

**THESE ARE QUOTES FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH TWO
FORMER LVVFD CHIEFS AND ONE FORMER MAYOR
JUNE 20, 2005**

In attendance:

Former LVVFD Fire Chief, Kip Workman
Former LVVFD Fire Chief, Paul E. Mattke, Jr.
Former Mayor of the City of La Vernia and LVVFD member,
Ewald “Junior” Koepp.

How did you pay for trucks?

Paul E. Mattke, Jr., “We borrowed the money from my mother to buy the ‘64 truck. Then, we held a lot of sausage suppers to pay her back. That was in the 60s.”

How did you get your training?

(Laughter) from all, “We trained ourselves.”

How were you notified of fire emergencies?

Kip Workman: “One whistle for meeting night, three long whistles for an out of town fire. “

Men: “A whistle was blown at noon. Floresville still does that.”

Junior Koepp: “Many of the firefighters worked at Koepp Chevrolet, so we got the calls for fires. It was only a four digit phone number back then.”

Kip Workman: “The phone book said, ‘For fire, call Koepp Chevrolet.’”

What were some of the procedures when you fought fires back then?

Paul E. Mattke, Jr.: “Back than, we didn’t have procedures.”

Where did the water come from to fight fires?

Kip Workman: “We didn’t have hydrants until 1967 or 1968.”

Note: After this interview, we learned that water came from the Koepp family’s private cistern which ran to the only fire hydrant in town, then located where the LV News office is now.

Where did the trucks come from?

Kip Workman: “One of them used to be an Air Force crash truck.”

Paul E. Mattke, Jr.: “Watco [located in La Vernia] built the tank for us.”

Paul E. Mattke, Jr.: “The Texas Forest Service gave us one of the trucks. A 1950 Ford. I went to Little Rock, Arkansas and picked up two of them. I drove one and brought the other behind. It took me two days. They also gave us a slide arm unit. It was a pump and tank. They called it a skid unit. You know it skidded and bolted.”

Kip Workman: “That truck would only run 45 mph, wide open.”

Kip Workman: “The 1980 4X4 one ton was bought brand new at Koepp Chevrolet.”

Paul E. Mattke, Jr.: “The GMC cost us \$107,000.00”

How much water did the trucks hold?

Paul E. Mattke, Jr.: “The ’64 held 1000 gallons.

Kip Workman: “One of the trucks held 850 gallons, another held 250.”

How many years were you Chief?

Paul E. Mattke, Jr.: “Thirty years.”

Kip Workman: “About 15 years.”

What are the temperatures at fires?

Men: “An average of 1200 degrees; sometimes more.”

How often did you get called?

Paul E. Mattke, Jr.: “Sometime eight times a day.”

How much did you get paid?

All: “No pay.”

Did you ever have to rescue people?

Kip Workman: “We did in the 1998 flood.”

Have there been many injured firefighters in La Vernia?

Kip Workman: “Sprained wrists, hyper extended knees, inhaled smoke...nothing major that I know of.”

Note: There has never been a recorded fatality of a LVVFD firefighter injured while fighting a fire.

Where was the equipment kept?

Kip Workman: “This building here [red brick building on Hwy 87 & FM 775] was built in about ’56 or ’57.

Junior Koepp: “Prior to that, the truck was kept in a shed at our shop [Koepp Chevrolet; when it was] on Chihuahua Street.”

When was the LVVFD formed?

Kip Workman: “About six years before La Vernia was chartered in 1966. Three people were necessary to obtain a charter. It was Billy Koepp, a Mr. Leisner and someone else.”

Who built this building?

Junior Koepp: “Members of the fire department.”

Kip Workman: “Pete Pierdolla told me he and Fred Nicholson would go after work in an old rickety truck to the McQueeney brick factory and buy seconds [bricks]. They paid 10 or 15 cents a block and carried as many as they could in

the truck. They dug footings four feet deep and held Alfred "Snake" Witte upside down by his ankles to dig out the bottom of the fitting holes.

Junior Koepp: "Nicholson was a bricklayer, along with another volunteer, Leroy McIntyre."

Why were the buckets round on the bottom?

Men: "So you wouldn't put 'em down; to keep the bucket brigade going."

What fires are especially memorable to you?

Kip Workman: "Not too long ago, down by Gary Shank's place, a fire burned several days. Robbie was on the hose, Donnie, him and Phil Dixon were on a two and half inch hose on that '64 pumper. They were makin' no progress and Paulie started winding that truck up and both them boys were big as me and their feet were coming off the ground this high. [indicates two feet]. We fought it and fought it and hauled water and hauled water. Sam Strunk showed up and said, 'Y'all want that fire put out?' and all of us on the end of the hose said, 'yeah, yeah.' And he said, 'We're gonna put this sonofa--- out.' He brought the bulldozer and covered that sucker up and I mean roofing shingles and all. It was hilarious."

"Another time, a trailer was burning and the awning was on fire, too. Paulie kept telling us guys 'Don't get under there, don't get under there,' and one guy just kept going up there and sticking that hose in the window and finally that carport came down and just flattened down to the ground and knocked him on his neck. Gave him a pretty good gooseknot."

Paul E. Mattke, Jr. "That wasn't too long ago."

Kip Workman: "For me it was. I can't go back as far as these guys [indicating Paulie and Junior]."

What other stories can you tell?

Kip Workman: "I have a story Bill Wiseman told me that I can't confirm. It was told to him. Rector Chapel, when they first started meeting, all they had was a stove in the middle of the sanctuary. They were all in their meeting and no one knew a fire had broken out on the roof. A stranger, a passerby, came in and said, 'Hey, the church is on fire,' and they ran to get the pumper cart and they put out the fire. The roof would have caved in on the meeting. When they tried to find the passerby, to thank him, he was gone. No one ever knew who he was or where he came from."

These are excerpts from an interview conducted by Elaine Stephens and Susan Richter, in the La Vernia Heritage Museum on June 20, 2005 at 7PM.