of the blitz, answer it with the urgency and speed which its shrill note demands.

Just as the N.F.S. has arrangements for dealing with fires in the important centres in area, so must it be prepared to tackle outbreaks in more remote districts.

“Retained Stations”

Obviously all the smaller towns and villages in No. 3 Fire Force Area, which has its headquarters in the city, cannot be covered by the whole-time fire stations in Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley.

Equally important from a financial aspect is the fact that frequency of fires in such places does not warrant the maintenance of whole-time stations.

But that does not mean the N.F.S. can afford to neglect them in any way.

In such cases the pre-war practice of organising “Retained Stations” has been revived.

“Retained Stations” have already been established or are in the process of being established at:

Stocksbridge, Royston, Cudworth, Hoyland, Penistone, Wath, Wombwell, Goldthorpe, Thorne, Adwick, Mexborough, Conisborough, Askern, Maltby, and Kiveton.

Except in one or two instances where a man is employed full-time until arrangements are made for the operation of the siren and call-bells by remote control, all the men attached to the stations are engaged on a "retained" basis.

Not Amateurs

This means that they follow their ordinary work, but hold themselves in readiness by night and day to turn out in case of fire.

A fair proportion of the men served as full-time firefighters during the war, and have had considerable experience in firefighting.

In no way can they be regarded as "amateurs" at the job.

They are paid a retaining fee and receive payment for the time spent at fires, drills, cleaning and maintaining the station and fire appliances, inspecting and cleaning fire hydrants, etc.

Sirens are used during the day-time chiefly to give the fire alarm, although in some districts they are used at night too.

Electric call bells, installed in the firemen's homes, are generally used for night alarms.

Both siren and call bells are operated by the person taking the fire call.

Local conditions vary, and it may be one of the "retained" men at whose house a telephone has been installed for the specific purpose; the operator at the local telephone exchange; the officer on duty at the local police station; or an employee at one of the works.

Telephones are available at fire stations where members of the public can report a fire.

All "retained" stations must be able to turn an appliance within five minutes of receiving a call - in actual fact this time is often halved.



Receiving a call. Within five minutes the station must be able to turn out an appliance.

Except for those men living within 200 yards of the station the majority of the men have cycles, and competition is keen to see who arrives first at the station.

At least 15 men are enrolled at each station and between 10 and 12 invariably answer a call.

Fire call received at “retained” stations are immediately transmitted to the nearest whole-time station where the officer-in-charge may in accordance with procedure, or at his own discretion, turn out an appliance man by whole-time firemen to support the appliance from the “retained” station, or attend himself to supervise operations.

Most “retained” stations have two fire appliances usually one motor pump with a pumping capacity of 600 to 800 gallons per minute, and a water tender.

Two Appliances

The tender carries 400 gallons of water with a pump which will deliver the water to the fire at anything up to 200 gallons a minute. It also tows an additional pump.

All appliances carry ladders, foam making equipment to deal with petrol and oil fires and, where fire risk warrants it, breathing apparatus to enable men to work in toxic fumes.

A most important fact is that “retained” stations are sited as to ensure a fire appliance being able to reach a fire even in the most remote parts of the Fire Force Area, within 15 minutes.

So much for the arrangements, but how do they work in actual practice?

My verdict after a tour of several stations is “First Class.”

In the company of senior N.F.S. officers I first visited Wath “retained” station.

The premises were in darkness and deserted. Within a short time I saw plenty of action. I put in a test fire call and soon the siren was sounding.

In a matter of seconds two men were rushing down the yard, opening the doors of the station, followed by more members of the service on cycles.

The speed at which they moved was to say the least rather bewildering to the onlooker.

The engine was started up and out of the station with six men in position in exactly two-and-a-half minutes.

Ideal Time

Meanwhile, more men were climbing on to the water tender and this, too, was on its way to the imaginary fire less than a minute later.

It was an ideal time to test the speed of the turnout.

It was shortly after 6.30 when normally most people are having a “doze” after the day’s work or quietly reading the paper.

Section Leader A.E. Hessam, a colliery shot firer, for instance, told me he was “looking after” his family when the siren sounded.

Another said he was on his way to the pictures, and another was returning home with the “washing.”

What happened to the “washing” I do not know, but the men lost no time in reaching the station.

Their enthusiasm and tem work were a revelation.

We next visited Mexborough station, which comes in the Doncaster Sub-Area.

Here the men were busy cleaning the appliances.

One second the men were chatting and whistling as they went about their various tasks - then came action with a vengeance.

In 30 Seconds

Column Officer L. Heeson, who has been in charge of the station for well over 20 years, suddenly pulled down the call bells. Dusters brushes, polish, all were forgotten as the men rushed to “action stations.”

In 30 seconds the engine was out of the station.

It was the type of transformation scene which must be witnessed to be believed.

Firemen, I discovered, don’t talk much about what they have done.

Nevertheless, I think the Mexborough station’s war record is well worth a mentioning.

Teams were sent to Coventry, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Hull, Sheffield, York, Manchester and Liverpool among other places when the Luftwaffe was doing its worst with fire raids.

Mexborough was only one of the stations - firemen from other South Yorkshire stations were also heavily involved. However, in peace as in war the N.F.S. is ever ready.

But remember; firemen can not go into action until they have received a clear accurate call as to where the fire is to be located.