

# Old engines never say die, they wait.

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In an old field in the barren beauty and wonder of Alaska sat an old fire engine. Its days had long since passed into the void of age. Birds had built nests in its pump cavity. Bullet holes had pierced its engine hood and lights. Someone had once tried to tow it into motion, flattening the dual Firestone hard rubber tires. It sat there for years. Progress drove on but the engine's headlights were no longer working, the discarded wonder of an era long gone. But there was something about the little fire engine — something that wouldn't and couldn't die. And it waited for that something — or someone.

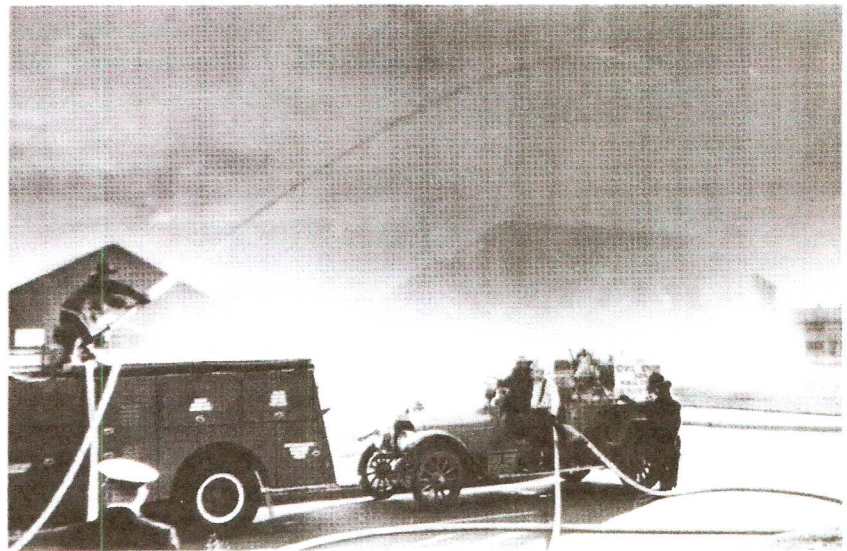
Then one day the fire chief at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, Douglas Courchene and his deputy drove by.

"I first discovered the old fire truck in an open field near Wasilla Lake in 1969. The deputy fire chief and I asked around to find out who owned it," said the chief. So, he and his deputy began an intensive investigation to find the owner of the little truck. They finally found the owner in Palmer, Alaska. From her they learned that the little engine had been delivered spanking new to the Alaskan Railroad in Anchorage. Although its exact arrival date in Alaska was unknown, it was determined that the old-timer was an abandoned 1922 American LaFrance pumper. It had been a possession of her late husband.

Chief Courchene asked if they could use the old truck in Fire Prevention Parades at Elmendorf and Anchorage. He told her that they would fix up the truck and try to make it as good as new. So, with the woman's permission, the members of the 21st Civil Engineering Squadron at Elmendorf AFB transported the truck to the base where it was transformed into the beloved vintage classic it is today.

In remembering the project, Chief Courchene said, "This generous lady let us have the truck and we agreed to restore it at Elmendorf. The Base Civil Engineer, Col. A.M. Dougherty and base commander, Col. Al Johnson supported the project and restoration started with earnest. Elmendorf fire fighters fell in love with the old truck from the beginning and interest grew base-wide as more people offered to help make it run. Two of our people were even certified as the engineer (driver) and assistant.

"Fire fighters refinished the wood spoke wheels and hose bed. Colonel Dougherty donated the large brass bell. The 750 gallon-per-minute rotary gear pump was



also repaired by fire fighters. A master mechanic out of transportation fabricated miscellaneous parts and repaired equipment and the chemical tank," continued the chief. "The general mechanic shop of the 21st CES has as its motto 'Can Do Will Do'. They machined parts for the engine, transmission and chain-driven rear wheels," he said.

It took about six months to get the engine to run. "But when it cranked," recalled the chief, "it was loud and healthy!"

Civil engineering painters painted the body bright red and their sign painters added decorative gold design. The little fire engine shined bright as new — its days

were reborn — death would not take its toll with this little fellow.

Since then the truck has spent seven years in parades, Fire Prevention Weeks, and community events as a display along with today's modern fire fighting vehicles, and in the base open house celebration. Its passengers have included many distinguished military figures and the character team of Smokey the Bear and Sparky the Fire Dog. Future commitments, according to Elmendorf officials, are not firm. The engine is presently housed at Elmendorf's Fire Station One. "But," added officials, "it is always ready to serve as an example for the hundreds of man-hours put into it to show the pride of workers from the 21st CES."

"There's always tradition associated with fire departments everywhere," said the chief, "I'm proud to share a part of it."

When a person becomes so involved with a project, and especially one of this nature, we tend to wonder if a sort of "love" is attached to it. When asked what it was like to leave the little truck next to its grandchildren like the gigantic Crash Fire Fighting and Rescue (CFR) Vehicle used on most Air Force flightlines today, Chief Courchene said, "No question about it, I grew attached to the truck. All the hard work was worthwhile and very rewarding as far as I'm concerned. You know, I tried to buy the truck once (pause) but it wasn't for sale." □