

X. THE FIRE DEPARTMENT'S HANDLING OF THE FIRE

Although no fire was anticipated, there was still a substantial Fire Department presence at the May 13, 1985 scene. Initially, three rescue squads, a ladder company, two Hundred-Series pumpers, two fire squirt gun vehicles, and various assorted command vehicles were present. The ladder company's purpose was to provide police with access to the roofs; the squirt guns were intended to direct water on top of the MOVE house to keep MOVE members from crossing the roof. Between approximately 5:00 a.m. and 11:15 a.m., the squirts were used in their intended capacity; thereafter, they remained off until shortly before the satchel charge was dropped. At that juncture, they were briefly turned on to deter MOVE members from venturing onto the roof and firing at the helicopter.

After the charge's detonation, at approximately 5:45 or 5:50 p.m., it became apparent that a roof fire had developed. That the fire was not then actively fought was initially the product of a Police Department order that the squirts should not be used, and the Fire Department's fear that fire fighting would impede Police Department operations on the rooftop. An additional pumper was, however, called in. It was dispatched at 5:53 p.m. and arrived on the scene at 5:57 p.m.

Within ten minutes of the pumper's arrival, a deluge gun, which reached as far as 6217 Osage Avenue, was set up and turned on. Under Police Department orders, however, that gun was moved because it could be reached by MOVE bullets. After being relocated,

it was thereafter turned on again a second time. However, it was on only briefly and then turned off because it limited the ability of the police to see the MOVE house. This sequence may have been repeated once or twice more.

As has already been discussed, no other efforts were made to fight the fire until 6:32 p.m. Beginning then, and for the next forty-five minutes, the squirts were sporadically employed, in an attempt to control the fire. In addition, six full alarms were eventually sounded. Each full alarm consisted of four engine companies and two ladder companies, with two battalion chiefs. The first alarm was called in at 6:54 p.m.

The arriving fire fighters could not freely fight the fire because of the possibility that MOVE could still shoot at them. Accordingly, normal fire fighting procedures could not be employed and unorthodox fire fighting techniques were adopted, with lessened effectiveness and minimal success. Such techniques, of necessity, continued to be employed until approximately 9:30 p.m. when the decision was made that the lives of the fire fighters would no longer be endangered.

By way of illustration, fire fighters arriving at approximately 7:00 p.m. tried to fight the fire from the homes on the south side of Osage Avenue. They proceeded into this area via the alley between Osage Avenue and Addison Street. Their intention was to get as close to the MOVE house as possible, put hose lines on the first and second floors of the facing houses, and play water across the street into houses on the west side of the

street as close to 6221 as possible. (By that time 6221 was lost to the fire because the threat of gunfire had earlier precluded a direct fire-fighting assault.) Doing this, while also playing water on the homes to the east of 6221, was intended (1) to stop the fire from travelling east and west, (2) to establish a fire curtain, and (3) to prevent a radiant-heat fire from spreading to the south side of Osage Avenue. Sounds, which some people interpreted as gunfire, however, necessitated the withdrawal of the fire fighters and their return to the Cobbs Creek Parkway area.

Attempts to fight the fire from the rear during this same time period were likewise abortive. After police checks of some of the Pine Street properties, fire fighters were permitted to enter those buildings to ascertain from the rear the extent of the fire. Before anything could be accomplished, however, a rumor that armed MOVE members had escaped prompted the removal of some firemen, while gunfire-like sounds caused others to leave. Similarly, an acting battalion chief who attempted to bring hose lines down the back alley toward 6221, to fight the fire from that vantage point, was prevented from doing so by Stake Out officers for safety reasons.

The foregoing are examples of the restraints which were placed, for a substantial period of time, on the Fire Department's ability to conventionally fight the fire resulting from the explosion of the satchel charge. It was not until 9:30 p.m. -- four minutes before the sixth and last alarm was sounded -- that the firemen were permitted to normally and conventionally proceed. By that

time, fifty homes were fully involved. Two hours and ten minutes later the fire was declared under control with the loss of only eleven additional residences. That the additional loss was so limited was labelled by fire expert Charles King as the product of a "super human effort."