



Skirmishes Highlight Hydrant Problem

New York — There sat the green-and-aluminum fire hydrant, and there sat a 1959 black Ford with "DPL" on its license plate.

The lines were drawn for a major engagement in the unending conflict between the city of New York and the UN diplomats who flaunt their immunity to New York's laws.

PUSHED FROM HYDRANT

A car bearing DPL (diplomatic) license plates is pushed away from a fire hydrant by fireman Andrew Callahan in the vicinity of the United Nations headquarters in this picture taken recently. By declaring war on diplomats who park near fire hydrants, Fire Commissioner Edward Thompson drew new battle lines in the unending conflict between the city of New York and UN diplomats who flaunt their immunity to its laws. (UPI)

Police commissioner after surrendered to the ancient doctrine of diplomatic immunity, which once protected an envoy's horse as well as its master and now seemed to extend to speed limits and parking laws.

Up stepped a new contender last week, Fire Commissioner Edward Thompson, 48, a former rank-and-file smoke-eater with a passion about fire-plugs.

Symbol of Interference

To him, hydrants had become a symbol of foreign interference with domestic security. They were habitual parking places for the drivers of New York's 850 diplomatically immune vehicles.

Thompson, who as an ex-judge knew the futility of ordinary measures (summons) against diplomats, issued a declaration of war.

"Parked cars that block fire hydrants are a menace to life and property. Whether owned by just average New Yorkers — or even diplomats — they will be towed away by the fire department."

Within a week, the fire department had skirmished with four nations, come under protest from the UN Secretariat and gotten involved with the U. S. State Department.

Skirmishes Noted

Skirmish No. 1 — N.Y.F.D. versus Nationalist China. Newsmen report black Ford, DPL 613, parked in hydrant zone by east side skyscraper, two blocks from UN. Thompson, just back from near-

aster (206 patients escape three-alarm fire at Brooklyn's St. Mary's hospital), orders three-alarm flap. Three fire chiefs clang up, also engine Co. 21. Battalion Chief John De Pietri releases brake, moves car. Cmdr. J. C. Wang, Chinese military delegate to UN, apologizes profusely.

Skirmish No. 2 — N.Y.F.D. versus Haiti. Ambassador Carlet Auguste, illegally parked around the corner from Wang, rejects protest from deputy chief Bernard Dulberger and deputy assistant chief Charles Strosser, almost brushes Strosser with ambassadorial Bulck as he drives off, protests to UN; UN protests to mayor.

Skirmish No. 3 — N.Y.F.D. versus Somalia. Battalion Chief De Pietri and assistant chief of department Richard Denahan ordered into action.

Ambassador Hassan Nur Elmi's chauffeur refuses to move Cadillac; then moves 13 feet (the law says 15); finally drives off.

Skirmish No. 4 — N.Y.F.D. versus Japan. Second Secretary Wataru Hiraizumi's maroon Buick parked by hydrant in front of Grand Central hospital (one block from UN). Deputy Chief Dulberger takes direct action: get in car, push it down block.

Speaks Up for Parkers

Within 48 hours, the United Nations was speaking up for its hydrant-parkers. C. V. Narasimham, Undersecretary for political affairs, protested to deputy mayor Edward F. Cavanagh Jr. That was probably a mistake; Cavanagh had been fire commissioner until seven months ago.

The state department, meanwhile, took a position in favor of both diplomats and fire-plugs.

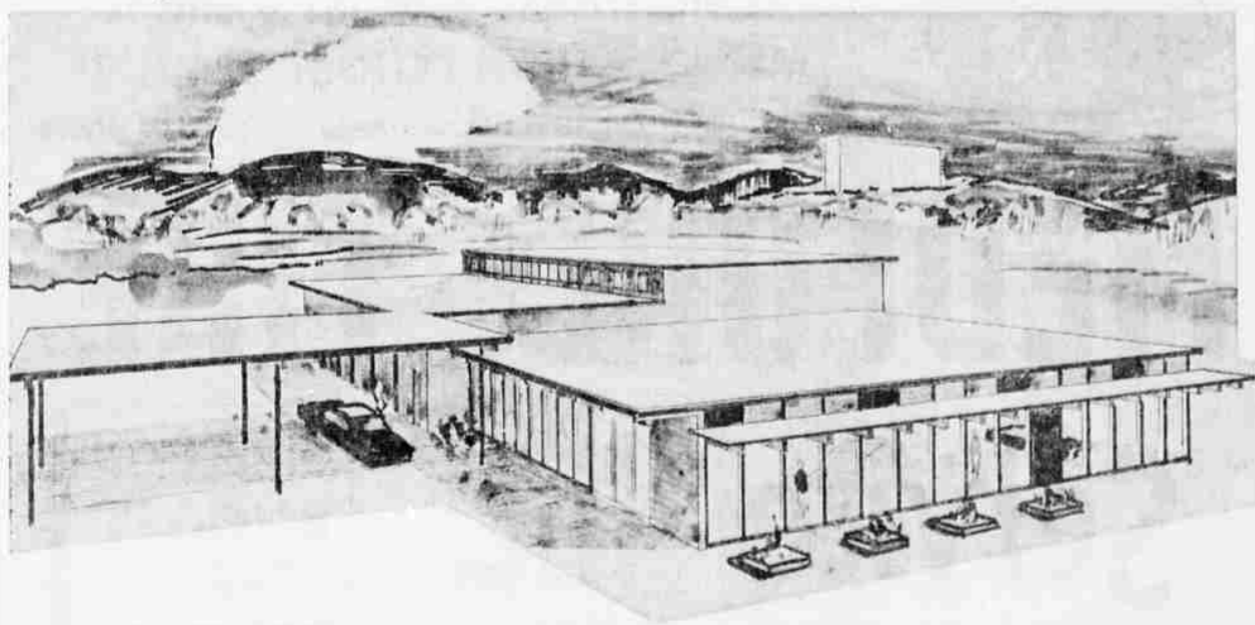
"A number of diplomats having DPL plates have made it known to the mission that they are doing their best to live up to the regulations even though they have diplomatic immunity," a spokesman for the American UN delegation said.



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