

History of Polk County Fire District No.1 as remembered by Retired Chief Don Milligan

I, Don Milligan, was hired as the first full-time Fire Chief of the Monmouth Fire Department. I was AC/FM for Ashland Fire. I started work Sept. 1, 1966. Delbert Seward was the Volunteer Chief and became my Asst Chief.

William K. Webb (Ken) was Chief of Southeast Polk Rural Fire Protection District (SEPRFPD) and I became his Asst. Chief. Claude 'Bud' Smith was the Training Officer at that time, also an Instructor at OCE, currently WOU. Two others that were instrumental and senior officers were Dee Bridges and Evan 'Butch' Evans. Ted Osgood was Volunteer Chief of Pedee Fire, a subscription fire agency. In the Fall of 1966 we reintroduced the sleeper/resident program.

I found Monmouth Fire to be a well run, effective and excellent fire department. It was staffed with citizen volunteers and Air Force personnel from nearby Adair Air Force Station. Some of the Air Force personnel were fire protection specialist at the base fire department.

When the Dept. of Defense closed Camp Adair in 1947, 8 of the 9 fire stations were closed, leaving only the one near 'Hospital Hill', the Navy Hospital. It still stands today as a market and restaurant. As a note, the Navy ran the fire stations up until Camp Adair closed. The citizens of the southern part of Polk County lost fire protection, which they were receiving for free.

These citizens, in 1947, organized the tax supported SE Polk Rural Fire Protection District. They received some of their fire apparatus from the military. SEPRFPD had stations at Airlie, Buena Vista, Suver and apparatus housed at Monmouth Fire and Independence Fire.

About 1950, the Air Force built a modern fire station in now what is called Adair Village. This station housed two fire departments, one was staffed by civil service firefighters and the other staffed with Air Force Fire Protection Specialists. It was put in place after the US Army closed Camp Adair somewhere between 1947 and 1950.

The new Air Force installation was a BOMARC Missile Base and an Early Warning Headquarters for the coastal radar sites. It continued to provide limited off- base fire fighting. SEPRFPD had a mutual aid agreement with the Air Force Fire Department. There were two Chief Officers; E.A. Deathridge was the Civilian Chief and Master Sergeant Wilbert Russell was the Military Chief who later became an Oregon State Deputy Fire Marshal.

When the Dept. of Defense closed the Adair Air Force Station in 1969, there was no more local response. SEPRFPD was being used outside of the District without any mutual aid and receiving no taxes for this.

* When the Adair Air Force installation was closed in 1969, Monmouth Fire lost a large group of the Air Force volunteers, who lived in Monmouth –this was a BIG LOSS!

About 1970, SEPRFPD responded to a mobile home fire on the south side of the Benton Co. line. Thus SEPRFPD Board, with my recommendation and that of Chief Webb, ended the practice of fighting fires south of the county line unless the fire was a threat to SEPRFPD or to save a life. The area citizens were notified of this. A little later in 1970-71, a mobile home was ablaze and SEPRFPD responded but allowed the mobile home to burn. SEPRFPD received really bad press for not extinguishing the fire. This decision was made due to the continued free fire support they were getting while SEPRFPD was not being compensated for their cost.

Elizabeth Harvey and Dr. Milo Merrill from the affected area contacted me to see if we could help them form a tax supported fire agency. I, with Charlie Roth Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal, Jim Austin Unit Forester with Oregon

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Dept of Forestry Dallas Unit, Dick Wagner Oregon Insurance Rating Bureau, Chief Ted Miller with Marion Co. Fire District No.1, Elizabeth Harvey, Dr. Milo Merrill and Richard Van Orman with Mid Willamette Council of Governments were the committee to form a fire district. The options explored were; to bring the area into SEPRFPD, annexing into either North Albany Rural Fire or Corvallis Rural Fire or creating a separate Fire District for Adair. It was decided to form what is now known as Adair Fire District. Dennis Haney was appointed as Adair's first Fire Chief in 1973. About 1980 SEPRFPD, Monmouth Fire and Independence Fire started a study with Pioneer Pacific Consulting to consolidate, merge, annex or somehow create a united fire district. We did not do a great job with the process; as a result it was a no go.

About 1982, we started the process over again and provided better information by mail to every household in the affected areas. We had a non-binding advisory vote and the results looked good. In 1984, we moved towards annexation, with the annexation of Monmouth Fire and Independence Fire into SEPRFPD for the purpose of providing fire protection and EMS services. Incidentally, a legal binding vote of all of the affected areas was conducted and it passed overwhelmingly in all three entities.

July 1, 1985, SE Polk Rural Fire Protection District now included Monmouth Fire and Independence Fire. By a SEPRFPD Board resolution the District name was changed to Polk County Fire District No. 1. I was appointed Chief of the District with Dan Greer as my Assistant Chief. Chief Bill Webb who was the Chief of SEPRFPD retired.

Pedee Fire also wanted to be annexed into Polk County Fire District No. 1. After much study of finances, tax base, and needs of Pedee, PCFD rejected the move. Pedee's needs were too great and would be too costly for PCFD to absorb. As a note, SW Polk FD, also rejected Pedee for much of the same reasons.

The Polk County Clerk shows 1947 as the original date of formation for Polk County Fire District No. 1, this was a name change from Southeast Polk Rural Fire Protection District, not an abolition of the organization.

Pedee Fire was annexed into Polk County Fire on February 10, 1992 via Board Resolution under the direction of Fire Chief Rick Hopkins.

I, Don Milligan, retired from Polk County Fire District No. 1 on August 31, 1988.

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