

Fire Center, Call After Call, Night After Night

By ROLF WIEGAND
Enquirer Reporter

John Lindemann looks at the television monitor of the high, chain-link gate which blocks the entrance to the communications center of the Cincinnati Fire Department in Eden Park.

"This is a well-constructed building," he says. "The security is pretty good."

Windows in the walls surrounding the 30-foot by 60-foot room were bricked during the 1967 riot. At the same time, fence and gate were installed, along with audio-visual monitors.

The square, three-story brick building is nestled into a hillside on lower Martin Drive, near the field that marks what once was a reservoir. A car whizzes past the gate, and the monitor sizzles.

The ceiling of the room where Lindemann, a 10-year veteran of the communications section, and his partner for the evening, Jack Madden, a five-month veteran, work is 30 feet high.

Sound-proofing tiles cover the upper half of the walls and the ceiling, regular tiles the lower half and floor. Lamps, suspended from the ceiling, cast a soft light.

Around the walls on three sides of the room is electronic equipment that monitors the circuitry of the 1760 to 2200 fireboxes in Cincinnati.

TAKING UP two-thirds of the floor space in the room are several long tables with strips of paper tape stretching from a device at one end of the table to a device at the other end.

Near the door to the room is the three-man console, containing two switchboards and two radio microphones. The switchboard has plugs for each firehouse in the city and about 12 incoming lines for emergency calls.

Flanking the console on one side is a handy filing cabinet. A rolex street guide, listing all the city's streets and addresses, stands on top of the file, which contains numbered cards for each of the city's fireboxes.

Behind the console, standing guard to the backs of the dispatchers, is an electric clock, accurate to the tenth of a second, and two reels of tape, revolving slowly.

"All emergency calls are automatically recorded on the tapes, which run for 24 hours," Lindemann explains. "The tapes are time-dated and saved for 90 days."

With a flip of a switch, Madden, manning the switchboard, can record calls that come in on the no-emergency lines.

A light begins to flash and bells begin ringing at one of the machines along the wall. Lindemann moves to one of the tables where the paper tape is moving, having holes punched in it for each ring of the bells.

This is one of two master tapes that record, by punched holes, the number of the firebox that has been triggered. The tapes are saved for records.

Lindemann counts the holes in the tape and returns to the handle near the console. He looks up the card with the corresponding number. The card tells him which companies to send and where to send them.

HE SITS DOWN at the console, and broadcasts the run over the radio. Madden plugs in to Station X, the Police Communications Center, to tell police of the fire alarm and to have them send a police car to the scene. His other hand pushes the button on the console that activates lights hanging above city streets, causing them to blink a yellow warning to drivers that emergency vehicles are on the roads.

Lindemann checks the time of the alarm, this time at Lincoln Park Drive and John Street.

The radio speaker in the console crackles. "Engine 29," Lindemann acknowledges. "Engine 29 reports a box-puller at Lincoln Park Drive



—Enquirer (Tom Hubbard) Photo

Surrounded By Electronic Gear, Operators Man Radios

... Jack Madden, right, takes call while John Lindemann stands by to broadcast; tape recorder, center, files calls

and John. No suspects. We are winding the box."

The fireboxes work on a mechanical spring that must be re-wound each time it is sprung. Lindemann calls the fire marshal on the radio, and is told to cut-tap the fire and put all companies in service.

When a fire is out-tapped, all the companies that were involved in it are done working. When a company is in service, it is available to be sent on another run.

On the wall near the door is a map of Cincinnati, with glowing red, green and yellow lights that show the locations of engine companies, ladder companies and fire marshals.

A board on the console next to the switchboard is full of lit toggle switches that connect to the lights on the map. A glance at the status board or the map tells dispatchers whether a fire company is available or not.

Madden flips switches as engine companies sent to John Street and

Lincoln Park Drive report back in service.

"All that in two minutes," Lindemann says of the run. The average false fire alarm consumes three to four minutes of service and costs between \$200 and \$300. There are between 12 and 18 per night.

Lindemann calls Station X, telling them of the out-taps and turns to assist Madden in filling out the form that is made of each fire run.

THE TWO MEN are responsible for all fireboxes in the city, all emergency calls to the fire department, for dispatching all fire equipment to fires and emergencies, for the civil defense radio network and for the Hamilton County disaster radio network.

Station X calls to report an open fire hydrant. Madden takes the call. Lindemann sends Engine Co. 29 to the address.

Three men work the console from 7 a. m. to 2 p. m., when calls to the fire department offices are numerous. Also, routine checks of firebox circuitry are made during

the day, and a man has to assist in that process in the tower.

The boxes are divided into odd- and even-numbered ones. One half of them are tested each month, the other half the next.

From 2 p. m. to 7 a. m. two men handle the console. But for every fire run, both men are tied up, and other calls are put off.

"The work situation here is bad, and getting worse," Lindemann says. "By the first of the year, there will be four more ambulances put into service in the fire department."

"We are going to take over more of the runs that are usually handled by the police. We have been given to understand that we will handle all automobile accident injuries, all sick person calls and all injured in the street calls.

"If that is the case, it would be impossible to handle all that work with just two men," Lindemann concludes.

Madden answers a call, talks into the headset and hangs up. A child was asking "which Mays Street intersects with Alexandria?"

Madden disregards the possibility that the child was lost, saying he heard a television in the background. The switchboard buzzes again. Madden answers, "Fire Department, Fire Department, Fire Department, Fire Department," and hangs up.

"I give them four chances to answer; then I hang up," he explains.

ANOTHER CALL on the switchboard. A car, "leaking gas badly," in a parking lot in Riverfront Stadium. Madden tells Lindemann and both groan. The traffic at the stadium for the Bengals game will give the firetruck driver a hard time.

Lindemann dispatches an engine to the stadium and notes the time of the alarm. Madden plugs into X and waits, and waits and waits for them to answer his call. They do, and he tells them of the run.

Two calls at once. Madden answers one, from Station X about the gas leak at Riverfront Stadium. Lindemann moves and answers the other, from a police officer in the street asking for the name of an alley off Charlotte Street.

"The police frequently call us for street locations," Lindemann says, adding, "Our rolex system is better than the one at Station X."

A call on the commercial line comes in. Madden answers and throws a switch to record the caller, a woman reporting windows broken out at a restaurant on Forest Avenue. She wants them boarded.

Lindemann checks the rolex and the file, and sends a truck.

Some of the cards for the fireboxes are marked in red, "R-R."

Reluctant Response? No, reduced response. There are the fireboxes that are used often to file false fire alarms. Instead of a full complement of fire equipment, a box like this receives one engine, one ladder company and the marshal. If there is a fire, the marshal can radio for help.

The radio speaker in the console chatters faintly, picking up radio traffic from county fire departments.

Another call. A man is trying to reach a relative in one of the firehouses. Madden gives him the phone number at the house, reluctantly.

THE LADDER company that was sent to board up the windows on Forest Avenue calls. They are given the time of the run for their house logbook.

Each piece of fire equipment sent out of its house calls the tower when it returns to quarters. Each time the man at the switchboard gives the time of the alarm and places the truck back in the available position on the status board.

If equipment that is supposed to be sent to a fire is already busy, the trucks slated to respond to the second alarm are sent. These trucks are farther away, and take longer to respond.

"Fortunately, in the downtown area, there is a pretty heavy concentration of fire equipment," Lindemann says. "Not so for the suburbs." The extra time it takes for a suburban truck to get to the scene of a fire might be measured in lost lives.

Another call. A child has fallen from the third floor window of a building on Reading Road. Madden writes the message, Lindemann checks the status of the Rescue One and Two, the ambulances.

Rescue One is not in service, so Lindemann sends Rescue Two.

A woman calls. Her son's legs have gone numb. Madden refers her to the police at Station X.

He explains that she will get faster response that way, and that the rescue units should be saved for heart cases, oxygen cases and life-threatening situations.

"Some people try to schedule the life squad run five days ahead of time," Lindemann says. "That's not what the rescue units are here for."

"You would be surprised what kind of calls we get. We get calls on everything: bats in apartments, cats in apartments, cats in trees—we even got a call once on a chicken in a sewer."

"ANOTHER TIME we got a call on a dog in a sewer. Now, I like dogs, but if I send a \$40,000 piece of equipment there, and another fire report comes in that the truck should have gone on, then I am running the risk of losing a life."

The switchboard buzzes. A back injury at the Cincinnati Club, 30 Garfield Place. Madden takes the call and sends Rescue One, just back from a previous run.

Someone calls from 532 Armory Ave. to report her lights out. Madden refers her to the electric company.

This Saturday night has been quiet so far. No "working fires"—fires that demanded a time-consuming deployment of fire equipment—have occurred.

The door to the tower opens, and Joe Hock comes in to relieve Jack Madden. Hock is a 31-year veteran of the Cincinnati police department, retiring to work for the fire tower in 1972.

The door opens again and Fred Parr, a 26-year veteran of the fire tower comes in to relieve John Lindemann.

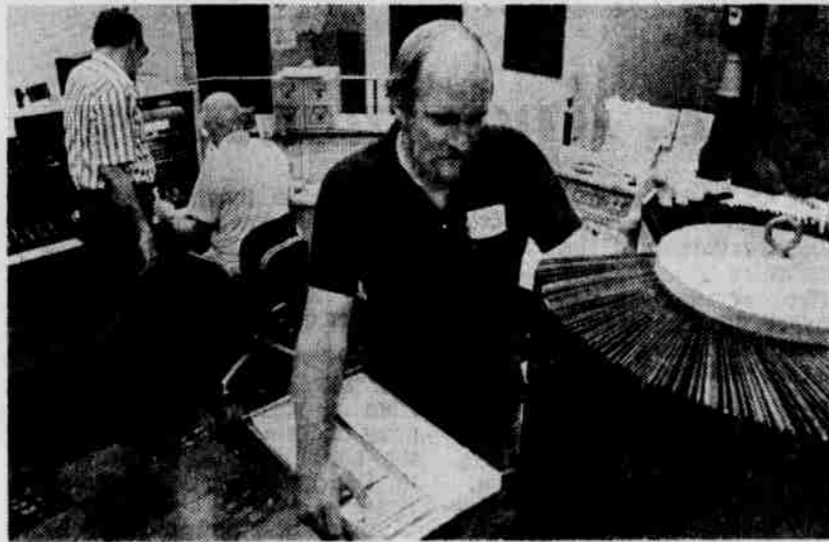
Hock is more suspicious of callers than Madden. He asks them to repeat their address; asks what the nearest cross-street is; asks for the phone number.

He explains that this is his way of discouraging people from filing a false fire alarm over the phone.

A woman calls, reporting trouble with her stove at 2303 Park Ave. Parr looks up the address in the rolex, and the box number in the file.

He broadcasts the run, sending one engine company. Hock throws a switch on the status board, putting the engine out of service, and notes the time.

Another call again with a box alarm at the same time. Both men swing into action, a team. And so it goes, on into the night, every night, at the communications center of the Cincinnati Fire Department.



—Enquirer (Tom Hubbard) Photo

Lindemann Checks Rolex Street Guide

... Madden and Joe Hocks, rear, compare notes at switchboard

Fred Asimus, Publisher Representative, In Fla.

Mass of Christian Burial for Fred Asimus, 56, formerly of Western Hills, will be at 8 p. m. today at the St. Teresa Church, Glenway and Overlook Aves. Mr. Asimus died Saturday at Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., following a sudden illness.

Mr. Asimus had just recently

established his home at Palm Beach Gardens, having been transferred there as midwest district representative of the William H. Sadler Publishing Co. For 40 years in the religion book business, he was a past president of the parish council of the St. Teresa Church and was a

member of the parish education committee. He also was a member of the Inter-Racial Visitation Program in Cincinnati. He was a communications officer in the Air Force during World War II.

He is survived by his wife, Betty Tierney Asimus; three sons, Dick and Drew Asimus, both of Cincinnati, and Dan Asimus, Los Angeles, Calif.; two daughters, Miss Mary Asimus, Cincinnati, and Miss Nancy Asimus, at home; a sister, Mrs. Dolores Leaman, Cincinnati, and a grandchild.

Burial will be in the St. Mary Cemetery, St. Bernard. The family requests that any memorials be made as contributions to the Heart Fund.

Charles J. Travis

Charles J. Travis, 71, formerly of Cincinnati, died Monday at his residence in Lexington, Ky.

A graduate of the University of Cincinnati's College of Pharmacy, Mr. Travis owned and operated a drug store at Ninth and Mound Sts., Cincinnati, for many years.

He is survived by his wife, Florence; two brothers, Morris and Philip Travis, both of Cincinnati; and two grandchildren.

Graveside services will be at 3 p. m. today at the Lexington, Ky., cemetery, Millward Mortuary, Lexington, is in charge of arrangements.

Museum Opens At Bardstown

IN THE GOLDEN age of southernness, wealthy planters looked about for the finest education for their sons and often chose St. Joseph's College, in Bardstown.

The oldest Catholic college in Kentucky, St. Joseph's was established in 1819 by Bishop Benedict J. Flaget. It produced alumni who became governors, poets, bishops and cabinet members. Now one of the college's stately brick buildings houses Spalding Hall Civic Center, which includes a museum devoted to items dealing with Bardstown and Kentucky from those early years to the present, plus a pottery and a restaurant with a courtyard cafe.

Spalding Hall was built in 1839,

a year after the college's main building was destroyed by fire. At various times it has been a Civil War hospital, an orphanage, and a boy's preparatory school.

The buildings that housed the college are located on Fifth Street in back of the St. Joseph Cathedral, one of the first Catholic cathedrals in America.

Open weekdays, except for the noon hour and on Sunday's from 1:30-5 p. m., the museum has guided tours that begin with a taped historical background story of the Bardstown area.

Displays are arranged in chronological order beginning with Indian relics, moccasins and a "long jacket".



—Enquirer (Gordon Merlioka) Photo

Getting His Sun But Not Too Much

A BLAZING SUN on a hot Labor Day afternoon affords an excellent opportunity to cruise around town and catch some rays, but if the driver's fair-skinned, he might wish to take precautions against sunburn. Ed Stewart of Mt. Washington, spotted near the Schmidt Playfield in the East End, solved his minor problem by donning a straw sombrero.