

ESQUIMALT FIRE DEPARTMENT HISTORY

Historical Events

1912 Esquimalt's first municipal police force

Following the incorporation of the municipality in 1912, Council took measures to protect the community's investment with a municipal police force. This force followed a model found in most neophyte municipalities whereby fire and police services were provided by a single department. Esquimalt would be able to maintain this dual capacity, because of three unique factors: its fiscal limitations, support from the Victoria City Fire Department, and support from the Canadian Forces Base.

1912 First two police constables appointed

Arthur Halstead and John Grey were appointed as police constables for the municipality. Halstead was sworn in as the first Chief Constable, vested with the authority to organize the duties of the police department. In addition to their regular police work, they were expected to do:

- Volunteer Firefighting
- Health Inspections
- Pound Keeping
- Sanitary Inspections

The police officers were expected to attend every fire call possible and were often in charge of the effort to put out the blaze.

1923 Purchase of an "Indian Chief" motorcycle

1924 First fireman hired

Fred Pick the first full time fireman hired to be on duty from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m.

1926 Purchase of a "Harley" Motorcycle and side-car

1929 More money for increased duties

The Fire and Light Committee saw the need to increase fire services, and decided to pay their existing officers more money in exchange for an increase in duties, as opposed to creating a separate fire department at a substantially greater cost.

1945 Five-man force

By 1945, a five-man force was serving a population that had swelled to 4,500 citizens. This incredible population increase, previously unknown to Esquimalt, was the direct result of the extraordinary number of military personnel associated with the Base during a time of war. The number of soldiers in Esquimalt by 1941 was so great that the Base was forced to expropriate approximately ten square blocks of the adjacent municipality in order to provide adequate facilities for its people.

1948 Increase to an eight-man force

As a result of the population growth, Esquimalt Municipal Council increased the police/fire force to eight men. Each man continued to perform dual fire and police roles in times of emergency, yet, there was a growing tendency toward specialization.

1949 Fire Agreement between the four Greater Victoria municipalities

An agreement between the four Greater Victoria municipalities to assist each other with fire protection was drafted.

1950 Esquimalt police/fire department unionizes

Creation of the Esquimalt Municipal Employees Federal Union No. 333.

1954 Police officers feel overworked

The police simply had less time to devote to fire protection owing to the increase in crime and social unrest caused by the growing population. By the early months of 1954, the police were feeling so overworked that they refused to be on call for fire duty in exchange for an extra \$20 per month. Furthermore, there was an outcry from the firemen that they received no additional pay for "handling drunks" and performing other kinds of police duties.

1954 Firemen dismissed and re-employed as Special Constables

In response to demands from firemen for better pay, hours, and working conditions, the Employees Union threatened to charge the municipality with being in violation of the Fire Departments Two-Platoon Act. This act required that each municipal fire department provide two four-man platoons for fire protection (at this time, Esquimalt's police/fire department consisted of only three firemen and four policemen.) To get around this requirement, the firemen were dismissed and then re-employed as Special Constables on the specific condition that they continued to provide volunteer fire protection for the municipality. In return, the union demanded that firemen receive the same scale of pay as police officers, an additional 2.5% bonus.

1954 Designation of firefighters as Special Constables unsatisfactory

By the end of 1954, it was clear that the designation of firefighters as Special Constables was an unsatisfactory arrangement. As a result, the Esquimalt Council, led by its Reeve, Cmr. A.C. Wurtele, decided to create a totally amalgamated force. This move elevated the firemen to an equal level with the policemen and put to rest any notion that Esquimalt was somehow in violation of the Two-Platoon Act.

Previously, firemen and policemen performed dual roles only in times of emergency. However, under the new system of full amalgamation, all men would be equally responsible for fire protection and policing.

In exchange for these additional responsibilities, the men were given \$5.00 more per month than fire and policemen in Victoria and \$20.00 on call allowance.

1955 Hired one more man

When the Council hired one more man in 1955, Esquimalt could finally claim that it adhered to the Two-Platoon Act.

1957 Esquimalt Police Union formed

Up until 1957, the Employees Union represented the firefighters and police officers. After 1957, both of these groups were represented by the Esquimalt Police Union, thus strengthening dual capacity. There has never been a separate fire union in Esquimalt.

1963 Purchase of new pumper truck

Esquimalt took delivery of a 1963 Pierre-Thibault 625 GPM triple combination pumper.

1964 First Fire Sergeant appointed

Jim Owens, one of the original three firemen who were reassigned as Special Constables in 1954, was appointed as the first Fire Sergeant for the Esquimalt police/fire department.

1966 Provincial Fire Marshall commissioned to investigate fire protection

In face of opposition to the dual force, Esquimalt Council commissioned a number of reports to determine which form of fire protection and policing would best serve its citizens.

The commission reported that instead of creating a separate fire department, which would be costly, that strengthening the existing force would provide adequate service at a much lower rate.

1966 Fire Mutual Aid Agreement between Esquimalt and DND

In addition to this report, a well-defined agreement signed between Esquimalt and the Department of National Defence regarding fire protection support from the Naval Fire Department supported the dual capacity recommendation.

1967 Additional eight men hired

As a result of the Commissions recommendations to strengthen the existing force, eight more men were hired which brought the manpower up to thirty police/fire officers.

1976 New Ladder Truck

Esquimalt took delivery of Ladder 102, a King Seagrave 85-foot Snorkel elevating platform.

1979 Official opening of the new Esquimalt Public Safety Building

1981 New Fire Engine

Esquimalt took delivery of Engine 101 - a King 1050 GPM triple combination pumper.

1986 New Fire Engine

Esquimalt took delivery of Engine 103 - an Anderson 1250 GPM triple combination pumper.

1990 New Command Vehicle

The department took delivery of a 1990 Dodge Caravan for use as a command vehicle.

1992 First female police/fire officer hired

In February, 1992, Cst. Shannon Perkins was hired as the first female police/fire officer.

1998 New Command Car

Esquimalt purchased a used 1996 Chevrolet Tahoe as the new Command 104. This acquisition and that of a Chevrolet Blazer as a detective car introduced four wheel drive vehicles to the department following the blizzard of December 1996.

2003 End of an Era and a New Beginning

On January 1, 2003 Esquimalt Police-Fire Department ended operations. Thirty-three members joined with the Victoria Police Department, which took over responsibilities for policing. Thirteen members stayed behind to help form the new 26-member Esquimalt Fire Rescue.