



Fire Watch

Los Angeles Fire Department Newsletter

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Our Mission

“To Preserve life and property, promote public safety, foster economic growth through leadership, management and actions, as an all-risk fire and life safety response provider.”

The Los Angeles Fire Department Newsletter is published monthly by the Planning Section.

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FIRE PROTECTION IN LOS ANGELES HARBOR

During the past century the Los Angeles Fire Department has served the fire protection needs of the Los Angeles Harbor. The historical origins of this tremendous responsibility can be traced all the way back to the annexation of the southern area of the City.



THE FIREFIGHTING TUGS "WARRIOR" AND "FALCON"

On August 28, 1909, the communities of San Pedro and Wilmington were annexed by the City of Los Angeles. With no fire protection for the newly acquired eight miles of waterfront, the City immediately contracted for the services of the "Falcon" and the "Warrior", two privately owned

firefighting tugboats. Although no firemen were assigned regularly to these two vessels, during emergencies firefighters from land-based fire stations would board the tugs and go to work. The two tugs owned by the Wilmington Transportation Company were rented on a monthly basis until their services were discontinued in 1915 and 1917 respectively.



LOS ANGELES' FIRST FIREBOAT "AEOLIAN"

Los Angeles purchased its first fireboat the "Aeolian" in 1915. This 20-foot long fireboat, believed to have been built in Seattle, went into service in 1916. Considered "one of a kind" the "Aeolian" derived its firefighting capability from a 60-gallon bicarbonate of soda and



sulphuric acid chemical supply. When mixed and discharged through the onboard reeled hose



AMOSKEAG AND NOTT STEAM FIRE ENGINES

these chemicals formed an extinguishing agent. The boat also carried a short ladder for boarding lumber schooners and other vessels.

According to the Los Angeles Record, on September 18, 1916, the Finance Committee of the City Council in an effort to not incur the expense of \$125,000 for a new fireboat, recommended to the City Council using barges to assist with harbor fire protection. Thus beginning in 1917, Los Angeles used horse-drawn Amoskeag and Nott steam fire engines. After arriving from their fire station these engines were placed aboard a barge with a supply of coal for energy. This alternative to a new fireboat was not only cheaper but it was believed the fire apparatus could “pump water from the channel almost as effectively as an expensive fire boat.” One of these steam pumpers, an 1881 Amoskeag, is periodically on display at the old Plaza Fire Station in downtown Los Angeles.

Following the purchase of the “*Aeolian*” the Los Angeles fireboat fleet expanded as funding and the needs of the harbor increased and fireboat technology advanced.

Fire Boat No. 1 – “*Archibald J. Ely*” (1919-1969)

On August 1, 1919, Los Angeles commissioned Fire Boat No. 1. Purchased for \$33,000 the 65’ long all-wood vessel had a beam width of 17.7’ and was originally stationed at the foot of First Street in San Pedro. Significant improvements were noted in Fire Boat

No.1. One Hall Scott “Invader” powered this boat for propulsion and two Hall Scott “Invaders,” powered the two pumps, each rated at 1000 gallons per minute. Carried onboard were a generator, breathing apparatus, forcible entry tools, a foam generator and powder, floodlights and a siphon ejector. On May 2, 1927, Boat No.1 was moved to Berth 260 at Fish Harbor. In 1965 Fire Boat No.1 was re-christened the “*Archibald J. Ely*” after Chief Engineer Eley who served the LAFD from

May 1910 to July 1919. After many years of service the venerable fireboat was sold to a private citizen and was refurbished as a houseboat. The boat unfortunately later sank in Puget Sound, Washington.

Fire Boat No. 2 - “*Ralph J. Scott*” (1925-2003)

On May 6, 1924, voters approved a \$400,000 bond issue for construction of a second fireboat, a

fire station to house it, and auxiliary apparatus. Fire Boat No.2 was then designed by boat builder L.E. Caverly and built by the Los Angeles Shipbuilding and Drydock Corporation (Todd Shipyard) in San Pedro for \$214,000. The boat, named for Ralph J. Scott, the Departments’ seventh Chief Engineer (1919) and a fire protection and harbor fireboat visionary, was christened on October 25, 1925 when a bottle of fire-extinguishing foamite was broken across her bow. Fire Boat No.2 was not only a marvel of modern boat technology but also originally included a formidable crew of fourteen! The original crew was comprised of a Captain, Pilot, Mate, two Engineers and nine Firemen who operated the 99-foot boat which weighed in at 152 tons. The “*Ralph J. Scott*” carried breathing apparatus, forcible entry tools, heavy stream appliances, flood lights, smoke ejector equipment, siphon ejectors, drag

and grappling hooks and nozzle tips up to 6” for the largest deck turret. The boat was

equipped with 24 hose outlets and 5 large deck guns. “Big Bertha,” mounted on the wheelhouse, could alone deliver a whopping 10,200 gallons-per-minute. Additionally, the tower turret believed to be the first, or possibly one of the first, fireboat towers in the nation could rise to a height of 42’ above the water. Fire Boat No. 2 was originally powered by seven 350-horsepower Winton gasoline engines. Three of these engines



FIRE BOAT 1



drove the center, starboard and port propellers for a top rated speed of 17 knots (the fastest fireboat afloat at



that time). Fire Boat No. 2 was one of the first large fireboats powered by gasoline. Carrying 2156 gallons of fuel, the fireboat featured a safety system that completely changed the air in the engine room every five minutes as a precaution against leaking gasoline vapors. To further safeguard against below deck fires a bank of eighteen 50lb carbon dioxide extinguishing agent cylinders were located forward of the water tower. In 1945 the vessel was re-powered with Hall Scott gasoline engines. Beginning in 1975 the gasoline engines were replaced with diesels, and by 1978 two 700-horsepower V-12 Cummins, three 380-horsepower Cummins and two 525-horsepower Detroit's powered the fireboat. These advances allowed Fire Boat No. 2 to ultimately deliver 18,655 gallons per minute at 150 psi pump pressure. Fire Boat No. 2 is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was designated a National Historic Landmark on June 30, 1989, a true testament to her 78-year career.

Fire Boat No. 3 (1928-1967)

Fire Boat No. 3 was built by the Fellows and Stewart Shipyard at Wilmington. The boat was built as an auxiliary to Fire Boat No. 2 and was moored alongside Boat 2's quarters. Launched on March 15, 1928 the \$10,000 boat was made of all wood construction, was gasoline powered and 38' 4" in length. Fire Boat No. 3 carried a foamite generator and

eight cans of foamite powder. Additional equipment included MSA hose mask, grappling and drag hooks, a 10' roof ladder and 28 life jackets. One of the most significant and historical fireboat rescues occurred on Fire Boat No. 3 on October 21, 1944. Fireman Joseph V. "Rocky" Roquemore single-handedly rescued 17 sailors and workers who had jumped or were thrown into the



water when explosions and fires erupted from Navy landing craft and a wooden dock. Fire Boat

No. 3 was decommissioned on July 28, 1967 and sold.

Fire Boat No. 4 - "Bethel F. Gifford" (1962-present)

Los Angeles purchased Fire Boat No. 4 as a part of a master plan for long-range port protection. Commissioned in 1962 the 76' long boat was purchased for \$639,000 and was built at the Albina Engine and Machinery Works in Portland, Oregon. In active service Fire Boat No. 4 is rated at 9000 gallons per minute at 150 psi and carries 550 gallons of foam solution for petrochemical fires. Its super maneuverability features include the capability of moving side-to-



side and back-and-forth by means of jet stream nozzles. The boat was named the "Bethel F. Gifford" in honor of the late LAFD Battalion Chief whose research and efforts were primarily responsible for this fireboats innovations.

AN ERA ENDS AND A NEW ONE BEGINS

On April 12, 2003, the Los Angeles Fire Department and the Harbor Department held a dedication ceremony for a new fleet of fireboats and marked the retirement of modern fireboats 1, 3 and 5, and Fire Boat No. 2, the "Ralph J. Scott". The event was held in the Port of Los Angeles at Berths 87 and 88. The real significance of this event is that it was the first time such a large number of fireboats have been



dedicated at one time and marked the farewell of the pride of the fleet the **"Ralph J. Scott"**. Fire Boat No. 2 had served the harbor virtually uninterrupted for 78 years! Her

longevity is a testament to her construction and the dedication of the various crews and mechanics that maintained her over the years. Whether plowing through a wall of fire during the 1947 Markay tank ship fire or

supplying thousands of gallons of water during emergency incidents at the harbor the **"Ralph J. Scott"** steadfastly served the port in times of need. Happier times provided the fireboat with opportunities to provide water displays for welcoming visiting vessels. Also retired were modern fireboats 1, 3, and 5 built in 1967. These boats each had a length of 34 feet and a pumping capacity of only 750 gallons per minute. The dedication and retirement ceremony culminated a nine-year joint effort by the two City departments to upgrade fire and rescue protection in the Port of Los Angeles.

The four new fireboats purchased by the Port of Los Angeles at a total cost of \$11.6 million will be housed at strategic response locations around the Port of Los Angeles. The crown jewel of the four state of the art vessels is new Fire Boat No. 2. Fire Boat No. 2 was designed by Robert Allan Ltd. in Vancouver, B.C. and built by Nichols Brothers Boat Builders of Freeland, Washington. The vessel is 105 in length and was launched on January 17, 2003 and ultimately arrived in the Port of Los Angeles on March 21, 2003. The vessel can pump



38, 000 gallons per minute and has a very unique propulsion system for a fireboat, allowing it to maneuver in ways that have previously been unheard of. Additionally, new Fire Boat No. 2 has a dedicated area for patient treatment in the event of victim rescue or an at sea medical emergency.

New fireboats 1, 3, and 5 are 40 feet in length and made of all aluminum. They are powered by twin Catapillar 3126B engines that drive 24" propellers and can reach a top speed of 29 knots fully loaded. To optimize vessel control and firefighting capabilities the boats utilize a Cummins dedicated fire

pump engine. A Stang monitor provides 1000 gallons per minute. The three vessels are also equipped with the latest technological advances in propulsion and navigation and also serve as the dive platform for the



LAFD's scuba divers who perform firefighting tasks and water rescues around the port. These rapid response vessels will work alongside the Departments larger craft, fireboats 2 and 4.

Today, Department fireboats and crews assigned to the Port of Los Angeles continue to serve an ever expanding number of harbor needs. Present day responsibilities include missions involving firefighting and rescue, patrol and inspection, emergency medical service and homeland security patrol.

For more information on the proud history of Department fireboats go to www.lafire.com.

***Special thanks to **Paul Ditzel's** book **"Fireboats"** for the background, history and photographs of the LAFD fireboats and to **Captain II Larry Schneider Jr.**, for the historical information from his website www.lafire.com. Captain Schneider is currently assigned to Fire Station 50C, the Glassel Park/Atwater Village area of the City.