

## Sweetwater Valley Fire Protection

(Chula Vista Historical Society. Family, Friends, and Homes, 1991, pp. 480-483.)



It was in late 1949 that several citizens got together to see if better fire protection could be obtained for the valley by forming a local fire department. Up to that time, the California Division of Forestry furnished the only Fire Department services from their J Street station in Chula Vista (this is now Chula Vista Fire Station No.2). It took the State Forestry trucks up to fifteen minutes to arrive at a fire in the valley, depending on the location. It is doubtful if any fires were fought in 1949, since the time was devoted to organizing the department. On February 14, 1950, the papers of incorporation were signed, forming the Upper Sweetwater Valley Volunteer Fire Department. Don Herron, a sixth grade teacher at Ella B. Allen School became the first fire chief and was assisted by fifteen volunteers. The Sweetwater Fruit Company and the Williams Ranch each made a fruit sprayer truck available for use as the first fire trucks. At least one of the trucks was to be kept available for fire duty at all times. Each truck held 500 gallons of water and was equipped with a spray nozzle. The Fruit Company made space available in the "Old Red Barn" as the first Fire Station. The "Barn" was long a valley landmark until it was demolished in 1960 to make room for the Bonita Village Shopping Center. Money to operate the Fire Department was needed. This was obtained through subscriptions from residents and benefit horse shows. The first horse show in June of 1950 held in the arena next to the "Red Barn" netted \$1300, successful enough to allow the department to purchase a surplus fire truck, a 1931 Moreland from Kack Truck for \$750. The truck was fully equipped. Also at this time, a roof siren was purchased to notify the volunteers of a fire. The Sweetwater Fruit Company allowed the truck to be housed in the Red Barn until such a time other arrangements could be made. On the first anniversary of the department's organization, a Fireman's Ball was held at the Sunnyside Steak Ranch and contributions were solicited. A speech by Chief Bennet, the department's second chief, told about the ten fires that were fought in the first year.

In March of 1951, ground was broken for the new station. The Fruit company donated the less than one quarter-acre site for the Fire Station, its present location at 4035 Bonita Road. There were plenty of volunteers who devoted their time in helping to construct the station, and some materials were also donated, but money was still needed to purchase most of the materials. In July, the Second Annual Horse Show

sponsored by the firefighters was held to raise funds for equipment and the station. It netted almost \$2,000. November 4, 1951, saw the station completed and dedicated to Jack Eaton as Eaton Hall. Jack was the son of Tom Eaton, one of the volunteers. Jack had been killed in Korea just three weeks before he was due to return to the United States. The station cost only \$5,000 to construct, due to the donated labor of the valley citizens. The station, equipment, and men now serve a population of 473, seven businesses, with an area of fourteen square miles. In 1952, it was decided to man the station around the clock. The volunteers took turns during the day in 'answering the phone and responding to alarms. At night, two college students were hired to sleep at the station and were paid a small salary. There would be one student on duty each night at the station on an alternating night time and weekend basis. If an alarm came in, the person at the station would push the button on the big siren, write the address of the fire on the blackboard at the front of the station, and then respond with the fire truck. As the volunteers arrived at the station, they would get their turnouts and respond to the fire in their own vehicles. In September 1959, a full-time dispatcher/secretary was hired. In November, the second full-time fireman was hired. The middle of Bonita-Sunnyside was annexed over much controversy by the City of Chula Vista. Residents on both sides disapproved, but no legal way was found to stop the annexation by Chula Vista. In 1960, a building boom hit the valley, and, as a result, another fire truck had to be ordered. This was a Seagrave 1,000 GPM triple combination pumper. It was delivered in July 1961 at a cost of \$32,000. Bonita and Sunnyside were still growing at an above-average rate, and in 1962, three more firemen were hired. At this time, a work schedule went to 24 hours on duty and 24 hours off duty, but still using a part-time man on the weekends. Also in 1962, a converted military bomb carrier and generator from 1943 was purchased from the Lower Sweetwater Valley Volunteer Fire Department. The converted pumper-tanker replaced the 750-gallon tanker then in service. The replacement had 4-wheel drive, a 500 GPM skid-mounted pump, and a 500-gallon water tank and was ideal for brush and grass fire. Probably the largest fire Bonita-Sunnyside Fire District has had up to this time was 550 acres which burned in Rice Canyon area (now Interstate 805). In November, it took 19 hours to control 100 tons of hay burning at Bradley's stables. In 1966, a fire prevention program was put into effect and another man hired to allow the men to work in fire prevention full time. In 1966, Chief Jones retired and Captain William Cook was appointed chief. In 1966, the district had another fire rating inspection and went from a seven to a six overall, with only a few outlying areas remaining at nine. Late in 1967, three more men were hired, drawing the volunteer program slowly to a close. In September 1967, Chief Cooke resigned and on October 1, the Board of Directors appointed Harold F. Miner as chief. In 1968 there were only three volunteers left, so one more fireman was hired in order to insure that there would be a minimum of three men on duty all time, and frequently four. Also in 1968, the district purchased a 1953 Ford brush fire truck as a replacement for the rapidly aging pumper-tanker. The purchase of this truck repeated the story of 19 years earlier: it was purchased from the Division of Forestry, and it was a surplus truck. It cost the department \$750. By this time, all personnel were paid, no volunteers were left. Alarms in 1968 passed the two hundred mark. Jerry Harris, firefighter, died on the line of duty in 1972. Later in the year the firefighters began a new program, EMT (Emergency Medical Technicians). This is an advanced form of the regular Red Cross first aid program that we had been taught for years. A state-wide program, soon to be nation wide, required at least one hundred forty hours of instruction taught by doctors, some of which was hospital training time. It took a year for an individual firefighter to complete. This program enabled us to work side by side with the paramedics which also was a new program, giving the citizens of the valley the benefit of our added knowledge to aid and assist in patient care in a more professional and knowledgeable manner. The EMT program also requires a refresher of thirty-six hours every two years. As time progressed, so did the building and population growth in the valley. Early in 1974, the Fire District negotiated with the County to lease the vacated County Road Station at 4940 Bonita Road for a second station. After the lease was validated, the firemen put many hours and effort into getting the buildings and grounds repaired, repainted, and ready to move into. On October 6, 1974, the official dedication of Station No. was made. A Marine Guard officiated at the flag raising. Flags of the United States and California State were presented by Representative Van Derlin and Senator Mills and Assemblyman Deddeh. Headquarters remained at Station No. 1. The large roof siren that called the volunteers to duty was sold early in 1975 to another volunteer department in Washington State. It had not been used in years except for an occasional new year's eve celebration. The last time it had been used to call firefighters to a fire was in June 1966. In 1975, the department was given a Dalmatian dog to keep at the station, the traditional firehouse mascot. In 1976, the firemen completely renovated the brush and grass unit and repainted it the new safety lime yellow. In late 1976 the district had

an ISO grading with results of lowering the grading from a six to a four. By this time, the district had a chief, secretary, and eighteen firefighters. Early in 1977, plans were being formulated to purchase a new pumper due to the growth of the district population and also to the age of the truck. In June 1977, the district took delivery of a 1977 Clark fire engine. Its cost was \$68,000; it was diesel powered, had a 1000 GPM Pumper, and was a faded lime yellow in color. The 1954 Mack pumper was completely renovated and painted and put into reserve upon delivery of the new pumper. Population was approximately 10,000 with an area of eight and a half square miles. The area decline was due largely to annexations by the City of Chula Vista. Alarms answered in 1977 went over the 400 mark. In January 1978, the City of Chula Vista and Bonita Fire District came to an agreement to swap certain areas so that the closest fire engine would respond regardless of political boundary lines. In May, after a 6-month community wide fund raising drive, the district was presented a check for \$5,000 by the Sweetwater Women's Club to purchase the "Jaws of Life." The Sweetwater Women's Club has been a great supporter of the Fire District over the years with many other donations. A property tax relief bill known as Proposition 13 was passed by the voters of California in June. This also meant that special districts would no longer set their own tax rate. This proposition cut the Fire District budget by almost sixty percent. The balance of the budget was to come from state budget surplus funds. In February 1980, for the third year in a row, severe winter storms caused serious flooding in the valley. Several people and much livestock were constantly being rescued from high water rushing through the valley. At one point, flood waters reached the back door of Station No. 1. Water was forced over both sides of the Sweetwater Dam. This is the first time that this has happened since 1944. In April, a county wide blood donation drive began for Bonita firefighter John Yana who contracted leukemia. Later, in his hometown of Chicago, Illinois, he died, September 1982. To offset continuing budget problem caused by passage of Proposition 13 two year earlier, the Fire District put Proposition G on the June ballot. It failed by 140 votes of the required two-third passage. It would have raised \$250,000 for the department. March 31, 1980, Chief Miner, who had been chief of the department for over 13 years, retired. He was replaced in June by Orville Moody, a 14-year veteran of the Bonita Fire Department who became the 8th chief. Population now is approximately 15,000 and area covered still about eight and one half square miles. Early in 1981, our brush unit was sold. Diminishing brush lands and age of the unit (28 years old) made it unreliable for our needs. It was sold to a private campground in the Cuyamaca Mountains. Purchased "used" from California Department of Forestry in 1968 for \$750, we sold it for \$1,000. "A.C." (Assistant Chief), our Dalmatian, had to be put to sleep. It was congestive heart failure and degenerated discs in his neck, which had been giving him problem for quite some time. In July 1983, the Fire District passed a benefit assessment fee whereby single family residents were assessed \$30 per household for a period of one year. This money was to be set aside for the purchase of a station site, and for remodeling the existing station or purchase of equipment. Money raised through this fee was just over \$100,000. In December 1983, the firefighting force was down to chief, secretary, and thirteen firefighters. Budget problems have not allowed the district to replace firefighters who have retired, died, or quit to seek jobs elsewhere.



STORY OF FIRE PROTECTION  
IN SWEETWATER VALLEY



*Circa 1950*



*Circa 1951*



*1993*

**Bonita - Sunnyside  
Fire Protection District**



STORY OF FIRE PROTECTION IN SWEETWATER VALLEY

TO

ALL VALLEY FIREFIGHTERS, PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE  
WHO SERVE THIS COMMUNITY WITH PRIDE AND DEDICATION



The following is the property of the Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Protection District. Written approval of the Fire District must be obtained before reproduction of all or part of this document except for passages in connection with articles about the Fire District for inclusion in magazines or newspaper. Compiled and written by Richard C. Yokley, B.S.F.P.D.



#### THE STORY OF FIRE PROTECTION IN SWEETWATER VALLEY

Fire never had been a concern to the residents of the Sweetwater area, there just weren't that many homes in the valley. The first recorded fire was the Allen home, 4094 Old Orchard, in 1906. It was all wood construction and did not take long to burn. The fire alarm rang out thru the valley by ringing the bell on the boarding house owned by the Sweetwater Fruit Company, located near what would now be the end of Vista San Miguel, not far from the Allen home.

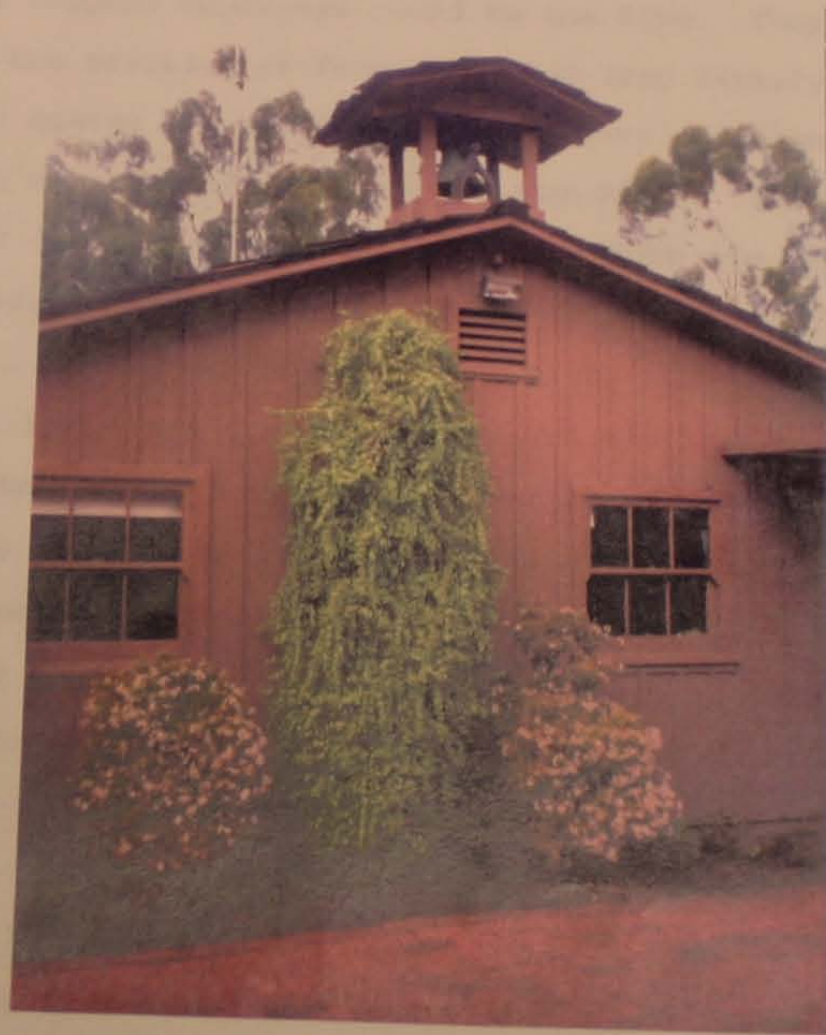
A second residential fire took place in 1907 near Sweetwater and Mesa Vista and again the boarding house bell rang to call the hired hands in from the fields and respond to try to extinguish the fire.

No other fires were recorded until late 1948 when a home on Willow Road was destroyed by fire. This was one of the coldest Winters residents could remember. Temperatures had plummeted to 19 degrees at night, and snow fell and remained on Mt. San Miguel for at least a week.

Citizen's realizing how vulnerable they were, decided that better fire protection was needed. Now, the only fire protection provided is by the California Division of Forestry. The nearest station is on East 'J' Street in Chula Vista. If additional trucks were required, they had to come from La Mesa.

The Sweetwater Fruit Company provided a fruit sprayer truck available to fight fires. They also installed a telephone in their offices and nearby at the La Tienda Cafe.





**FIRST FIRE BELL**

This is the bell that called the workers in from the orchards in the early 1900's. Originally located on the Sweetwater Fruit Company boarding house it is now owned by the Norton Family of Bonita.



When an alarm came in, the information was taken down, then the person ran to the Old Red Barn to ring the bell. This called the fruit company employees in from the orchards to operate the engine. They were given the location and then the fruit company employees raced to the fire. They would be aided by the Division of Forestry, when they finally arrived.

This system was neither quick or very efficient. Often the fruit sprayer truck was out in the field. When the fire bell rang out the engine would have to dump its oil used to control scale insects on the trees, then fill the tank with water, all before responding to the fire.

Late in 1949 a group of concerned citizens held several meetings to see if there could be better fire protection for the valley by forming a local fire department. At a meeting of the Sweetwater Mens Club January 26, 1950 the minutes state that Scofield Bonnet brought before the members the idea of forming a volunteer fire department. The idea caught on. Less than a month later, on February 14, 1950, papers of incorporation were signed forming The UPPER SWEETWATER VALLEY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT. Don Herron, a 6th grade teacher at Ellen B. Allen School became the first Fire Chief and was aided by 15 volunteers.

Later an additional sprayer truck from the from the Williams Ranch was added so there would always be a truck standing by available to be used for firefighting. No longer would time be wasted to dump the oil and refill the tank with water.



On more than one occasion residual oil was still in the hose lines causing the fire to flare up and spread briefly as fire fighters began to extinguish the fire. Each truck held 500 Gallons of water and is equipped with a spray nozzle. The engine had no real home, it was kept under trees and covered with a canvas tarp until needed. It was parked near the Old Red Barn. The barn was a valley land mark until it was demolished in 1960 to make room for the Bonita Village Shopping Center.

Money to operate the fire department was needed. Donations were obtained thru benefit horse shows and \$25.00 a year subscriptions from residents. The first horse show in June of 1950 held in the arena next to the Red Barn raised \$1,300.00. Successful enough to purchase a surplus, CDF Engine, a 1931 Moreland, for \$750.00. A picnic and fund raiser was held to raise money to equip the engine. During the picnic a fire was spotted across the valley and the Moreland, with all available volunteers, responded. By the time they got there the fire was almost out. It is reported that they would have gotten there sooner but they ran over their own hose. "So much for our first run", stated one of the volunteers. A siren was also obtained to notify the volunteers of a fire. Mr. Waters, owner of the 76 Service Station, (now the site of Jack-In-The-Box) provided more suitable space to park the engines. So now the fire phone is moved from the La Tienda Cafe and the new siren is mounted at the 76 station.



A Firemans Ball was held at the Sunnyside Steak Ranch on the First Anniversary of the departments organization, February 14, 1951. A new Fire Chief was appointed and donations for the next year were taken. The new Fire Chief, Scofield Bonnet, told about the 10 fires that were fought that first year and plans for a fire station.

In March of 1951 ground was broken for a fire station. The fruit company donated a 1/2 acre site, next to Mr. Waters Union 76 Station at 4035 Bonita Road. There were many volunteers who devoted time in helping to construct the station, and some materials also donated, but money was still needed to purchase most of the material.

In July the Second annual horse show sponsored by the firefighters was held to raise funds for equipment and for the station. It netted almost \$2,000.00. November 4, 1951 saw the station completed, and dedicated to Jack Eaton as Eaton Hall. Jack, son of Tom Eaton, local dairy farmer and one of the volunteers, was killed in Korea just 3 weeks before he was due to return home. The station cost \$5,000.00 to construct due to the donated labor of the valley citizens, and valued at \$20,000.00.

The station, men, and equipment now serve a population of 473, an area of 14 square miles, and 7 businesses. They are the Sunnyside Store & Post Office, The Bonita Store & Post Office, La Tienda, Bonita Beauty Shop, 76 Service Station, Sweetwater Fruit Company, & the Sunnyside Steak Ranch.





**BONITA VOLUNTEERS BREAK GROUND FOR FIREHOUSE**  
Celebrating construction of the Bonita Firehouse are, Left to Right: Bill Waters, Elmer Moore, Ralph Doughty, Dick Allen, Dick Wilson, Don Stadelle, and Scofield Bonnet.



**TEMPORARY SIGN IN FRONT OF FIREHOUSE**  
Sign depicting the location of the Upper Sweetwater Valley Volunteer Fire Department during construction.



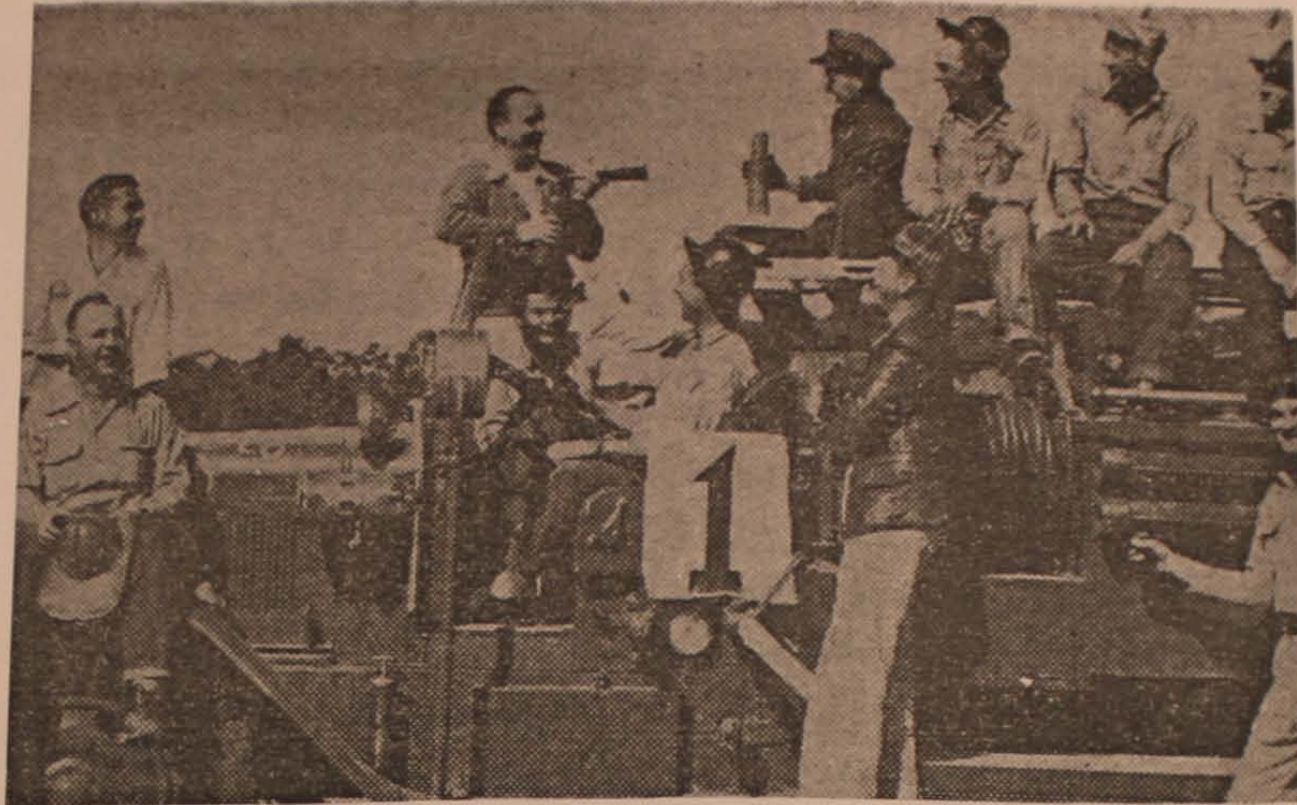


**FIREHOUSE, FIREHORSE?**  
Susan Provence, 8, of Bonita with her horse in front of the nearly completed firehouse, July 1951



**ALL MOVED IN**  
The Upper Sweetwater Valley Volunteers are ready for the first fire out of their newly completed firehouse. Inside are one of the sprayer trucks and the 1931 Moreland.





**BONITA FIREFIGHTERS CELEBRATE FIRST ANNIVERSARY**

Standing and sitting on the 1931 Moreland engine are, Left to Right: Bill Waters, Elmer Moore, Don Stadille, Bert Mendoza, Chief Scofield Bonnet (at the wheel), Ferd Dunn, Oliver Kyle, Frank Wigginton, Joe Basham, S. Totty, and Bill King



Engine 2, a Ford 1 1/2 ton truck used on grass fires carried 750 gallons of water. Sitting on station driveway with the Old Red Barn across the street.



Bill King became the departments third chief in January 1952. It was now decided to man the station around the clock. Two college students were hired to sleep at the station at night and they were paid a small salary. There would be one student on duty each night at the station on an alternating nights and weekends. If an alarm came in during the day, it would be answered at the Union 76 station by Bill Waters and he would push the button on the fire station siren summoning valley volunteers. He would write the address of the fire on the blackboard in front of the station and then respond to the fire with the engine. As the volunteers arrived they would check the address, grab their turn outs, (firefighting clothes), and respond to the fire in their own vehicles. At night one of the college students would answer the phone at the fire station, sound the large 7 Hp roof top siren heard throughout the valley to call the volunteers and then respond to the fire with the engine.

In February of 1952 the firefighters held their annual ball at the Sunnyside Steak Ranch celebrating the Second anniversary of the UPPER SWEETWATER VALLEY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, and to raise funds for the coming year. The third annual horse show was held in June and would be the last show sponsored by the fire department. Due to the cost of maintenance and operation of the fire department and lack of enough money to get added equipment, the residents decided to form a fire protection district. This was done by a vote of the people, supported by tax funds instead of benefits,



contributions, and house hold subscriptions. On August 22, 1952 a petition was filed with the San Diego County Board of Supervisors signed by 60 taxpayers and residents "praying that a fire protection district be formed ...". On September 23, 1952 the BONITA-SUNNYSIDE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT was 'created and established'. On January 29, 1953, by a vote of the people, the department became a legal entity. The election, held at the Sweetwater Womans Club yielded 140 yes votes to 4 no's. This on (almost) the third anniversary of the incorporation of the UPPER SWEETWATER VALLEY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT now to be known as the BONITA-SUNNYSIDE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT. The area of protection is 4,182 acres (6.5 square miles) with an assessed valuation of \$1,771,970. Bill Waters became the districts new chief. Money received that first year enabled the district to order a new fire engine. In June, a \$12,000.00, 1954 Mack 500 gpm pumper arrived. A Ford 1-1/2 ton truck purchased from former Chief Bonnet was converted into a 750 gallon grass and brush rig. These 2 trucks replaced the 1931 Moreland, the fruit company truck, and the truck from the Williams Ranch. Today the district has 17 paid and volunteer firefighters.

Local residents, Mr. and Mrs. Arther Hamilton Marston, received a scare as their 12 year old son George was over due from an outing in Mexico. Several Bonita firefighters and district commissioners headed a search party to go to Mexico to try to locate their son. From June 11th to June 13th, with the aid from a helicopter, our local firefighters went





FIREFIGHTERS AND COMMISSIONERS WITH THE NEW ENGINE.  
Standing, L to R, George Hatch, Chief Bill Waters, Jim Jones,  
Elmer Zimm, Arthur Cox, Bert Hand Jr. Kneeling L to R, Norman  
Francis, Robert Henschel, Bill King, Robert Russell Jr.,  
Scofield Bonnet, Mel Sernuck, Commander Morris.

Canon









above and beyond their normal service to the community. Successful in their search, George was found by college student firefighters, Bert Hand and Charles Andrews, safe, cold, and hungry. George was found back in a remote canyon on day 3. The Marstons were so grateful to the firefighters that they donated a portable oxygen resuscitator to the department at a public ceremony on June 28.

On July 1st 1955 the district appointed their first paid Fire Chief, James W. Jones. He recently retired from the Navy and has lived in the valley since 1948. He is helped by an all volunteer crew. Now the fire phone at the 76 station was silenced and all alarms now answered at the fire station 24 hours a day. Chief Jones answered the calls during the day and the college students, with the rank of Engineer, at night. In 1956 the district had its first ISO rating inspection resulting in a grade 7 for all areas within a mile and a half of the station and a 9 in the outer areas.

In July 1957 the first full time firefighter was hired, Bob Pray. The chief and firefighter worked days and the 2 college men still on duty at night and weekends. A radio system was installed in the station and in the engines.

A dark day in the fire districts history took place in March of 1959 when a fire started next door at Sweetwater Realty. A 19 year old college student, working part time at the firehouse, who gave no reasons for his actions, admitted setting fire to the building. He poured gasoline thru a rear window and then ignited the gasoline with a match. He then



extinguished the blaze outside the building with an extinguisher off the engine. It flared up on the interior and he then called Chief Jones for help. After an investigation, he was arrested and convicted of arson.

During the early years of the department, the firefighters, for a small donation, helped the residents out by burning off some of the fields of excess grass and weeds. Normally done on very large parcels where there would be more than what the regular trash service would haul away. On more than one occasion we burned off more than what the owner wanted, as it got away from us from time to time.

A full time secretary/dispatcher was hired in September 1959. Marge Jones, wife of the current Chief, had been working part time since 1955. In November the second full time firefighter, Bill Cook, was hired.

In 1960 the fire station needed to be expanded to provide adequate room for the engines and the increased number of personnel that were being hired. The hose tower removed and the square footage of the building was doubled.

A building boom hit the valley and as a result another fire engine needed to be ordered, a Seagrave 1,000 gpm pumper. Delivered in March 1961 at a cost of \$25,000.00, just in time for the newly remodeled station.

Current estimated population, 2600.

Bonita and Sunnyside were still growing at an above average rate and in 1962 three more firefighters were hired. Now the work schedule went to 24 hours on duty and 24 hours





**BONITA-SUNNYSIDE FIRE DISTRICT HAS A NEW FIRE ENGINE**  
Bonita Fire Chief Jim Jones (Left) and Asst. Chief Ed Spencer  
of Lincoln Acres Fire District at Columbus Ohio picking up  
the Seagrave Fire Engine at the factory. The new engine is  
painted White for Civil Defense purposes.





Front of station in 1961 with the new Seagrave Engine 3, the Mack Engine 1, Engine 2 the grass rig, and the Chiefs station wagon.



Fire District apparatus in 1969. Pictured are the Seagrave, Mack, the new brush truck, and the Chiefs car.



off duty, the college students now no longer needed. Later in 1962 a 1943 converted military bomb carrier and a generator was purchased from the Lower Sweetwater Valley Volunteer Fire Department.

In 1962, 97.4 acres of Bonita was annexed, known as the Bonita Village Annexation, includes Fire Station property. Residents in both communities including National City were concerned as how this would affect the valleys future. A J.P.A. was signed between Bonita and Chula Vista. This agreement would provide for the cities paying the fire district a sum equal to that which the district would have collected in taxes from the annexed land. The Fire Districts assessed value is \$9,130,810.00 with the annexation representing \$126,980.00.

Probably the largest fire the fire district had up to this time was the 550 acre burn in Rice Canyon (now Interstate 805). In November it took almost 20 hours to control 100 tons of hay burning at Bradleys Stables, (near Equitation and Bonita Rd.).

In 1966 a fire prevention program was established and firefighter Allman was hired to allow a firefighter to work full time in fire prevention. In late 1966 Chief Jones retired and the fire board appointed Captain William Cooke as the new Chief. The district size dropped slightly to 4,138 acres (6.46 square miles) however the assessed valuation now \$10,001,750. The district had another ISO rating inspection and we went from a 7 to a 6 over all with only a few outlying





Aerial view of the intersection of Willow and Bonita Roads, looking in an Easterly direction. Note the Firehouse, Bonita Store, Red Barn, and the Horse Arena where the firefighters held their horse shows. (1960)



areas remaining a Class 9. In 1967 firefighters Moody, Knefler, and Pastore were hired full time and the volunteer firefighter program rapidly ending.

In September Chief Cooke resigned and in October the fire board appointed Harold Miner, a valley resident since 1954, as the districts new Chief. Retired from the Navy, Miner spent 12 years as Fire Marshal on several ships including 2 aircraft carriers. He was also 'instructor in charge' at San Diego Navys firefighting school. Less than a month after his appointment a brush fire started in Ramona. By mid-morning a request for mutual aid sent a Bonita engine to protect structures in the Poway area. More than 25,000 acres and 6 structures were destroyed. It began a new era of fire protection for the citizens of San Diego County. It also caused a new radio system that would allow different fire departments to communicate with each other.

Early in 1968 there were only three volunteers left so one more firefighter was hired to assure there would be a minimum of three men on duty and frequently four. The district purchased a 1953 Ford brush truck as a replacement for the pumper-tanker. The purchase repeated the story of 19 years earlier. The truck, purchased from the Division of Forestry cost the department \$750.00. The CDF unit, rebuilt by district personnel, now carried 400 gallons of water instead of the 200 gallons that it normally carried.

By the end of the year alarms passed 200 and 2 more firefighters are hired, closing the volunteer program.



The work force currently consists of Fire Chief Miner, Engineers Ruffell and Maynard, Driver Mark Allman, and firefighters Moody, Knefler, Pastore, Miller, and Harris.

The population in 1969 was 4912, living in 1313 dwelling units. (A special county census was taken.) Firefighter Dave Spence is hired to replace Paul Miller who went to San Diego Fire Department.

September 1970, the Laguna Fire. Many factors came together this month to set off the largest fire in the county's history. Caused by low humidity, high Santa Ana winds, thick dry undergrowth resulting from years of low rain fall, and no formal training for fighters in combination wildland-structure fires. More than 186,000 acres were consumed from the Laguna Mountains to Proctor Valley Road in Sunnyside, where it was finally controlled and stopped.

Firefighters from Bonita-Sunnyside as well as from all over the county and state were on the fireline for 12 days to try to control this devastating fire. Firefighting costs alone were more than \$1,000,000 not including losses of structures, livestock and watershed control. In the 2 weeks of the Laguna Fire more than 200,000 acres were destroyed in that and other fires in the county. This was the first real test of the County-Wide fire radio system.

In 1971 two more firefighters, Jim Cranfield and Bruce Cartelli, are hired, the district now has a chief, secretary and 10 personnel. Population now at 6990 with a median household income of \$14,000, while the median income for



Chula Vista is \$8,301. The average price for a home in Bonita is \$32,000. Bonita is the 4th largest unincorporated area in the county.

Early in 1972 firefighter Jerry Harris, was killed in a vehicle accident while returning from a firefighting school. Firefighter Richard Yokley is hired in April to replace him.

Later in the year the district firefighters began a new program, E.M.T., (Emergency Medical Technician). This is an advanced form of the regular Red Cross first aid program that was taught to district firefighters for several years. A state wide program soon to be nation wide required at least 140 hours of instruction, taught by doctors, and included hospital emergency room training. It took a year to complete the program. This EMT program enables firefighters and paramedics to work side by side, giving the citizens of the valley the benefit of added knowledge to aid in patient care. The E.M.T. program requires a refresher course of 36 hours every two years.

By years end, firefighter Spence quits and moves out of state. He is replaced by Larry Baldwin.

As time progressed so did the building and population growth in the valley. Early in 1974 the fire district negotiated with the County Road Department to lease the vacated road station at 4940 Bonita Rd. for the districts second station. After the lease was confirmed, the firefighters put many hours into getting the buildings and grounds repaired, refurbished, and ready to move into.





#### Fire District Station 2

A three bedroom house built in 1950 for the County Road Department foreman and his family. Vacated a few years ago the Fire Department now houses the firefighters and all engines on this site. Headquarters remains at Station 1.



On October 6, 1974 the official dedication of Station 2 took place. The Marine Color Guard officiated at the flag raising. Flags of the United States and California were presented by Representative Van Deerlin, Senator Mills, and Assemblyman Deddeh to Fire Chief Miner. Fire District headquarters remains at Station 1.

Several firefighters are hired under a Federal C.E.T.A. program allowing the department to go to a 3 platoon system with 5 men on duty per 24 hour shift. The large roof siren that called the volunteers to duty was sold early in 1975 to a volunteer department in Washington State. It had not been used in years except an occasional New Years Eve celebration. The last time it was used to call firefighters to a fire was in June of 1966.

In 1975, replacing leaving men are firefighters, Bob French, Scott Walker, Tom Miles and Rick Erickson. The department was given a Dalmatian to keep at the firehouse, we call him 'AC', meaning, Assistant Chief.

In 1976 the firefighters completely renovated the brush and grass engine and repainted it the new safety lime yellow. In late 1976 the district had an ISO rating with results of lowering the rating from a 6 to a 4 for the entire district. At this time the district had a chief, secretary, 18 firefighters, and our dog. The fire district area covers about 4,114 acres (6.45 square miles) with an assessed valuation of \$35,027,215.



Early in 1977 plans were being drawn up to purchase a new pumper due to growth of the district and age of the present engines. In June, the fire district took delivery on a 1977 Clark Fire Engine, it cost \$68,000.00. The 1954 Mack pumper was renovated, painted and taken out of service. Population now about 10,000 with an area dropping below 6 square miles, due to continued annexations of surrounding cities.

Alarms answered in 1977 went over the 400 mark.

In January of 1978 Chula Vista and the Bonita Fire District came to an agreement to swap certain fire protection areas so the closest engine would respond regardless of political boundary lines.

In May after a 6 month community wide fund raising drive the Sweetwater Womans Club presented a check for \$5,000.00 to the Fire District to purchase the 'Jaws of Life'. The Womens Club has been a supporter of the fire district for many years with other donations.

A property tax relief bill known as Prop 13 was passed by the voters of California in June. This also meant that special districts like ourselves could no longer set their own tax rate. This proposition cut the district budget by almost 60%. The balance of the budget was to come from state budget surplus funds, (later known as State Augmentation Funds).

In February of 1980 for the third year in a row severe Winter storms caused serious flooding in the valley. Several people and much live stock were constantly being rescued from





1977 Clark Fire Engine at factory in Albuquerque New Mexico





The engines in 1977 lined up at the station. The Seagraves, Mack, and the new Clark. Pictured are Engineer Pastore with the Mack and Firefighters Walker and Ince with the Clark.



high water rushing thru the valley. At one point flood waters reached the back door of Station 1. Water was forced over both sides of Sweetwater Dam in February for the first time since 1944.

In April a county wide blood donation drive began for Bonita firefighter John Yana who contracted Leukemia. (He died in September 1982 in his home town of Chicago).

To aid in continuing budget problems since passage of Proposition 13 two years earlier, the fire district placed Proposition G on the June ballot. It failed by 140 votes of the required 2/3's for passage. If passed, \$250,000.00 would have been collected for the department.

Reported 1980 population, 11,986.

March 31, 1981, Hal Miner, Chief of the department for more than 13 years retired. In April, Orville Moody a 14 year veteran of the Fire District became the eighth chief. Later this year the brush engine is sold. Diminishing brush lands and age of the unit (28 years old) found it no longer suiting our needs.

'AC', (Assistant Chief), our Dalmatian had to be put to sleep. He suffered from congestive heart failure and had degenerating discs in his neck. All of which had been giving him problems for quite some time, he would be 6 years old.

The 1982/83 Fire District budget is \$686,000.00

In July of 1983 the district passed a Benefit Assessment Fee where single family homes would be assessed a one time charge of \$30.00 per household for one year. This money to



be set aside for the purchase of a station site, remodeling the existing station or the purchase of equipment. Money raised thru this fee was just over \$100,000.00.

The 1983/84 Fire District budget is \$ 836,073.00.

December of 1983 has the firefighting force down to chief, secretary and 13 firefighters. Budget problems have not allowed the district to replace firefighters who have retired, in one case died, or quit to seek jobs elsewhere. The Benefit Fee passed earlier in the year could not be used for firefighters salaries per board action. Also Bonita and National City signed an Automatic Aid Agreement that would drop political boundary lines to have the closest engine to the incident respond.

In April the Womens Club gave the department a check for \$2,000.00 to purchase a new cutting tool to work with the Jaws of Life. A birthday celebration in May for the Mack Fire Engine purchased 30 years ago this month. It now is mostly for parades. In June another Benefit Fee was passed by the board of Directors. This would run until 1988 and again impose a \$30.00 per year fee per household. On July 10th Bonita and San Diego signed an Automatic Aid Agreement.

The Womens Club was honored in August by the firefighters by holding an appreciation dinner. In appreciation of their long standing community service to the fire department. It was held at the Firehouse Museum in San Diego and the meal was prepared by the firefighters. Union Representative Dennis Ince presented a plaque to the Womens



Club in honor of their many years of service.

We responded to our usual Christmas Day fire this year, the cause, an unattended fire place.

The number of alarms answered this year went over 500.

The 1984/85 budget is \$861,000.00

On February 14, 1985 the department celebrated its 35th anniversary. Incorporating 35 years earlier as the Upper Sweetwater Valley Volunteer Fire Department.

The department was told that they would have the honor of being represented at this years Bonitafest by having the fifth plate in the series made in our honor.

In April National City annexed 17 acres. Down to 12 firefighters as firefighter Gil Ballatore, hired in 1974, quit to sail around the world in his home made sail boat. In June National City annexed 30 more acres for a condominium development on Valley Road. The area has diminished to 3,392 acres, (5.3 square miles).

The end of June and first week of July was busy for firefighters throughout the state as well as for Bonita. Part of 6 different strike teams this week for fires in the City of San Diego and County. San Miguel Mountain also burned 8,000 acres reminding us of the 1970 Laguna Fire.

The 1985/86 fire district budget is \$796,000.00

The Fire Department was well represented at the 1985 Bonitafest for our 35th anniversary as all the past chiefs were honored during the parade and a special luncheon held in their honor at Murriettas. All remembered as the site of the



old Sunnyside Steak Ranch where they held their annual fire-fighters dances in the early 50's. Those in attendance with their families were Chiefs E.S. Bonnet, (1950-52); Bill King, (1952-53); Bill Waters Jr. representing his dad Bill Sr., (1953-55); Marge Jones representing her husband James, (1955-66); Bill Cooke, (1966-67); Harold Miner, (1967-81); and current Chief, Orville Moody. A good time was had by all. The 1954 Mack took 'Best Individual Entry' in this years parade.

By mid 1986 annexation by the Chula Vista is in the news again. Fire District consolidation of the 7 southern fire districts is also an issue. The 7 districts being, Bonita-Sunnyside, Grossmont-Mt. Helix, Spring Valley, Alpine, Crest, Lakeside, and Bostonia. In October 240 acres of SDG&E property, the San Miguel Substation, was annexed into the district. The district size now 3,520 acres, (5.5 square miles) serving a population of 13,376.

By the beginning of 1987 annexation groups are now facing tougher opposition as anti-annexation residents are speaking out. Formal LAFCO proceedings had begun, however by May LAFCO had been put on hold as Chula Vista did not provide them with the necessary papers for a 1987 election.

Later in 1987 Bonitas third Strike Team of the season went to Palomar Mountain for 4 days. During Bonitafest this year the Mack took 'Best Individual Entry' for the second year in a row and Captain Yokley was honored with being presented the Bonitafest Historian Award. Later in the year



discussions began about purchasing a new engine for the district, disposition of the 27 year old Seagrave and refurbishing of the Clark.

In October ground breaking ceremonies were held on the South Bay Parkway culminating a 5 year department project, headed up by Captain Yokley, to have a center divide installed to reduce the death and serious injury from cross-over traffic. County Supervisor Brian Bilbray and other county and State Officials were present. (As a result of Captain Yokley's endeavor he received the *Star News Salutes Award* from the Chula Vista Star News Newspaper, *A Golden Service* award from the San Diego County Credit Union, *A Community Service Award* from Firehouse Magazine, and nominated for the *Firefighter of The Year* by the National Association of Professional Insurance Agents.)

Alarms answered by the fire district in 1987 went over the 600 mark for the first time.

The 1987/1988 assessed valuation of the fire district is \$498,051,594.00 with an operating budget of \$1,170,927.00.

To start off 1988, Chief Moody became president of the San Diego County Fire Chiefs Association. During a heavy January wind storm our leaning palm tree at Station 2 fell. Luckily away from the house and into the parking lot.

Because of renewed annexation issues, consolidation with Spring Valley and Grossmont-Mt. Helix fell through. The two fire districts did finalize their consolidation and renamed the new fire district the San Miguel Consolidated Fire District.

In March (1988) a new pumper design and specs are being finalized. The 'Beck' company of Cloverdale CA will be building our new engine at a cost of \$177,00.00. The fire district will be paying cash for it as funds will be coming out of the Benefit Assessment Fund.

The City of Chula Vista is once again considering an annexation proposal for the November 1988 ballot. Meetings with the City Officials, District Officials and firefighters have begun.





**BECK**

BECK FIRE APPARATUS  
1285 SOUTH CLOVERDALE BLVD.  
PO. BOX 185  
CLOVERDALE, CA. 95425



The District Board remaining officially neutral while the firefighters coming out with a No Annex position.

In March, major renovation of Eaton Hall, Fire District Headquarters began. All the termite infested wood removed which included the double hung windows and were replaced with aluminum. The outside of the station sandblasted and stucco coated and decorative trim installed around the windows and parapet. The office areas were remodeled as well for the convenience of the Chief and two secretaries. During the renovation a poster was discovered under the plaster, advertising the First Annual Firemans Ball at the Sunnyside Steak Ranch in 1951.

In late July a massive petition drive was started by the B.A.A. (Bonita Against Annexation) and in just a few short weeks gathered enough signatures to stop the annexation election in November. More than 4,000 signatures were collected, well over the one half of the registered voters. For the third time in the Valleys history, annexation by Chula Vista has been stopped.

In September the fire district took possession of its new engine. The Clark will now go in for repainting and some minor body work. The 1961 Seagrave was taken out of service.

This month saw record breaking high temperatures hitting the county. Several large wild land fires involving 100's of acres were fought. Bonita's firefighters were part of 3 Strike Teams going to San Diego City (twice) and Santee for structure protection.



The fire station property at 4035 Bonita Rd, originally on a 99 year lease, was deeded over to the Fire District by the fruit company heirs. The Fire District now owning the property outright. The county Road Station site at 4940 Bonita Rd. came up for sale with the fire district given first option of purchase. A \$5,000 dollar deposit was given to the county on the property, assessed at \$300,000.00 dollars.

By March of 1989 firefighters are being trained in the use of a semi-automatic defibrillator. We would be the fifth community in San Diego County who can to shock patients suffering from a heart attack 'back to life'. The defibrillator and related equipment cost almost \$8500.00. Bob Southerland, Bonita resident and local McDonald's franchise owner presented a check to the Fire District to pay for the unit.

In April Captain Donald Ruffell retires after 27 years with the department. He first saw service as a teenager, later as positions opened, he became a volunteer. Then Don hired on with a permanent position attaining the rank of Captain. Due to Dons' retirement, Scott Walker, with the department 14 years is promoted to Captain. Firefighter Jeff Brum is hired to maintain 12 paid men, and always 4 on duty.

The sale of the 4940 Bonita Rd. property now official, by Board of Supervisor approval in April, cost \$330,400.00.



By mid year Contract/Automatic Aid discussions with Chula Vista have begun. A third Benefit Fee is passed by the Board of Directors, to run until 1996. The money collected is to be used for the building of the new station on the site of the County Road Property at 4940 Bonita Rd.

In August 90 acres annexed in to the district. This is 'Summit Site' just south of Sweetwater Reservoir. This and other acreage all ready within the district is to be the site of an overnight camping area.

Within the last 2 months the firefighters have been out of the district on two Strike Teams, once to Mt. Laguna for 48 hours and to Mt. Palomar for 50 hours. Both instance for brush firefighting and structure protection.

For the 1989 Bonitafest Retired Fire Chief Hal Miner was presented with the Bonitafest Pioneer Award. (There was no parade this year.)

By the end of November and early December the department responded on two more Wildland Strike Teams, Santee and San Diego City. Discussions over, resolutions adopted, there is no longer a 'Contract' fire agreement with Chula Vista, areas now fall under the Automatic Aid Agreement.

A building committee is formed and work is progressing towards several designs for the exterior of the station. All designs are to keep the valley history and appearance. The design of the interior of the station is also a committee effort, most of which is being done by firefighters.



The year 1989 became a record year for the department. Alarms went over the 700 mark for the first time, surpassing last years number by more than 100 incidents. The fire loss figure hit a record high with over a \$1,000,000.00 loss.

The first order of business for 1990 was the disposition of the 1961 Seagrave pumper, out of service and just sitting in storage since 1988. It was sold, for a nominal fee, to Amigos U.S.A., a brotherhood of American and Mexican firefighters. The engine, re-outfitted, will go to a town in Mexico that needs a fire engine that we no longer can use.

On February 14, 1990, the 40th Anniversary of the founding of fire protection in the Sweetwater Valley, it snowed. As a very cold Siberian storm blew thru the county, snow was seen falling by firefighters thru the firehouse window. A quick check of local residents and none could ever remember this ever happening before. Snow fell in many other unlikely parts of the county as well.

The Bonita Museum hosted a reception on the 18th of February honoring the 40th anniversary of the founding of an organized fire fighting force in the Sweetwater Valley. More than 100 valley residents managed to crowd into the small museum to hear what some of the 'old-timers' had to say. Current Chief, Orville Moody introduced former Chiefs of the department; Sco. Bonnet, Hal Miner, and Marge Jones whose husband was Chief and who herself worked for the department as a secretary/dispatcher for more than 20 years. An Aid from Supervisor Bilbray's office attended and presented a



County Proclamation for the departments anniversary. A good time was had by all who attended. A belt buckle specially designed for the 40th Anniversary of the founding of the fire district was presented to the past Chiefs.

In March and April of '90, firefighters Mike Kobliska and Carl McAllister are hired to replace two firefighters who are on long term disability leave.

On October 13th, during Bonitafest, a reception is held at the Bonita Museum. Several dignitaries attended to celebrate the Third Anniversary of its founding. A proclamation is read and presented stating who founded the museum and describing the yearly events, specifically the 40th anniversary of the Fire District. At the Bonitafest parade, the Mack took 'Best Individual Vehicle for the third time.

After 20 years of service, on December 12th, broken by a 4 year leave, Mark Allman retires from the department.

Twelve acres of unoccupied land between Lynwood and East 'H' Street annexed into the City. Area remaining in the fire district is 3,594 acres, 5.62 square miles.

Former Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Captain, Don Ruffell, has been elected to the Board of Directors for a 4 year term, beginning in December of 1990, defeating 13 year board member Frank Kral. Mr. Tom Pocklington is elected also, replacing 5 year member John Green. Current Board Member, Robert Scott, appointed in 1987, replaces Frank Kral as Board Chairman.



Work on the new station still progressing, although slow at times. Getting ready to go out for contractor bid for construction.

In March Captain Yokley is promoted to Operations Chief. This restructuring of the chain of command is to help in the day-to-day operations and put more manpower in the field. Engineer French is promoted to Captain.

After 24 years Engineer Thomas Knefler retires. A party was held for him on May 21 with everyone wishing him well in his new home in Hawaii. Tom was presented with recognition plaques. His official last day is June 2, 1991, exactly 24 years. On his last shift he was escorted home with fire engines lights and sirens--a very emotional time for all. In preparation for Tom's retirement and due to the promotions firefighter Tim Isbell is hired in July.

In preparation for the demolition of Station 7 another remodel of headquarters was required. Serious considerations of temporary housing sites around the valley such as renting a home or renting trailers was looked into. Eventually though due to cost limitations it was decided to 'make due' by moving back down to headquarters during the construction of the new station.

The 1990 Census figures released this June show a population of 12,524 residing in 4,188 households.

In August, civilian Fire Inspector, Mary Tedesco is hired to focus primarily on Weed Abatement



Bids have been sent out for the construction of the station. Time now to make the move 'back in time' to 4035 Bonita Road. Everything salvageable is removed from the house to be used at the old fire house. All the kitchen cabinets, stove, oven, light fixtures, and more are removed, and moved down to remodel the old station to make it liveable once again while the new station is being built.

On September 6th an official ground breaking ceremony took place on the site of the new station. Several local dignitaries were present as well as Assemblywoman Trica Hunter and David Hutchinson, Supervisor Brian Bilbray's aid.

Engineer Dennis Ince retires due to a medical injury after 17 years with the department.

A historic day for the fire district, October 6, 1991. Today a construction contract is awarded to Tony Wanket Construction of Vista and the demolition begins.

Firefighter Randy Bell is hired to replace the vacancy left by the retirement of Dennis Ince.

By years end work on the new station has been slow due to dirt compaction problems. Some sewer, plumbing, and electrical work completed in preparation for pouring of footings. Mid January 1992, the dorm and administration slabs are poured.

A three alarm fire in the Bonita Mall in the 4100 Block of Bonita Road took place in January. Units from Chula Vista National City, and San Diego assisted in the Midnight fire. 7 businesses are affected by fire, water, and smoke damage.





Bonitas engines lined up at Station 2 in late 1988



Officials celebrating the ground breaking for Bonitas new station are, James Robbins, architect; Don Ruffell, Fire Board Secretary; Tom Pocklington, Vice Chairman; Orville Moody, Fire Chief; Assemblywoman Trica Hunter; and Robert Scott, Fire District Board Chairman.



Work really moving on the new station now to be addressed  
4900 Bonita Road. Walls up and the roof sheeted by the  
middle of March.

The end of April has a strike team consisting of  
National City, Chula Vista, and Bonita-Sunnyside engines  
responding to the L.A. City and Long Beach area. This was a  
response due to the rioting and numerous fires in the area as  
a result of the Rodney King trial verdicts vs 4 LAPD police  
officers. Local fire and PD forces were overwhelmed  
requiring help from outside agencies. The National Guard was  
activated and responded along with the engines, as well as  
the FBI to all alarms. The Bonita Engine was stationed at  
Long Beach Station 9 for 4 days.

In May a fund raising for the Fire department netted  
over \$2300.00. Headed by local resident, Diane Cousino, a  
'Taste of Bonita' was held with 13 local restaurants and  
caterers serving food to almost 500 people. A great time  
was had and residents were looking forward to next year.

The Fire District ISO grading has just been completed  
and they confirm that a Class 4 continues to apply. The last  
time we were graded, in 1976, the district had 18 fire-  
fighters and one Chief Officer operating out of two stations.  
At this time there are 12 firefighters and 2 Chief officers  
operating out of one station.

Richard Pena, local resident and 'Star News' writer,  
agrees to form a time capsule committee for the new station.  
As Curator of the Bonita Museum he is a logical choice.



Gail Huckle, owner of 'Frame and Studio Gallery' agrees to coordinate the decorating of the station interior.

August 10, 1992, the big day arrives. Firefighters move into the new station at 4900 Bonita Road. All in just ten months and four days after the contract was awarded and demolition began. Plans well underway for the official grand opening on September 16th.

Close to 300 visitors, dignitaries, and guests on hand for the station opening. Old time firefighters told of the early times of the fire department. Supervisor Brian Bilbray told the crowd how proud he was to be part of this great community event. The firefighters and the community have a great new facility and all should be proud. Items for the time capsule were on display. Many community organizations have taken part in donating items.

Effective December 14, 1992 Harry Pastore retires. Hired on August 1, 1967, he served the community for over 25 years. Prior to coming to Bonita he served as a call man at Lemon Grove Fire Department for two and a half years for a total firefighting career of almost 28 years.

Discussions underway regarding paying for dispatch service to the City of Chula Vista. In 1984 the City began dispatching for Bonita and the rest of the South Bay. Due to 'Contract' fire protection with the city, which was in force at that time, Bonita did not pay for dispatch. Contract Fire Protection has been phased out over the last three years and Bonita is no longer being paid to protect that part of Chula





New station for the community and firefighters at 4900 Bonita Road. This, the former site of Station 2 demolished in 1991 to make way for the new station. Completed in August 1992.



Vista known as the 'Bonita Village Annexation'. This area is now covered under the Automatic Aid Agreement.

In 1965 the city of Chula Vista requested of the Board of Directors of the Bonita-Sunnyside Fire District that with the completion of Chula Vista Station 4, by Southwestern College, certain areas be withdrawn from the Districts 'Contract' fire protection, (which began in 1962). The area known as Bonita Bel-Air, just South of and outside of the Districts boundaries had been under Bonitas protection. It was felt by the City that with the completion of station 4, the City would be able to serve the area in a satisfactory manner. All other areas that have been annexed to the City of Chula Vista that lay within the boundaries of the Fire District would remain under 'Contract' fire protection, namely the Bonita Village Annexation.

The Fire District and the City signed an Automatic Aid agreement in January 1978. This agreement between the two agencies insured that the closest engine to an incident would respond regardless of political boundary lines. A map was drawn up outlining the areas of 'swap' coverage. At this time the middle of Bonita, (see map), is still under 'Contract' Fire protection. With this agreement the Bonita Bel-Air subdivision once again came under Bonitas protection.

At this time the Zone was still under the Mutual Aid concept whereby even on a structure assignment only a single engine would be dispatched. When it arrived on the scene to



AREAS COVERED UNDER THE JANUARY 1978 AUTOMATIC AID AGREEMENT  
AND PREVIOUS CONTRACT WITH THE CITY





confirm a working fire additional units would be then dispatched. This wasted time for the arrival of help, resulting more property damage due to not enough firefighters on the scene in the fires incipient stages to combat the fire. This concept demanded that a specific agency use all its own resources, call back firefighters to respond reserve engines, etc, before being able to ask for 'help' from neighboring agencies.

As you can see by the map, the area served by Bonita as opposed to the area served by Chula Vista is heavily lopsided. That amount of calls generated in that portion of Bonita now being protected by Chula Vista is extremely few in number. In 1991 a time consuming survey of the number of calls in the area resulted in only 12 incidents of all types that Chula Vista responded to in the Carvallos/Pepper Tree area. By contrast Bonitas call volume into Chula Vista amounted to 131 incidents. Assessed valuation for the areas differ in the millions of dollars as well.

An Automatic Aid agreement with the City of National City was signed in December 1983.

In February 1984 Chula Vista began dispatching for Bonita as well as for National City and Imperial Beach.

Discussions began with the City of San Diego regarding Automatic Aid. In June of 1984 the City of Chula Vista, via letter to the District, threatened cancelling 'Contract Fire Protection' if we signed an agreement with San Diego. Currently the City of Chula Vista already had AA agreements



with National City and San Diego. By July San Diego and Bonita signed an AA agreement and Chula Vista did not cancel the contract as threatened.

About a year after the Montgomery Annexation, (to the City of Chula Vista, in January 1986), the Zone Chiefs decided that on all structure assignments within the Zone a minimum of 2 engines and 1 truck would respond as a First Alarm assignment. This would now eliminate the Mutual Aid concept within the Zone. Now, no matter where the incident is located, adequate equipment and personnel would be responding automatically, biased on the closest engine response.

This automatic response of equipment that the Zone Chiefs agreed to is not to be confused with the Automatic Aid agreements signed years earlier.

The Automatic Aid area for Bonita to respond into Chula Vista has fluctuated over the years since 1978. Chula Vista's area for AA response into Bonita has in fact been reduced thru annexations by the City.

Presently throughout the county virtually every Fire District and City agency that touch each other have AA responses into each others community on an as needed basis.

The wettest January on record, 1993. By mid January water began spilling out the South channel of Sweetwater Dam at the rate of 2500 cubic feet per second. Swelling the already above capacity Sweetwater River, AKA the Bonita and Chula Vista Golf Courses. Central, between Bonita and



Sweetwater Road has been closed for 5 straight days with no reopening in site. Plaza Bonita Road is also closed between Bonita Road and Bonita Mesa Road. There have been major mud slides on Sweetwater road forcing the closure between Willow and Briarwood Road. Reminiscent of the Winters of 1979 and 1980 the 5200 thru 5400 Block of Central was closed due to flooding. Water rose 3 feet in just 45 minutes flooding the homes on the ends of the Audubon and Hazlehurst cul-de-sacs South of Central Road. On January 19th, with more rain and runoff entering the reservoir, the North gates of the dam are opened. A dramatic site with water spilling out both North and South gates of the dam. This month, to January 19th, Chula Vista received 9.60 inches of rain.

Sunday the 24th saw the 'old' fire station officially turned over to the Bonita Historical Museum. There was a Grand Opening Celebration in which over 100 people attended.

The end of February is still seeing several rainy days. Central is still flooded and closed between Bonita and Sweetwater Roads, due to water still being let out of the reservoir.

April 19, after some repairs the Road Department opens up Central Ave. between Sweetwater and Bonita Road. It has been closed for three months.

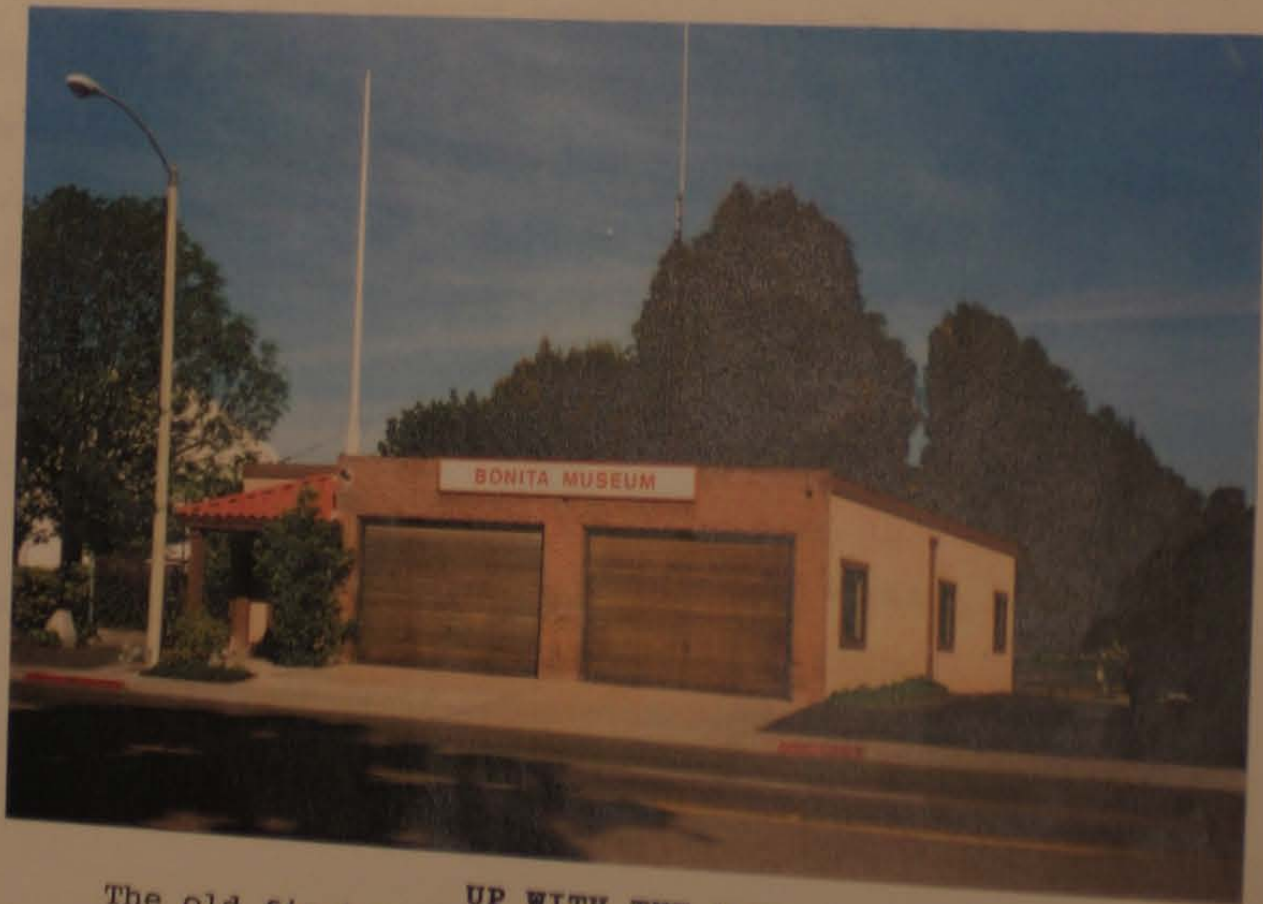
The end of October brought the first major Santa Ana winds to Southern California. Within literally hours, 13 major and several smaller brush fires struck the state. The largest in San Diego county was near the Wild Animal Park.



Canon



**DOWN WITH THE OLD**  
Firefighter Tom Miles looks on as Scott Walker and Jeff Brum remove the sign off the now vacant firehouse.



**UP WITH THE NEW**  
The old firehouse sports a new sign proclaiming the new location of the Bonita Historical Museum.



A Strike Team of fire engines from the South Bay was on the line from the 27th thru the 30th. This would be the largest acreage brush fire since the Laguna Fire in 1970. The fire consumed more than 20,700 acres, destroyed 5 homes, 6 smaller structures and did an estimated \$1.25 million in damage.

State wide these 3 days, 787 buildings including more than 650 homes were destroyed. More than 170,724 acres were blackened from Ventura County, South to the border, near Tecate. The most devastating of which was in the City of Laguna Beach where over 366 homes were destroyed. Two days later the community of Malibu was hit and lost 350 homes. By the end of the first week of November a total of 26 fires, 19 of which are arson destroyed over 1100 homes and blackened more than 200,000 acres. Collectively these fires will be known as FIRE STORM 93.

Captain Jerry Maynard retires on December 29th with over 37 years of service to the Bonita-Sunnyside Fire District. Starting out in 1956 when he was just 16 years old he became an Auxiliary Firefighter. At 18 he became a Volunteer. Hired full time in 1963 as a paid firefighter, he really has seen this community and department grow. His expertise in the maintenance area has kept our fire engines in tip top shape for many years, he will be missed!

Unfortunately there will not be any Captains promotions as Jerry leaves. Richard Yokley, who was reduced in grade from Operations Chief to Captain in September for budgetary reasons, will take over as 'B' Shift Captain.



The department is now down to 11 Firefighters and one Chief Officer. A far cry from the mid 70's when the district supported 18 firefighters and operated out of 2 stations.

This January of 1994 is a busy one. Not for flooding like in 1993 but for fires. South Bay sent a Strike Team to the Santee-Lakeside area on a 2500 acre grass fire on the 12th. Then on the 17th a major earthquake registering 6.7 on the Richter Scale hit the Northern Los Angeles area, and felt here in San Diego, started over 50 major fires, collapsed many buildings, and killed over 50 people. A South Bay strike team was sent and stayed for two days assisting in the rescue effort.

A June grass fire near Lake Henshaw consumed more than 5,000 acres before being brought under control. A Strike team from the South Bay worked on the fire line for two days. In July on three different occasions South Bay and Heartland firefighters fought stubborn arson blazes in the canyons off of Quarry Road South of South Bay Parkway. No homes were lost.

Firefighter Randy Bell drove Bonitas first ever destruction derby car at the El Cajon Speedway. Money raised by Bonita and other Fire Departments around the County went to San Diego Burn Institute.

Congressman Bob Filner, at a September 8th Fire District Board Meeting, presented Congressional Recognition Certificates to Bonita Firefighters who participated in 'Fire Storm 93'.



Receiving the certificates were Captain Scott Walker, Engineer Larry Baldwin, Engineer Tom Miles, and Firefighter Mike Kobliska. Peter Liebig, Southern Deputy Director for the California State Firefighters Association, (CSFA), also presented the firefighters medals of appreciation on behalf of Governor Pete Wilson and Ron Coleman, State Fire Marshal. The firefighters were recognized for their hard work in battling the fires near Wild Animal Park in October and November of 1993, named the Guejito Fire.



#### PRESENTATION

Bonita firefighters accepting service awards from Congressman Bob Filner and CSFA Deputy Director Pete Liebig. Pictured Left to Right are: Captain Scott Walker, Firefighter Mike Kobliska, Engineer Larry Baldwin, Congressman Filner, Engineer Tom Miles, and Pete Liebig



By years end the City of Chula Vista annexed 1.80 acres near Lynwood and Bonita Roads. SANDAG released revised census figures that show a population of 13,152 residents living in the Bonita and Sunnyside area, that is now 5.61 square miles in area.

Mike Sims becomes our newest firefighter on January 23, 1995. This now brings our staffing level back up to 4 firefighters per shift.

State augmentation funds have been reduced over the past 4 years until finally being eliminated altogether which generated over \$264,000.00 dollars every year since the passage of Prop. 13 in 1978. This along with the \$50,000.00 annual loss of the Chula Vista Contract area (Bonita Bel Air) in 1992, now Automatic Aid, and now for the first time having to pay Chula Vista for dispatching services, (\$10,000.00 each year). Additionally Bonita is suffering an \$88,000.00 a year loss in what is called a 'Tax Shift' to help augment the school districts.

A 4th Benefit Fee has been passed by the Board of Directors of the Fire District to run until the year 2005 with same fee schedule as previous fees.

August and September was busy with 3 South Bay Strike Teams going to Campo, Rancho Penasquitos in San Diego, and to Delzura.

The number of annual incidents took a record leap to end 1995 with 921 alarms, almost 200 incidents over the previous year.



In January 1996, an error that took place in 1993 was routinely discovered regarding Fire District boundaries involving 10 homes in the area of 5300 Robinwood Road. These homes were inadvertently left out of the original annexation during the development of the area. After 2 years of negotiating with the County by the individual homeowners and the Fire District, the County agreed to the annexation of the homes into the Fire District without the required fees. The area involved is 18.67 acres resulting in a total of 3614.47 acres, (5.65 square miles) now within the Fire District boundaries.

An unusual dry January brought Santa Ana winds and a 3500 acre Wildland Fire to Jamul. Bonita Firefighters along with other South Bay departments responded to Jamul and took stand at individual homes for almost 8 hours as structures were threatened. By Sunrise winds had died down enough that water carrying helicopters and air tankers were able to bring the fire under control. Structures now no longer in danger all Strike Teams in the area were released.

In keeping with our tradition in being able to provide the best possible service to the community the firefighters began training on a new life saving tool, the 'Combitube'. This piece of equipment enables the firefighters to establish and maintain an airway, a primary concern, in traumatic patients.

Late October brought a devastating fire to the Harmony Grove and Elfin Forest area of North County. Bonita Firefighters were called in on the 21st and battled the inferno until being released on the 23rd. Homes were lost and a homeowner perished from burns received while making a desperate and valiant effort to save his home.

After many years of battling the elements of rain and the subsequent of closing of Central Avenue over the Sweetwater River, effectively cutting the valley in half, hope is in site. Construction on a new bridge running between Bonita Road and Sweetwater Road began. By





March 1997, construction completed, a grand reopening ceremony took place. Appropriately enough, the first to cross the new bridge was the Bonita Fire Department . The fire district has long lamented about the problems each winter when the crossing had to be shut down due to flooding. Editorials and newspaper articles began in earnest in 1993 regarding the annual closings due to flooding when the connecting road was closed for over 3 months.

Captain Yokley is honored during Septembers Bonitafest event by being named '1997 Bonitafest Pioneer'.

1997 ends with the Chief Moody announcing his retirement effective the end of 1998. The fire district answered over 1000 alarms for the year, never before reaching this number, most of which being medical in nature.



DISTRICT FIRE CHIEFS

UPPER SWEETWATER VALLEY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

DON HERRON	FEBRUARY 1950	TO	SEPTEMBER 1950
SCOFIELD BONNET	SEPTEMBER 1950	TO	JANUARY 1952
BILL KING	JANUARY 1952	TO	JANUARY 1953

BONITA-SUNNYSIDE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

BILL WATERS	JANUARY 1953	TO	JULY 1955
JAMES JONES	JULY 1955	TO	SEPTEMBER 1966
BILL COOK	SEPTEMBER 1966	TO	SEPTEMBER 1967
HAROLD MINER	SEPTEMBER 1967	TO	MARCH 1981
ORVILLE MOODY	APRIL 1981	TO	



THE 16 ORIGINAL VOLUNTEERS

Name	Year	Year
Basham, Joe	1965	1966
Bonnet, Scofield	1967	1967
Doughty, Ralph	1967	1967
Dunn, Ferd	1967	1967
Eaton, Tom	1967	1966
Herron, Don	1967	1967
King, William	1967	1967
Kyle, Oliver	1967	1967
Jones, James	1967	1972
Mendoza, Bert	1967	1972
Moore, Elmer	1972	1972
Sernuck, Mel	1972	1972
Stadille, Don	1972	1972
Waters, Bill	1974	1974
Wiggington, Joe	1974	1974
Totty, S.	1974	1974

U.S.V.V.F.D. ORGANIZERS

- Scofield Bonnet
- Bill King
- James Jones
- Bob Burch
- Ralph Doughty



VAID EMPLOYEES OF THE FIRE DISTRICT

	Badge #	Hired	Ret. etc.
JAMES JONES	1	1955	1966
BOB PRAY	--	1957	?
BILL COOK	2	1959	1967
RON BURNS	3	1962	?
DONALD RUFFELL	4	1962	1989
JOHN JACOIA	5	1962	?
JERRY MAYNARD	6	1963	1993
CHUCK GAZANA	7	1963	?
MARK ALLMAN	8	1966	1990
ORVILLE WOODY	9	1967	P
F. THOMAS KNEFLER	10	1967	1991
HARRY PASTORE	11	1967	1993
HAROLD MINER	12	1967	1981
PAUL MILLER	13	1968	1969
ROBERT BUFORD	14	1968	1968
ED SCHULER	15	1968	1968
JERRY HARRIS	16	1969	1972
DAVID SPENCE	17	1969	1972
JAMES CRANFIELD	18	1971	P
R. 'BRUCE' CARTELLI	19	1971	1980
RICHARD YOKLEY	20	1972	P
LARRY BALWIN	21	1972	P
DENNIS INCE	22	1974	1991
GIL BALLATORE	23	1974	1985
HANK JONES	--	1974	1974
JOHN YANA	24	1974	1980
STEVE BROWN	--	1974	1974
ROBERT HILL	25	1974	1984
ROBERT FRENCH	26	1975	P
M. SCOTT WALKER	27	1975	P
TOM MILES	28	1975	P
RICHARD ERICKSON	29	1975	1978
DAVID ACOSTA	--	1989	1989
JEFF BRUM	30	1989	P
MIKE KOBLISKA	31	1990	P
CARL McALLISTER	32	1990	P
TIM ISBELL	33	1991	P
RANDY BELL	34	1991	P
MIKE SIMS	35	1995	P
MARY TEDESCO, INSPECTOR	36	1991	P

DISTRICT SECRETARIES

MARGE JONES	1955	1981
RUBY BOONE	1981	1991
RITA CYMAN	1987	P



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIREFIGHTERS

LOCAL 1827

UNION OFFICERS

March 1969 to Feb 1971	P. Tom Knefler V.P. Harry Pastore S/T Mark Allman
Feb 1971 to May 1971	P. Tom Knefler V.P. Bob Buford S/T Ed Schuler
May 1971 to May 1972	P. Tom Knefler V.P. Bob Buford S/T Jerry Harris
May 1972 to Oct 1972	P. Dave Spence V.P. Mark Allman S/T Bruce Cartelli
Oct 1972 to Feb 1974	P. Mark Allman V.P. Bruce Cartelli S/T Tom Knefler
Feb 1974 to Jan 1976	P. Bruce Cartelli V.P. Larry Baldwin S/T James Cranfield
Jan 1976 to Jan 1979	P. Bruce Cartelli V.P. Larry Baldwin S/T Richard Yokley
Feb 1979 to Feb 1980	P. Bruce Cartelli V.P. Bob Hill S/T Bob French
Feb 1980 to Feb 1981	P. Bob Hill V.P. Tom Miles S/T Don Ruffell
Feb 1981 to Feb 1982	P. Richard C. Yokley V.P. Tom Miles S/T Mark Allman

REORGANIZED TO IAFF LOCAL 2716

Feb 1982 to Feb 1984	St. Don Ruffell S/T Mark Allman
Feb 1984 to May 1985	St. Don Ruffell S/T Dennis Ince





LOCAL 2716 CONT.

May 1985 to Aug 1897

St. Bob French  
S/T Dennis Ince

REVERTED BACK TO IAFF LOCAL 1827

July 1987 to Aug 1989

P. Scott Walker  
V.P. Tom Miles  
S/T Dennis ince

Sep 1989 to Oct 1993

P. Tom Miles  
VP/ST Larry Baldwin

Oct 1993 to SEP 1996

P. Tom Miles  
V.P. Larry Baldwin  
S/T Tim Isbell

SEP 1996 -

P. Tom Miles  
V.P. LARRY BALDWIN  
S/T MIKE SIMS



DONATIONS TO THE FIRE DISTRICT

1978	Jaws Fund	\$200.00
	THE MARSTONS, PEGGY & ARTHUR	
1955	E & J Resuscitator	\$500.00
1982	MRS. JERRY HARRIS	\$100.00
1972	Color Television	\$500.00
1987	SHIELDS REALTY	\$600.00
1973 - 1974 - 1975 - 1976		
1980	Calendars for valley distribution (with fire prevention theme)	\$100.00

SWEETWATER WOMENS CLUB

1974	Cardio-Beeper	\$300.00
1975	Air Chisel & Come-a long	\$2000.00
1978	Jaws-of-Life Rescue System	\$6000.00
1979	Hydrant Road Markers	\$700.00
1980	Cash Donation	\$500.00
1983	Two, 8 Channel Radios	\$2300.00
1984	Jaws-of-Life Cutter	\$2000.00
1990	Breathing Appliance Air Compressor	\$2500.00
1992	27 Hand Made Trama Bears (value)	\$270.00
1993	18 Hand Made Trama Bears	\$180.00
1994	66 Hand Made Trama Bears	\$660.00
1995	34 Hand Made Trama Bears	\$340.00
	42	

BONITA BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL ASSC.

1978	Jaws Fund	\$100.00
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CHULA VISTA KIWANIS CLUB

1978	Jaws Fund	\$500.00
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MONTGOMERY LIONS

1978	Jaws Fund	\$227.43
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SWEETWATER WOMANS CLUB 'EVENING SECTION'

1978	Jaws Fund	\$250.00
	LAS PRIMERAS	
1982	Cash Donation	\$500.00
	SUTHERLAND MANAGEMENT CORP.	
1989	First Medic Defibrillator	\$6000.00
	ERIC JOHNSON	
1990	Camper Shell for Ford Pick-up	\$500.00
	PIPER PHOTO	
1991	Melodie Piper, owner Photos for display board (value)	\$300.00
	McMILLIN REALTY, BONITA OFFICE	
1992	Gladys Hradecky, Realtor 30 Bonita (trama) bears	\$330.00
	'TASTE OF BONITA'	
1992	Diane Couisno, Restaurant tasting Purchased cutter for 'Jaws'	\$2,300.00
	GLEN ABBY MORTUARY	
1992	Pat Gradillas, Manager Time capsule brass plaque	\$2,000.00
	DESTRUCTION DERBY	
1994	BENEFIT THE BURN INSTITUTE	
	Jalisco Cafe	\$50.00
	M.R. Contreras	\$50.00
	Sweetwater Womens Club	\$100.00
	Piper Photo	\$50.00
	Old Bonita Store and Restaurant	\$20.00
	Bonita Golf Club	\$100.00



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PAGE 2, 43, 49, 51  
PAGE 6, 7, & 8, (TOP).  
PAGE 6, 7, & 8, (BOTTOM); 11, 12, 14, 22, 24  
PAGE 15  
PAGE 18  
PAGE 25  
PAGE 32  
PAGE 40

CAROL HAMMOND

RICHARD YOWLEY, BSFPD  
UNION/TRIBUNE  
BSFD PHOTO  
SEAGRAVE CORPORATION  
JAMES JONES, FIRE CHIEF  
CLARK, FIRE ENGINE DIVISION  
BECK FIRE APPARATUS COMPANY  
CHULA VISTA STAR NEWS



## Fire Protection in the Sweetwater Valley

### A Brief History

On February 14, 1950, a local fire department was formed and incorporated as the Upper Sweetwater Valley Volunteer Fire Department. Don Herron became the first fire chief and was assisted by 15 volunteers. The Sweetwater Fruit Company and the Williams Ranch provided fruit sprayer trucks for use as the first fire engines. Space was made available by the fruit company in the "Old Red Barn" for the first fire station.

Horse shows were held to raise money to operate the Fire Department. In March 1951, the Sweetwater Fruit Company donated land for a fire station. On November 4, 1951 the station, which was built by Chief Scofield Bonnet and firefighters, was completed and dedicated as Eaton Hall in memory of Jack Eaton. On February 23, 1953 the Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Protection District became a legal entity. The district appointed their first paid Fire Chief, James Jones, in July 1955. An all-volunteer crew assisted him. Bill Cooke was appointed Chief in 1966. In 1967, Harold (Hal) Miner became Chief and eventually had an all paid staff. Since 1981, Chief Orville Moody led the Fire District in serving a rapidly growing community. The year 2001 ended with Chief Moody retiring from the fire department. Captain Scott Walker was promoted to Chief in November 2001 and continues in his place.

On August 10, 1992 the firefighters moved into their new station at 4900 Bonita Road with construction taking only 10 months and 4 days.

## Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Protection District

### Some interesting statistics

Year	Population	Department Footage	Calls
1951	473	14 square mile	
1953		6.5 square mile (4182 acres)	
1961	2600 estimate		
1966		6.46 square mile (4138 acres)	
1968			200
1969	4912		
1971	6990		
1976		6.45 square mile (4114 acres)	
1977			400
1980	11986		
1984			500+
1985		5.3 square mile (3392 acres)	
1986	13,376	5.5 square mile (3520 acres)	
1987			600+
1989		3610 acres	700+
1990	12542	5.62 square mile (3594 acres)	
1993	13,152	5.61 square mile (3592 acres)	
1994			700+
1995			921
1996		5.65 square mile (3614.47 acres)	
2005	15,000		



## Brief Chronology of Bonita-Sweetwater Fire District – to 1998

- 1906, 1907 First fires in Sweetwater Valley
- 1948 Next fire
- 1950 Upper Sweetwater Valley Volunteer Fire Dept. Established
- 1950 Used Fire truck obtained from LA
- 1951 Fire Station set up on Bonita Rd., near Willow
- 1953 Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Protection District established
- 1954 New Mack Fire Engine
- 1955 First paid Fire Chief
- 1957 First full time Firefighter
- 1959 Second full time firefighter
- 1960 Fire station expanded
- 1961 Second new Fire Engine (Seagrave)
- 1962 Three more firefighters hired, 24 hr. duty work schedule started
- 1966 Fire Prevention program started
- 1967 3 more firefighters hired
- 1968 3 more fighters hired, ending volunteer program  
200 alarms by end of 1968
- 1970 Laguna fire – largest in county history – from Laguna Mountain to Proctor Valley Rd. in Sunnyside
- 1971 Staff grows to 10 plus the Chief and secretary
- 1972 EMT program established
- 1974 Second station opened
- 1976 18 Firefighters plus a dog
- 1977 New fire truck purchased; original Mack retired  
Alarms in '77 over 400
- 1983 Firefighters down to 13 due to budget problems  
Alarms in '83 over 500  
Alarms over 600
- 1988 New Fire engine; the Seagrave retired and later sold
- 1989 Alarms over 700
- 1990, Feb 14 Snow in Bonita
- 1992 Fire in Bonita Mall (Museum affected)  
New Fire House opened
- 1993 Old Fire Station turned over to Museum  
Staff down to 11 firefighters and 1 Chief
- 1995 Alarms in '95 921
- 1997 Alarms over 1000, mostly medical