

Supplement Name: Olson, Garret

Garret Olson, Fire Chief

I was at off-duty and at home when the initial dispatch was transmitted. At notification of a working incident, I put on my uniform and started toward the scene. Several blocks away I could see the smoke from the fire. I parked my vehicle on High Street in front of the north-facing parking lot exit at Smart and Final to discourage people from driving toward the scene. I then moved toward the command post location on the opposite side of the fire from my parked location and checked in with the Sub Fire Incident Commander (IC), BC Berryman. The IC was at the rear of his command vehicle making assignments to working divisions under his command, and he had a strong sense of his strategy and accountability for his divisions, including assignment of a Safety Officer, CAL FIRE BC Shalhoob. I left the command post to walk the perimeter of the occupancy.

I encountered Division A Supervisor, Captain Callahan. Callahan consulted with me that his was going to direct Truck 1's operations on the roof to cut a hole(s) in the roof over the seat of the fire with a goal of releasing the heat and smoke on the Higuera side of the business to prevent further lateral spread. I told him to make sure his efforts were coordinated through the IC and to make sure his crews sounded the roof carefully, understood the location and firewalls, and performed their assignment very rapidly before exiting the rooftop. I walked south on Higuera toward Pismo Street and observed the fire from the front of the building. The front of the building was well involved in fire with heavy smoke pouring from the structure from openings on the Higuera Street side as well as from openings I couldn't see from Higuera. While on Side A, I encountered a citizen who yelled at me something about the direction of the fire's spread. I went over to talk with the citizen, who I later learned was Mr. Richard Ferris, and he gestured where the fire was and where the firefighters should be attacking the fire through the A side door. He then said something to the effect that the fire could have been put out with a garden hose if the firefighters weren't so inept. The conversation quickly became unproductive, and I asked Mr. Ferris to step back up on the curb on the opposite side of Higuera from the fire where other citizens were safely congregating out of the street.

I moved to the Pismo Street side, where I encountered crews in Division C, under the command of Division C Supervisor, Captain Marshall. Division C was attempting to cut the fire off from extending to the rear of the building by directing hoselines through openings along the exterior wall to the rear of the retail area of The Sub. Upon inspection, I saw that there was a significant volume of burning debris on the ground of the business's interior floor. This burning material was not only blocking entry but precluded safe interior operations. From the configuration of the burning debris and the volume of fire in the building, I concluded that the fire was consuming overhead combustibles, including whatever system was holding them overhead, and burning debris had dropped from the ceiling height. Plywood paneling in the display windows impeded penetration of fire streams as did what appeared to have been a doorway whose opening was filled in with concrete. These factors limited the access Division C had to the interior of the building. I made sure Division Supervisor Marshall was aware of the location of the electrical service drop directly over his head and continued my 360-degree assessment of the building.

Walking further east on Pismo Street, I observed the windows and entry to what I concluded was a residence. Immediately adjacent to that was a loading dock with

several trailers and a large volume of stored material under and between the trailers. This area was smoky from smoke that appeared to be coming from the Higuera Street side and the roof. At times, the smoke was so thick that the sun was completely blocked out. I continued my walk around, continuing to observe more trailers, lattice-style fencing, and accumulated materials next to and below the trailers, including a trailer on the far east end of the building at Walker Street. I turned and headed down Walker Street where I observed citizens salvaging products from the small artisan wood furniture store to the rear of Quality Fabrics. I walked in the parking area to the rear of Quality Fabrics and observed what appeared to be a firewall between the occupancies on fire and Quality Fabrics. The interior of Quality Fabrics appeared to be clear of smoke.

I continued on Walker to Higuera and returned to the command post where I shared my observations with IC Berryman. We conferred regarding the need to cut off the fire as it moved toward the apartment/warehouse portion of the building. Since I had just walked the building, I offered to direct the crews in Division C and advised that more crews would be needed as well as another Division Supervisor. The IC and I agreed that I would face-to-face with Division Supervisor Marshall to transfer his division to me and he would return to directing the activities of his crew, Engine 3. I checked in with Division Supervisor Marshall and discussed the plan and transfer of the Division.

After assuming Division C, Truck 2 became an available resource to Division C. We moved hoselines on the ground to position Truck 2 as far down Pismo Street from Higuera as possible and put Truck 2's elevated water tower in operations on the fire which had already come through the roof on Side A. Crews in Division C continued to direct hoselines through exterior openings with a focus on containing the fire to its Side A origin.

I then entered the apartment attached to the warehouse area. The apartment had some residual smoke but no detectible heat. I also observed the warehouse and loading dock areas which also had light smoke and no detectible heat. At this point resources were made available to me to form another division of firefighting forces under Deputy Chief Gater. I reentered the apartment and warehouse area with Chief Gater to discuss the objectives for Division D, under his command. The main objective for Division D was to deploy handlines to the interior and prevent the spread of fire from reaching the apartment and warehouse. We noted the large openings in what otherwise would have appeared to be a firewall. Division D crews entered the building with hoselines under Chief Gater's command, and I rejoined the Division C crews battling the fire from the exterior. I constantly monitored the smoke conditions on the outside of the structure, particularly through a window high on the warehouse wall and behind the location of Division D personnel.

With Division D interior, Division C continued to attack the fire on its southern flank through exterior openings and the roof. Ultimately, thick black smoke began to appear behind the position of Division D. Deputy Chief Gater and I conferred over the need to pull the crews out before they were surrounded by fire. By the time Division D exited the building, the fire was above and behind them, threatening to cut off their only unobstructed exit onto Pismo Street. Once out of the building, Division D personnel joined Division C personnel and were comingled on Pismo between Higuera Street and Walker Street, with Truck 7545 located on Walker Street between Pismo Street and Pacific Street.

While Division Supervisor of Division C, I again encountered Mr. Ferris and a

business associate of his. Again, these men alleged the fire could have been put out with a garden hose and crews never went in the building. I explained that crews had gone in but were driven out by smoke, intense heat, and tons of supplies/debris. I shared that I personally had been in the building, but my comments appeared to be dismissed as Mr. Ferris kept yelling at me that the firefighters were inept and refused to fight the fire. I said that I was very sorry for the damage to his business and tried to reassure him that we were doing all we could to stop the fire. Several times Mr. Ferris was yelling at firefighters along Pismo Street, and due to the noise of hoselines and apparatus, all we could hear was somewhat inaudible, but distracting since firefighters didn't know if the yelling was coming from somebody in command, perhaps yelling something critical that they needed to know. Repeated, I observed fire crews looking back toward Mr. Ferris to see what the commotion was behind them. On at least two occasions, SLO PD attempted to move Mr. Ferris.

During operations, I climbed Truck 7545 to inspect roof conditions, including the location of walls that appeared to be effective in holding back the fire.

During the evening, while operations were still on-going, I transitioned Division C personnel to Chief Gater, who oversaw both Division C and D. These Divisions were essentially collocated. At that time, I performed PIO responsibilities for the media.

As the evening became night, the IC and I conferred with PD on a traffic plan, which included keeping the northbound travel lane of Higuera closed as well as the westbound travel lane of Pismo Street closed, both due to collapse hazards from the structure. I also observed crews removing debris from the street with brooms and shovels to prevent further debris from entering the storm drain or causing traffic problems.

At approximately 11:30 pm, we got word that there was an apartment in the basement of the structure and that the apartment dweller was missing per his family. I notified City Manager Lichtig and worked with SLO PD to locate this missing person. The missing person's sister called me that night to inquire about her brother. The following morning at approximately 8:00, the missing basement apartment dwelling appeared on the scene asking if he could move his van. I dialed his sister's phone number and handed him the phone so he could tell her that he is safe and alive.

As the operations began winding down, Chief Gater and I discussed our presence over the night and into the next day. We agreed that the minimum staffing at the fire should be one engine company, one ladder company, and a chief officer. We repositioned Truck 1 to Pismo Street for maximum utility and positioned Engine 5 on Higuera Street. Gater took the night shift, and I relieved him early the next morning. I returned at dawn to find crews applying water to isolated hot spots. I remained the IC until BC Berryman returned to the scene. I stayed for several more hours overseeing media functions, monitoring a gross clean-up of debris on the streets, and the implementation of a traffic plan.