Frank Rubino

Job: Fire Department Captain

The alarm came in at 4:45 P.M. from Fire Box #289 which is at the corner of Greene and Washington. I was attached to Engine Co #18 at W. 10th St.

I was attached to a pump engine. We kept a 20 lb. pressure going in that pump engine while it was in the engine house. It was connected to a stationary boiler in the station house. But this was not important in this case because the Triangle Fire took place in a high water pressure area. High water pressure was introduced in this city in 1909 and that part of the city came within the new setup. When an alarm came in we immediately notified the pressure stations there was one over on the East side and one over on the West side.

They were about to mount the pressure at the point where it was needed through a system of cut-offs.

The first alarm came in by a phone call from people in the building across the street. It was received by Engine Co. #72 on 12th St.

We came around Waverly Place into Washington Sq., East and turned the corner at Washington Pl. Next to the Asch Bldg. was the American Book Co. building. There was a shed that came out from the building to the curb. As we turned the corner the first thing I saw was a body of a man come falling down, landing on the roof of the shed and crashing right through. We kept going and turned into Greene St. and began to stretch out to the hook up to the stand pipe. I was working with John P. Crawford and he was trying to make the connection. Then I saw the bodies begin to come down on the sidewalk and I hollered to him, "Come out of there, come out of there, you will get killed."

Those bodies were coming down with the force of 1 1/2 tons by the time they hit the sidewalk. They were coming down with hair and clothes burning - you know the girls at that time wore long hair. When the bodies didn't crash through the deadlights, they lay there on the sidewalk three or four high, burning, and we had to play the hoses on them.

The standpipes were not required by law at this time but this building had them and it reduced insurance on the building.

We finally made the connection and went up the stairway, 8 floors. Some of the other men had gotten up as high as the 10th and they tried using the standpipes on the 10th floor. There was a crossover there of the pipes and the whole thing had crashed down. By the time we were coming up the steps there was a steady flow of water coming down. We had to break the door in to get in. There was a partition on the inside around the door. Behind the partition, the bodies were piled up. When we hit them with the hose, they just broke down and crumbled. There were 25 to 30 bodies piled up at the back windows.

While we were upstairs, we had others who were fighting another fire in the cellar. Some of the falling bodies crashed through the dead lights and went into the cellar which was stored with rabbits' fur and set that on fire. We had to lay out lines in the cellar.

The girls had just been paid. When we searched the girls for identification, we were able to identify many of them by their pay envelopes.

The civilians helped us with nets but it was no good because as many as 5 or 6 bodies came down at one time.

We had tall ladders at the scene. Hook and Ladder Co. #20 from Mercer St. came in with a 90 ft, ladder but that was straight up. When you backed away from the building, of course, it got shorter. One of the men crept along the ledge to the corner of the building and perched himself behind the Triangle Shirtwaist sign like it was a shield.

There was nothing we could do once they began to jump. People began to holler, "Raise the ladders, raise the ladders." But we had the ladders up - they don't know that it is more important in such a situation to hose back the fire so you can save lives. But once they began to jump there is nothing we could do.

The whole floor was covered with hangers. When they finished a blouse they hung it up on a string. That string was the track along which the fire ran.

They came out the windows because they were being pushed by those in back of them who were being burned by the fire. That was not panic - there was nothing else they could do but go out the window.

It was a 5-alarmer and there were about 35 pieces of apparatus. This memory has never left me.

The pressure stations had concentrated 125 lbs. on the main line when we gave them the signal.

The Hook and Ladder came down Mercer St. so damn fast.

The door was locked. Panic - don't believe it. The horses began to act up but we had a standard procedure with them at the beginning of a fire. You pulled the pin and the hitches released; then we would lead the horses away to the nearest fire house.

Chief Worth of Ladder Co. #20 who later went to the 3rd Battallion stood in the street clapping his head.