

Portrait of a Fire

# Tape Recorder Signal Starts Series of Events at 'Hell's 50 Acres'

By EDWARD V. McCARTHY

New York - (AP) - At 5:12 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 18, a tape recorder in Manhattan fire alarm headquarters ticked off the automatic signal "3-199-28" from the downtown neighborhood known to firemen as "Hell's 50 Acres."

The electronic message signaled that a warehouse's private alarm system had detected fire at Broadway and Grand st. A dispatcher checked the number off a file card and transmitted a bell signal. Within seconds, Engine Company 3, Ladder Company 20 and a battalion chief radioed back "on the way."

### Lived Up To Dread

In the next eight hours, lower Broadway lived up to all the dread expressed in its nickname of "Hell's 50 Acres."

A force rivaling the strength of an army division was deployed in battle—firemen, police, emergency workers and hospital disaster crews. Half of Manhattan Island went on a war footing. And before the night was over the fearsome bell signal "5-5-5-5" sounded in 270 New York fire stations to report that firemen were dead in action.

This was no civil defense alert or cold war flareup. It was fire, the ancient enemy of every city. As a memorial to those who die fighting fire and a reminder to those whose carelessness can court the disaster of uncontrolled flame, here is the story of Alarm 3-199-28—a conflagration that destroyed or damaged six New York buildings, killed three firemen, and set off a massive investigation of New York's ability to protect itself from its biggest enemy even in the era of the A-bomb.

One of 83 Calls  
The 5:12 p.m. signal was one of 83 calls received Nov. 18 at the Manhattan alarm headquarters in the middle of Central Park. Flashing lights, a buzzer and the recorded tape took down the electronic message triggered when heat melted a detector head in the basement of 463 Broadway, a five-story masonry leftover of the last century.

"Hell's 50 Acres" a dingy lower West Side hive of crowded "loft buildings" high-ceilinged commercial structures dating back to the late 1800s. Small firms jam into them and fire hazards are numerous.

Six firemen died in February, 1958, in a loft building fire a block away. The next month, 24 workers lost their lives in a similar blaze nearby.

Answering the automatic alarm from 463 Broadway, a dispatcher sent out the bell signal which started Engine 31 and Ladder Truck 20 and Battalion Chief Harold Anderson on a routine "run."

Four minutes later, Anderson radioed back from his car—"send out Box 199." The fire was too much for "one and one," Fire Department slang for one pumper and one ladder truck. This brought two more engine companies, another ladder truck and Squad Unit 8. The latter is a manpower unit which travels without pump or ladder equipment.

Six minutes after the first alarm, a diversion sent chief dispatcher Thomas Redmond into full action, Box 98 at Frankfurt and Gold st. 15 blocks away in "Hell's 50 Acres," rang out the news of another fire.

Redmond sent two engine companies, two ladder trucks and another squad to that location and began to worry. A veteran of 39 years as a dispatcher, Redmond knew this neighborhood; he didn't like the idea of two boxes "hitting in" so close together.

Fears Justified  
His fears soon were justified. At 5:23 p.m., Battalion Chief William T. Heiden radioed and asked for a full first alarm assignment at Box 98. Five minutes later, Chief Heiden reported he was using "all hands" on a fire sweeping up an airshaft in a five story warehouse building.

At 5:29 the radio barked, "by order of Chief Heiden, transmit a second alarm for Box 98 . . ." for the Gold st. fire.

Now the pace quickened. At 5:30 p.m. came the radio message, "by order of Chief Anderson, transmit a 2nd alarm for Box 199 . . ." for the fire at 463 Broadway.

The companies Anderson needed on Broadway were already on the way to Gold st. The dispatcher made a snap decision. He sent out a third alarm, bringing in companies from Midtown Manhattan and from Brooklyn, across the East River.

Fire Commissioner Edward F. Cavanagh Jr., cruising on the nearby East River Drive, heard this radio by-play. He, too, knew the neighborhood and the dangerous potential.



**BLAZE CLAIMS FIREMEN**—Firemen are shown in action during a blaze in a loft building in New York City. Three firemen were killed in the fire in an area known as "Hell's 50 Acres." (UPI Telephoto)

Cavanagh ordered his driver to head for Box 199.

At Box 199, things were happening fast, too fast.

When Engine 31 arrived first at the scene, Lt. John A. McDermott and fireman Francis J. Sammon, John C. Cosner, Robert Barnickie and Royal Fox plunged into the smoke-filled cellar of a five-story textile building. They wore masks, carried a walkie-talkie and dragged a hose line with them.

As the second alarm companies were arriving, Barnickie and Fox emerged, gasping. They were burned on the face and hands. They stammered out that they could find no fire, but when they played a hose on the walls of the cellar, the water turned to steam.

Conditions were so bad, they said, all five decided to pull out. The two were rushed off to Bellevue hospital.

They thought the other three men were right behind them. They weren't.

The flames, almost unchecked, raced through all five floors of the structure and beams turned to charcoal and collapsed. Tremendous globes of fire burst through the roof and lit up the sky for miles around.

By now chief of department George David was at the scene. He had heard about the trapped men.



## Small Worlds Around Us

By Lynn M. Watkins

That 'Wild Canary' is Wild And Yellow—But No Canary

The vivacious little yellow bird that so gleefully flits through the orchard, across the lawn or in the flowering shrubs of the city park and which we so often call the "wild canary" is truly wild and surely yellow in color. But it is certainly not a canary.

Even a casual observation of this cheerful little warbler will reveal many striking differences between it and those members of birddom known as the canaries.

The genuine canary has a stout, heavy bill suitable for the crushing of seeds, while the yellow warbler, wrongly called "canary," has a sharp, slender, rather delicate bill suited to the capture and eating of insects.

Of all the warbler family, and it is an exceedingly large one, the yellow warbler is the most striking. As it darts in and out of the low bushes or

the orchard trees, it resembles a ray of golden sunshine. Of the over 150 species of warbler in North America, this one, sometimes called the summer yellow-bird or golden warbler, is the most beautiful and probably the commonest.

Wintering in South or Central America, the yellow warbler appears in northern U. S. about the first of May, and it brings to a winter-weary populace the promise that spring has come and summer cannot be far behind.

Shortly after their arrival from their winter-sojourn, Mr. and Mrs. Warbler will begin nesting preparations. The nest may be in a hedge or any low bush or preferably in the flexible branches of a willow tree if one is available. The nest is a masterpiece of perfection, securely tied to the junction of two limbs or laced to a clump of flimsy willow leaves.

This warbler takes considerable pride in the place

where its eggs and young are to be placed. Torn strips of bark are skillfully and carefully interwoven and the lining is often the down from the cattail. If this material is not available, feathers, soft grasses or pieces of thread or spider web will offer a soft, cozy bed for the baby warblers.

Perhaps because the nest is so attractive, it is often used by the lazy cowbird, who may sneak in while the rightful owner is away and lay a single egg in the nest. It may even happen that the cowbird baby will grow so strong and so bold as to push the baby warblers from their own home.

The yellow warbler's eggs are usually four in number, greenish-white in color and splashed around the larger end with brown blotches.

While the rather dull colored little female yellow-bird is incubating her eggs, the brightly colored male emits his cheery "che-wee, che-wee." For some peculiar and little understood reason the male yellow warbler prefers to sing only in the forenoon. His is a pleasant voice, and of course his coat is as yellow as butter, marked delicately with chestnut streaks along the sides. He is all this and more, but he is no canary.

(Released by The Register and Tribune Syndicate, 1960)

Grim, sweat-soaked and weary, Cavanagh and David directed a squad of 10 men at the corner of Broadway and Grand.

With a five-story wall threatening to let go over their heads at any minute, the men used crowbars and sledge hammers to pound their way through sidewalk gratings to make an opening into the cellar where the three firemen were trapped.

The stairways had long since been burned away. Blazing debris continued to plunge down from above. To try and go in that way was certain suicide.

**Descended Ladder**  
Finally, the hole was smashed through into the cellar. Two men with masks and searchlights descended a ladder which had been shoved down into the hole. They got as far as the bot-

tom step, ten had to scamper back. In voices choked with emotion, they made the terrible report to their superiors. They were met by a wall of fire. There was no hope for the missing men.

Shortly after 9 p.m., the flames had resided enough for rescue teams to make another try into the cellar and subcellar, which ran down to a total of 40 feet below street level.

The rescuers plodded through a scene straight out of hell. One after another, they finally came across the bodies of the three trapped men.

Chief O'Brien said the others knew all hope was gone. But with each of the bodies of their fallen comrades, they tried artificial respiration and oxygen. There was no response.

Firemen at the street level strained at ropes and at 9:38

p.m. pulled the bodies from the cauldron where they met death. Some 200 firemen gathered solemnly around the hole in the sidewalk.

In the glare of floodlights, with flames still leaping on all floors of the warehouse, hot water cascading down around them, they bared their heads while four department chaplains simultaneously administered last rites to the victims.

**SAFEWAY**

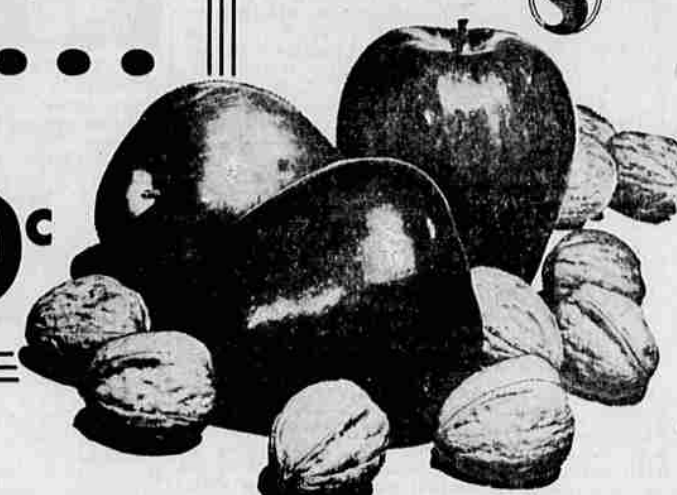
# Apples...

Northwest "Rome Beauty"

First-of-the-week special LOW price on these fancy grade, all-purpose apples. Medium tart, colorful . . . the finest apple ever for baking, grand for pies and sauce; a favorite for TV nibbling and lunch boxes. Get a big bagful or a box, today!

## 10¢

lb. 10¢



- Texas Pinks** Medium size grapefruit. **10 for 88¢**
- Juice Oranges** Florida thin-skinned. **lb. 15¢**
- Tokay Grapes** Colorful and so tasty. **2 lbs. 25¢**
- Winesap Apples** Extra fancy. **4-lb. bag 59¢**
- Fresh Peanuts** In shell. **lb. 39¢**
- Crisp Carrots** Topped and washed. **lb. 10¢**
- Red Potatoes** U.S. No. 1. **10 lbs. 59¢**
- Brussels Sprouts** Small, firm. **10-oz. pkg. 29¢**

- Wesson Oil** Reg. 65c. Pure vegetable oil. Limit, please. **qt. 49¢**
- Salad Oil** Finest NU MADE. Why pay more? Limit, please. **qt. 43¢**
- Bleach White Magic** Why pay more? 1/2 gallon 29c. **Gal. 49¢**
- Tide Detergent** 49 1/2-oz. or 51-oz. giant size **75¢**
- Purex or Clorox Bleach** 1/2 Gal. **33¢**
- Nu Made Dressing** Finest salad dressing. Limit, please. **43¢**
- Jell-Well Gelatins** LOW price . . . like getting one package FREE over other brands. **4 3-oz. pkgs. 29¢**

Fresh from Safeway's NEW Bakery . . .

- Skylark WHITE SANDWICH BREAD** Large loaf **33¢**
- Mrs. Wright's Bread** Improved white, wheat loaf **31c**
- French Rolls** NEW Skylark, brown pkg. 'n serve. So-o convenient of 6 **33c**

For Extra Savings, We Give Valuable **Gold Bond Stamps**

- Soft-weve Tissue** Wh. colored 2 roll pkg. **29c**
- Brocade Facial Soap** Assorted colors 10 Bar pkg. **49c**
- Mother's Oats** with FREE Chinaware 42 oz. pkg. **59c**
- Soda Crackers** Busy Baker plain or salted lb. . . . 25c **49c**
- Heinz Chili Sauce** Extra flavor 12 oz. bottle **39c**
- Corn Meal** Kitchen Craft yellow 5 lb. bag **45c**
- Lucerne Two-Ten** Fortified skim milk 4 Half gals. **1.64**
- Sour Cream** Finest Lucerne pint **55c** Half pint **29c**
- Fancy Tuna** Bumble Bee No. 1/2 can **31c**
- Twinkle Copper Cleaner** 4 3/4 oz. can **49c**

**ZIPPY SWEET PICKLES** **39¢**  
Whole style, 16 oz.; Fresh Kosher Dills, 24-oz.; Sweet Gerkins 12-oz. Jar

Treat your Family to this favorite . . .

# BABY BEEF LIVER

Skinned and sliced the thickness you like it. **39¢**

- SLICED BACON** Del Monte "Sweetheart" 1-lb. pkg. **49¢ lb. 39¢**
- Pork Spare Ribs** Extra-meaty. 3 lbs. & smaller. **lb. 49¢**
- Beef Round Steak** or Swiss Steak. "USDA Choice" lb. **98¢**
- Lamb Loin Chops** Center cut, small loin. **lb. 89¢**
- Lamb Rib Chops** Flavorful, "USDA Choice" **lb. 69¢**
- Breaded Fish Sticks** Capt. Choice Frozen 14-oz. pkg. **59¢**

Prices in this advertisement are effective Monday, through Wednesday, November 30, at Safeway in Medford. We reserve the right to limit.

**SAFEWAY**

- Modess Sanitary Napkins** 2 pkgs. of 12 **89¢**
- Fluffy 'All' Detergent** 3-lb. pkg. **89¢**
- Blue Bell Potato Chips** Triple Pack **69¢**
- Hershey's Cocoa Instant Mixing** 2-lb. 6-oz. pkg. **95¢**
- Lipton's Soup** Beef Noodle, Onion Green Pea **pkg. 35¢**

Again this year . . .

# FREE!

Simply Stop in at Our Office for

## CURRIER & IVES 1961 CALENDARS

With 12 beautiful 8 1/2"x13 1/2" Currier & Ives prints in color suitable for framing.

*Don Stathos, insuror*

THE MALL  
1005 E. Main  
Medford

PROFESSIONAL INSURANCE PROTECTION

Phone 5P 3-6658

YOUR Independent AGENT