

Ray Alfred

00:00:03 **Amy Mauro**

My name is Amy Mauro. I'm Executive Director of the DC Fire & EMS Foundation. It's September 20th at 1:30 p.m. I'm here on Zoom. I'm in Washington, DC. I'm with [Retired] Chief Ray Alfred. Chief, if you could introduce yourself and say where you're talking from.

00:00:28 **Ray Alfred**

Ray Alfred and I'm currently in Jacksonville, Florida.

00:00:37 **Amy Mauro**

And you retired as chief of the department in what year?

00:00:42 **Ray Alfred**

I thought you'd ask me that.

00:00:45 **Amy Mauro**

I know it somewhere.

00:00:50 **Ray Alfred**

I retired in in [1993].

00:00:57 **Amy Mauro**

Well, let's start from the beginning, then. Tell us where you were born and raised.

00:01:02 **Ray Alfred**

I was born and raised in a little French Creole town in Louisiana called Ville Platte, Louisiana. Central part of the state. It's where all of the French Creole folks lived. And went to school there. Went to high school there. Went to college at first at Southern University in Baton Rouge. And then into the military with the 101st Airborne. I was jumping out of airplanes, because my brother jumped out of airplanes. And so I wanted to be like him.

00:01:46 **Amy Mauro**

What decade was that?

00:01:49 **Ray Alfred**

That was in 1968. 68 to ... I'm sorry. 58 to 61. And so we did a lot of jumps together and a lot of exercises together. And the airborne was a part of the strike outfit in the event that anything happened anywhere in the world. We loaded up in the airplane and headed out to that direction where, regardless of where it was. We did a lot of demonstration jumps. West

point and a number of other places.

00:02:35 **Amy Mauro**

What kind of incidents did do you remember that you went to? Real ones.

00:02:45 **Ray Alfred**

I guess the the Lebanon crisis was something that happened around my time. Obviously, the riots. By then I was in the service itself. But I remember the 82nd Airborne coming into Washington during the riots. And they had no place to put them. So they lodged them at Gallaudet College on Florida Avenue. And dispatched them to wherever they thought they needed them. A lot of them were stationed around the Capitol itself. In the event that folks decided they wanted to take over the US Capitol and the office buildings.

00:03:51 **Amy Mauro**

You said you were in the service during the riots. Where were you stationed?

00:03:56 **Ray Alfred**

During the riots? I was not out during the riots. I was in Washington. I was in the fire service.

00:04:01 **Amy Mauro**

You were. Okay, so let's not skip ahead. So then from Airborne, where did you go?

00:04:08 **Ray Alfred**

Well, Airborne, I went to Truck 17.

00:04:12 **Amy Mauro**

Oh, so you went to the fire department? Why did you decide to - Well, first of all, how did you end up in Washington, DC? And then tell us about the decision to join the department.

00:04:22 **Ray Alfred**

Well, I actually didn't. I went into the service until I would be called by D.C. Fire. I got out of the service and went back to Louisiana and finally was called in 63 to come and join the department.

00:04:50 **Amy Mauro**

And why did you choose? And why fire?

00:04:55 **Ray Alfred**

Well, because I was stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and I walked into the post office one day and saw a sign says, "Come be a firefighter in the Nation's Capital." And so I

applied. I scored and passed everything. And but I still had to wait. And unfortunately, they were limiting the number of African Americans they were allowing into the fire service. There was never more than one African American per shift per company. And eventually, obviously, the numbers increased, but initially it was one African American per shift per company. And so we existed that way until past 68, when we started the fight to sort of equalize the department. The number of African Americans in the department. Had no women at the time, just men. There was never more than one African American per shift per company. And so we had to we had to get along with that for a while.

00:06:21 **Amy Mauro**

And so you joined in 1963. You got the call.

00:06:25 **Ray Alfred**

I got the call. I went to Truck 17, in Northeast D.C., 49th and Central Avenue. And that's where I spent the first five years, I guess, of my time in the department before I finally started to move up the rank.

00:06:47 **Amy Mauro**

And what were your first couple of years like?

00:06:52 **Ray Alfred**

They were tough. A lot of discrimination. We were never included in on the idea of being a technician driving the apparatus. And when we finally, I mean, we finally did, we really had to fight. We had to challenge the department to let African Americans become technicians. And when we finally did, it was okay. But still had a lot of discrimination.

00:07:35 **Amy Mauro**

In daily life, as a new African American firefighter, the only one on the shift. How did you see that discrimination on a daily basis?

00:07:45 **Ray Alfred**

Well, for instance, every fire station, almost, cooked their meals for the firefighters. Everybody ate together except African Americans. We were never included. We always had to bring our meal because we were not included in on the meal. And in most of the stations, some of the stations were inclusive in their meal, their cooking and sharing. But for the most part, a number of stations were not. And so we simply had to bring our meal, find some way to eat while we were on duty.

00:08:37 **Amy Mauro**

Unfortunate. And so, Okay, so I guess [after] five years, did you take the sergeant's exam?

00:08:45 **Ray Alfred**

I took the sergeant's exam. I passed it and they only promoted so many sergeants from the list. I was on that list, and it was almost as if folks that were ready to retire. Well, let me back up a little bit, because I started probably in 1968, to fight against discrimination of African Americans. As a matter of fact, I was the first President of the Progressive Firefighters Association, which put a mark on me. Every place I went, I was challenged, and I got used to that, very hateful stuff, but got used to it. Got past it. It didn't bother me because I was in the military, and I had run into some of it in the military. And so I got used to it. But it was important that we get rid of discrimination in the department. And so the fight, the fight continued. There was an effort at one point by the president of the union, Local 36, to get me transferred to to his station. And when that happened, I got a call from the media, channel four probably, and asked me, did I know that I was being transferred from my station to the station where the local president was ... the captain? And I didn't. And so I went in to ask my chief about it. Why didn't he tell me that he was recommending that I be transferred? And we had an interesting discussion. So it was my chief and the captain of my Truck 17. The two of them had decided that they were going to transfer me to the station where the local president was.

00:10:59 **Amy Mauro**

Which one was that? Do you remember? It's okay.

00:11:03 **Ray Alfred**

I don't know, in the 60s.

00:11:06 **Amy Mauro**

What's the idea behind that? I mean, did he want to keep an eye?

00:11:11 **Ray Alfred**

Keep an eye on me. Discipline me. Make sure that I got disciplined for anything that I did, any activity involving - because I was president of the Progressive Firefighters Association. So anything I might have been involved in, he would have been there. He would have been my captain. He would have disciplined me. And so when that happened, when the news happened that I was being transferred, I held a press conference to talk about it. I was invited to fire department headquarters, which was on McMillan Drive on Howard University's campus. And the chief, my chief and my captain were summoned to appear before the Assistant Fire Chief. And we had an interesting discussion. They were determined to discipline me, and I was determined to file charges against them. And I let them know it that, in fact, had I think it was like 3 or 4 lawyers that were interested in taking my case. And so the Assistant Chief asked me if I would just dismiss whatever charges I was going to do. And I said, "Well, that depends on what the captain and the chief is going to do."

00:12:42 **Ray Alfred**

And so - but it put a target on me every place I went. Every station I was detailed to. And then when I got to the station, they tried all kind of things. They'd take my boots and tie them together and do all kind of things with my mask, so that if I jumped off the apparatus and tried to put on my boots, they were all twisted up and my mask was tied to the apparatus, so

I'd get jerked off by it. So a lot of little things that happened to the point where it had gotten so bad that the Progressive Firefighters Association, which is the organization we had formed to address those situations, decided that they would put 25 firefighters on duty every time I was on duty to make sure that I didn't get harmed in any way. And I just said, no, I didn't want it. I didn't think it was necessary. Eventually things settled down a little bit, and we went on about the business.

00:13:54 **Amy Mauro**

Getting back to the decision to form the Progressives. So, I wonder, did you join Local 36 when you joined the department? And what led to obviously, discrimination against African Americans was the main motivator. But tell me more about those conversations at the time and who you worked with and how that worked.

00:14:15 **Ray Alfred**

Well, we were all part of the Local 36. We were members of Local 36. We were dues paying members. But every time we had a meeting that involved the working conditions, they would postpone the meeting until they could get a full body participation by White firefighters, and there weren't enough of us to to control the meeting. In other words, if we voted on motions, we'd be outvoted. And so that didn't exist. So we had to actually find our way in the courts. We had to threaten to go to court. We had to go to court in order to address a lot of the things that was taking place. ...

00:15:18 **Ray Alfred**

It was pretty tough. You know, everything on the job. We had to fight fires. We had to rescue people. We had to do everything. Everything everybody else did. But in addition to that, it was difficult because advancing up the ranks was another issue. We suspected at one point that White firefighters were being given or being shared with the exam itself. And so they always excelled. They were always at the top of the list. And we knew it because we'd seen evidence of the exam being passed around to keep White firefighters. Because they were always at the top of the list, almost scoring a perfect score. And so we knew that they had access to the exam that we didn't have, but we studied hard like everybody else, and eventually we get promoted. But instead of being first, second, third, fourth, fifth on the list, we were like 20 something on the list. And then key White firefighters were given the exam, which put us at a disadvantage. But anyway, we endured. We tried to do the job as best we could, and we were called out like everybody else to to major fires and rescuing people like everybody else.

00:16:58 **Amy Mauro**

Did you ever fear for your safety while you were on the fire ground, given the shenanigans with your equipment and the attitudes?

00:17:09 **Ray Alfred**

No, not really, because I had been in the military ... I was a paratrooper, I was jumping out of airplanes. So nothing bothered me. I was not afraid of anything. And I didn't think that those firefighters, that they meant us harm ... that they were bold enough to do anything, so we

didn't worry about that too much. Well, there were some ugly things. There were some fights in the fire stations ... and some firefighters had it rough. Some firefighters decided that they were going to - and got criticized for it, but they would do things by the number. In other words, if your relief time was 8:00, they would not come in before 8:00 or 4:00 in the evening or 6:00 in the evening. And that angered a lot of the firefighters that wanted to get relieved early. But they knew that. They were being harassed and a lot of things they had to endure. And so for some firefighters that followed them throughout their career, because they had gotten discriminated against so much. And instead of getting relieved at - like most of the firefighters that started at 4:00 in the afternoon, although the relief official time was 6:00, they would get relief at, at 6:00. [Editor's note: the practice may have been for a firefighter to get relief at 4:00 for a shift that ended at 6:00 but the Black firefighter may have provided relief at 6:00 instead, which would have been technically correct]. And so a lot of that took place, but we endured.

00:19:05 **Amy Mauro**

And so you formed the Progressives, I imagine, did you withdraw your dues from Local 36?

00:19:12 **Ray Alfred**

Yes. We stopped our dues. We withdrew our dues, about 200 of us. Perhaps there were approximately 300 African American firefighters, maybe a little bit more. And about 250 of us just withdrew. And we decided if in fact, they would not honor our membership and treat us as full-fledged members, then we wouldn't pay them dues. And so about 250 of us decided we were going to just withdraw from the union. And that's really when we formed the Progressive Firefighters' Association.

00:19:59 **Amy Mauro**

Great. And tell us about how your career progressed from there.

00:20:06 **Ray Alfred**

Well, I took the first promotional exam. Well, first of all, the idea of promoting a technician, you had to be selected by the captain of the company. And initially, the technician position was just given to the firefighters because most of them were White, they were just given the technician position. And then as we became eligible to be promoted to technician, they came up with a process, you had to take an exam and you had to score the highest ... in order to get to be promoted to a technician. And so a lot of that took place. And some companies, technician positions were just given to the firefighters and some companies where African-Americans became senior in the company and should have been eligible for promotion to technician, [but] the African-American was transferred out of the company. The technician position was made and sometimes they'd be transferred back. So it was a game. And so we knew it was. And so we began to look at the position of technician and how people were being promoted. And started to fight to have the technician position given a promotional exam ... which we knew we could compete for, and we knew that we'd be successful. And that began the process of selection of technician, which we thought was fair because everybody had to compete. But there were a number of ... positions. There were a number of situations that occurred that we found ourselves on the short end of the stick, which caused us

to continue to fight to eradicate all of the discrimination in the department.

00:22:25 **Amy Mauro**

So did you go for a technician first or sergeant?

00:22:30 **Ray Alfred**

I think I went for, I'm not sure, I think probably tech. Probably a sergeant's position. Actually, I got promoted to technician because I was the driver at Truck 17. So I took the exam, I passed it, and by then some of the discrimination was going away and you had officers coming in, you had black officers. And it was a little bit easier.

00:23:15 **Amy Mauro**

Where were you assigned during the 1968 riots?

00:23:20 **Ray Alfred**

Truck 17. I was at Truck 17 and obviously all of the ... issues that took place with reference to the riots and most of the rioting took place downtown, 14th and U. It started actually in the 14th [Street] corridor, and spread it away from there. I think it went up and down 13th and 14th Street. And when it began to get close to the White House, the military was called in when it started to spread and got near the Capitol, the military was called in in order to quell the riots. But, you know, the burning, the looting, the everything took place in the 14th [Street] corridor and spread from there.

00:24:20 **Amy Mauro**

How would you describe the atmosphere in northeast where you were assigned? Even though there wasn't quote unquote action there, I'm sure there was a lot of emotion and tension.

00:24:30 **Ray Alfred**

There was a lot of emotion. But obviously that portion of northeast where I was stationed, it was mostly African Americans. Not a lot of commercial stores except small grocery stores. But most of the commercial stuff was up and down the H Street corridor, 14th [Street] downtown. And I think when it began to spread from 14th street to U Street ... the leaders began to get anxious about it. And the military was called in. Law enforcement was reinforced because they didn't know what was going to happen and the riot was spreading.

00:25:37 **Amy Mauro**

So what happened next in your career as you progressed and moved around the city and up into higher ranks?

00:25:46 **Ray Alfred**

Well, I had ... always served in the Northeast Corridor, 49th Street for the first six years of my career. And then I moved to Engine 11, which was on Park Road, which was another area

that where most of the firefighting took place in that corridor. Engine 11. Engine 9. Engine 24. All of those companies. Engine 22. That was sort of the fire belt. 14th Street. 13th Street. What was sort of - what we called "the fire belt." I mean, that's where most of the big fires happen, a lot of high-rise apartment buildings, but a lot of fire problems. And so we used to call it the fire belt. And so if you were anywhere assigned to any one of those companies. Engine 9, Engine 11, Engine 12.

00:27:02 **Amy Mauro**

Engine 4.

00:27:05 **Ray Alfred**

Yes. All of those companies were I mean, they were just about all, all the time fighting fires. We at some point had arsonists in those areas, and they would walk in the front door of a building, and walk out the back door, and the whole building was involved in fire. That's how good they were. Law enforcement tried catching them, and it was difficult because they were that good at what they were doing. There were times when we thought we caught them. We trapped them in the fire building and where they couldn't get out, we thought. And when we went looking, we realized that they had already gone out the back door or something. So it was quite a problem...

00:28:27 **Ray Alfred**

We grew after that. I think the department got a little bit better. Once we got past that initial fight to get rid of discrimination in the department, we began to bring in more African Americans. The number of African Americans in each of the companies was increasing. And at some point, and I forget what year Bea Rudder came in, but she was our first female.

00:29:06 **Amy Mauro**

1978.

00:29:09 **Ray Alfred**

She was our first female. And that was an experience, because guys weren't used to having a woman in the firehouse. And so Bea as very progressive and aggressive. She wanted to be included. She didn't want any special treatment. And we used to say to her, "But you're a woman. You can't be in the same bathroom with the guys." And she didn't like the idea of being in a separate - having to be in a separate. She didn't want nothing separate. She didn't want no special treatment. And we had to convince her that it couldn't be that way. She had to have her own bathroom facilities. Sleeping quarters was a little different, but the kind of clothes she slept in, she couldn't just sleep as she would, as she was a woman where there were no men around. And so we had to convince her that she had to wear some sport shorts or some kind of shorts. She couldn't sleep like we would in our underclothes. But we got past that, and she was good at what she did. She was educated, obviously. She came to us with two degrees, I think. And probably in better shape than a lot of the guys, because she lived in the Lincoln Park area, and she used to run every day around Lincoln Park.

00:30:48 **Amy Mauro**

That's where I live. Yeah, I didn't know that.

00:30:51 **Ray Alfred**

That's great. Yeah, she used - that was her running path. She used to run around Lincoln Park all the time. And that's how she got in shape and kept in shape, and so she could outrun a lot of the guys and probably was in better shape than half of them. And she was smart. But she didn't want any special attention when she came to the Academy. I think I was at the Academy as an instructor, along with Lieutenant Lancaster. And we took it upon ourselves to try to talk her into the kinds of things she would run into and have to use to. We ordered in a camping trailer so that we could have a separate bathroom facility for her. It actually became a classroom, a separate classroom from the academy. And in it we were able to put a bathroom facility for her. She didn't like it, but we convinced her. And then during the breaks after, during training, a lot of our classes were in the academy and the training facility itself. And a lot of the breaks were in the bathroom facilities in the building itself. And the guys were really upset because anytime they went to the bathroom, she was there or she was at a position where she could see them if they went to use the bathroom. So that became an issue. Eventually it passed away, and she excelled at everything she did and then finally went to the company, and I think things had kind of settled down a little bit because we were used to having her, and she was good at what she did. She didn't ask for any favors. She participated. When she finally got to her company, she was as strong as any of the guys. And she participated as well as any of the guys. And so that finally went away.

And then we began to get other females in the job. And that started to happen around ... the country, females began to enter. A lot of times they would call our department to find out how did we do it, what did we do and how did we accommodate the females that were coming into the department. And so we were able to give them some idea of what to do and how to do it. And eventually the issue sort of went away. I mean, women began to come in and they were able to perform like the guys. And so it was less a problem. And women begin to excel like guys did. I mean, it was a given, you know, they could perform as well as we did. And obviously there were times when you had a task to perform on the fireground and whether you were male or female, you needed some help to raise the ladder, depending on what size ladder it was and help doing something on the fireground, regardless of whether you were a male or female, you had to work as a team.

00:34:54 **Amy Mauro**

And so that was by the late 70s? What rank were you at the training academy. So you spent time at 17, Engine 11...

00:35:05 **Ray Alfred**

Truck 6, actually. But I spent most of my time in the engine company because they had no officer. The officer was sick or something had happened.

00:35:17 **Amy Mauro**

So you were a sergeant.

00:35:18 **Ray Alfred**

So I was a sergeant, but they left me there. Most of the time I serve on duty. And then there was an opening at the Training Academy, and I think I was assigned to the training academy as an instructor. Initially as, I think, a firefighter. Then eventually I became a sergeant and then became a lieutenant as an instructor. Eventually, after I became lieutenant, I wanted to get away and go back to fighting fires. And I think I went from there to Engine 21, perhaps as a lieutenant, and stayed at Engine 21 until such time that I was ready to get promoted. And I ended up at fire department headquarters, and I think I did the first annual report for the fire department. And I think I still have a copy of that somewhere.

00:36:38 **Amy Mauro**

For which chief was that?

00:36:40 **Ray Alfred**

I'm sorry?

00:36:41 **Amy Mauro**

For which fire chief did you do the annual report?

00:36:45 **Ray Alfred**

It might have been Jeff Lewis. Jeff Lewis or Burton - At the beginning of Burton Johnson - somewhere between Burton Johnson and Jeff Lewis.

00:36:59 **Amy Mauro**

Yeah, that looks like the right time frame.

00:37:02 **Ray Alfred**

But Jeff Lewis was a tough guy...He had no mercy on anybody. He was tough, but he was fair. And everybody was afraid of him. When you did anything, and you thought that Jeff Lewis was going to be there to discipline. Boy, it was ...

00:37:54 **Amy Mauro**

I haven't heard anything about him, so.

00:37:57 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah, well, he was a tough guy. He was fair, but he was tough. He didn't care who you were. You had to perform. And everybody had a story about Jeff Lewis, what he did on the fireground, who he cursed out, and he didn't hesitate to curse anybody out.

00:38:25 **Amy Mauro**

And do you have a story about him?

00:38:28 **Ray Alfred**

Well, yeah, I think when I was assigned to headquarters, the afro had just come out and every African American wanted to have an Afro, myself included. And so I had an afro with a Fu Manchu mustache that connected with my beard of my sideburns, actually. And he hated it. He hated it. And so, I was in defiance. You know, here's how I'm going to wear my hair and that's it. I got a picture someplace of my Afro and my Fu Manchu and all of that. But it was always neat, you know? I always kept it neat. And he eventually got used to it, because I was determined that it was my haircut. And as long as it was neat, he couldn't control what I did. And so I kept my afro and my Fu Manchu.

00:39:57 **Amy Mauro**

And I'd like to see the photo.

00:40:01 **Ray Alfred**

I got one somewhere.

00:40:04 **Amy Mauro**

Can you tell us about mentors during your time coming up in the department? People who you thought were strong leaders or who influenced you?

00:40:17 **Ray Alfred**

Well, I guess here was some folks that you looked at as you were coming up through the department that you wanted to emulate. Whether it was how they dressed and we had khaki uniforms. Maurice Kilby, for instance, was always prep and I mean, his uniforms were starched stiff. And I mean, he had a procedure he went through every time he assumed duty, you know, he'd stand the locker room, and the way he put on his freshly starched uniform and made sure that the creases were all. You wanted to be like those guys, you know, they were neat. Their uniforms were always starched. And so you learned to become - you wanted to be like them. Because aside from knowing your job, you wanted to look the part. And so he was - he would be one of them that, for me, because he was in my station, he was assigned to my station, although a different shift. He was in my station, Lieutenant Robert Jones... TR Coleman was another one. I mean, when he became fire chief, it was like, oh my goodness, you know, he was Mr. It, you know, uniform always. He was proud of the way he looked in his uniform and, and so those are the guys you kind of look at and it's like, okay, so when I get promoted, I want my uniform to be stiff. I want it to be neat. I want to look neat. I want to look the part. And so, you know, those are the guys that we looked at.

00:42:41 **Amy Mauro**

Did any of them give you advice when you were going through the hard times with the racism and the Progressives. Any sort of people older than you who helped you through that?

00:42:54 **Ray Alfred**

Well, some of them, but we took the lead because a lot of them were older, what we call “old timers.” And, you know, they warned us, “Don't do this. You're going to lose your job ... Be careful.”

00:43:08 **Amy Mauro**

It was a change in attitude. I'm sure they sort of tolerated things. And your generation said, “We're not going to do that.”

00:43:14 **Ray Alfred**

Exactly, exactly. We were not about to tolerate any of it, you know, and we were determined we were not going to do it. And the department would have to straighten out. We would not. I mean, the country was going through discrimination, you know, and they were fighting. And so therefore we couldn't see ourselves accepting any of it. And because we were working as employees of the government of the city, protecting the community, we had decided it's not going to happen. You know, for those individuals that thought they could still discriminate against us, they had another thought coming because either we would sue the whole department or the individual. And so there's no way in the world we're going to put up with it. But a lot of guys tried. You know, we had a lot of fights in the stations, simply because we had younger guys on and they were determined that they were not going to put up with it. And so things had to change.

00:44:44 **Amy Mauro**

Let's see any other. How about significant incidents that you may recall, that stand out in your mind? Significant fires where you were present that you think about, rescues that you're proud of.

00:45:07 **Ray Alfred**

There were a lot. I mean, and in the fire service that's ongoing. You know, I've been to calls when, for instance, at Truck 17, the mother had no less than five children. The oldest, probably less than nine years old. But mother went next door to visit her parents. And left the kids in the apartment. They decided that they were going to play hide and seek, and they were taking newspaper and lighting it on the stove and looking for each other in the bedroom. This was my first victim, and I think that the victim was like a 2 or 3 month old baby in a crib, and the kids were playing hide and seek, and in one case, one instance, they left the burning newspaper under the crib.

But the baby - obviously we got the call and it was right around the corner from the fire station, 46th Street or something. And when we got there the place was fully involved, which means that the crib. The baby had burned to a crisp. And when we finally put the fire out, we got all the other kids out. We got four of the children out, but the baby, the infant was in the crib. And so for three days I couldn't eat because it was my first victim and it was that two month old baby. And so the sergeant in charge asked me if I had ever seen a burned body, and I said no. And he ordered me into the room with the bed where the crib was and in the process of showing me the baby, and the baby was burned to a crisp, the crib fell apart and it

hit the baby across the forehead and it exposed the brain. And so it was the first time I'd ever seen a burned body, and I like I couldn't eat for three days.

And after that, I'd been in the Adams-Morgan area. We had a fire. You remember all of these fires and what happened leading to the fires. And in this case, this was a nursing home, semi-detached house. Oh, no, it was a detached house, but it was a nursing home in the Adams-Morgan area. And a number of patients in that nursing home. Apparently, the guy decided that he was going to smoke. He was smoking. The mattress caught fire, and he decided he was going to try to bring it out, and he started pulling the mattress out, and it got caught at the base of the steps of a two-story house, and it flared up and he panicked and left it there. And so the whole place lit off. And you had dozens of patients upstairs and most of them died. I think probably 9 or 10 of them, 11, something like that, because they couldn't get out and they got trapped. And so when we got there and started putting the fire out, every place, every room we went into had a victim. And so those things you kind of remember.

00:49:20 **Amy Mauro**

Was that at Engine 21? Because I think Donald Mayhew, described a fire like that. So I think it may be the same one.

00:49:29 **Ray Alfred**

Engine 21. I was a young lieutenant then. And at 17, you have these assignments on the Engine and Ladder Company. Either on an engine company, you're carrying the hose line and you're attacking the fire along with the officer. On the ladder company you have a Halligan bar, and your job is to help gain entry. And you remember those positions at Truck 17. I was carrying a Halligan bar, and we responded the southeast section of Engine 30. Truck 17 across East Capitol Street. And a guy was trapped upstairs and I was carrying a Halligan bar. And when we got there, the fire had already come out of the basement and it was going up the second floor. And this guy, I could hear him breathing. And my task was to try to get up the steps, and I didn't have a hose line, and I didn't know if I was going to get trapped along with him. But I went up anyway. I fought with a guy to give me the hose line and he wouldn't, so I just went up the stairs to get the guy. And obviously he was a big guy and I had to drag him down the steps, but he fell near the top of the stairs, and the flames were coming around the stairs and hitting him in the face, and I finally got him out, but it was too late, you know. And so you look at those things and you say, "Well, maybe if I had gone up anyway, or maybe if I had gotten the hose line, or maybe if I'd done this, if we had gotten there earlier." you sort of second guess yourself. But those are the kind of little things that you respond to.

Bars on the windows, which was a big, big issue for us when they first started putting them up in that area, apartment complexes. We responded one time, and it was the end of the day, 4:00 or somewhere close, and it was off Benning Road, someplace not too far from the station. And when we got to the apartment complex, apparently the kids were playing with matches And got trapped in the room. And when we got there, we could see this little kid at the window. And at the time. And it's stuff that caused you to have to rethink your equipment. At the time we had no resource to cut the bars off the windows. And this apartment building had bars all over the place.

00:52:53 **Amy Mauro**

Really, you didn't have saws? Is that something that evolved after the bars started going up?

00:53:01 **Ray Alfred**

Oh yeah. And so we saw this little - I don't know if it was a boy or a girl, but standing at the window screaming and you can see the fire. And so you're breaking out the windows to try to get to the child. But we couldn't because we didn't have any tools to gain entry. And so you watch a child just burn. And so those are the fires that you never forget. We were in the Adams Morgan area, and the kids were in the apartment upstairs. It was Columbia Road and middle of the day. The mother went next door or something. Went to the store or something. The kids are playing with a lighter. And the light had just caught on to the clothes or something and lit off the whole apartment. And it was two twins. And when we finally put the fire out, there they were. And they had been playing with the lighter - we could tell because the lighter was still there and it got hot and they dropped it. And the rest is, I mean, the whole place. And this was midday and the whole place was just ablaze, you know. But we lost two twin kids. And so those kinds of fires, you remember, you rethink, you know, maybe if we had gotten there five minutes earlier, somebody had discovered the fire. You try to think, what else could we have done before the next time you respond to a fire? And that's what you do, you know, you figure out, could we have done anything differently? If we had gotten the call three minutes earlier, we could have saved the kids. But those things you go through, go through your mind. And you never, you never really forget them.

00:55:34 **Amy Mauro**

Well, thank you for sharing that. And I'm sorry to make you relive it because I know it's probably still painful. So I appreciate it. It to me - in my mind, those stories contain a lot of fire prevention lessons and, the city has come such a long way in terms of fire safety and prevention education, motivated by things like that. And I interviewed Willie Drummond, who talked a lot about Burton Johnson's leadership and the creation of the Community Relations Division. So it's interesting, from my time as chief of staff, I just I saw fewer, obviously, the occasional fire with circumstances like that, but I think the community has also come a long way. So the department should be commended for that contribution, I think.

00:56:30 **Ray Alfred**

You know, and you learn something every day, because there's always new equipment coming about. There's always new building codes. New building products - that's always coming out. And so we have to deal with it as firefighters. We try to figure out, well, if it catches fire, is it going to burn? How quickly is it going to burn? What kind of hazard is it going to present to us? Does it mean that our firefighting equipment or clothing has to change? What do we do? How do we make it safer for the firefighters? Is the mask still as good as it used to be? Should we have a new mask? Should we have new gloves? And all of that plays a part. The building codes, sprinkler systems. Should we have sprinkler systems in homes as well as in apartment complexes and office buildings and all of that? Could we save lives as a result of having sprinkler systems - requiring sprinkler systems in homes? We think that we could probably save more lives. But then the building industry, you know, the building owners, the apartment complexes. "Oh, we can't - just cost too much money." We are all of those things. But we've been successful in causing the building codes to be

strengthened.

00:58:26 **Amy Mauro**

Yeah, that's part of every evolution is the counter point of view. And then working to get where you need to go. So let's go to your years as battalion chief. And so then you're entering the senior ranks of management of the department.

00:58:49 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah. Well, as a battalion chief, I was always in the administration in some capacity other than firefighting. I was, for instance, the public information officer. I handled the media. I was a special assistant to the chief, Norman Richardson, T.R. Coleman, I think maybe Burton Johnson, Jeff Lewis. And so I began to get into the administration and be a part of that. As a battalion chief, I handled the media. And so, anytime there was a major fire, any kind of incident, I would respond to the scene and take care of the media. I got to know all of the media folks and all of the channels. And I remember one guy, Larry Krebs. I don't know if you've been introduced to him. Have you heard of him?

01:00:16 **Amy Mauro**

I've heard his name. Because I think that he.

01:00:20 **Ray Alfred**

He was a radio guy.

01:00:22 **Amy Mauro**

Okay.

01:00:23 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah, he did radio stuff, but he had been around for so long, he knew all of the players. He knew what to say and what he wanted to hear as the media person. And he'd even sometimes when I first started, when I first met him, here's what you do. I mean, he would literally tell me, "Look, you just stand right here and I'm going to ask you these questions and you just answer these questions." So, I got used to the medium.

01:00:58 **Amy Mauro**

I imagine he had good sources. Also probably knew more than you did about what was going on at times. Those are good reporters.

01:01:06 **Ray Alfred**

And then he would set up the television folks. He would set them up. "Okay, you guys just stand right here. Put your mic here. Put your. Do this, do that." And all I had to do is get up there and say, "Yeah, we had a fire and it burned the second and third floor and nobody was hurt." And, you know, so I got used to the routine of what it is I wanted to say to them, how

bad it was, how long we fought fires, who got hurt. Where are the firefighters that got hurt? Where did they go? You know, all of that. I just I got to the point where it came just naturally. I didn't have to think about it. And then I got used to in and out of the White House and in and out of the Congress. And I knew all the congressional leaders and, me and Mrs. Bush. We used to chat all the time.

01:02:13 **Amy Mauro**

Are you serious?

01:02:14 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah. The Secret Service agent would say to me. "Come on, come on, come on ... Let's go have lunch." And we'd go into the White House and sit down, and she'd come by, and we'd talk.

01:02:26 **Amy Mauro**

What was she like?

01:02:28 **Ray Alfred**

She was quite a pleasant person. She was a grandmother type lady. She cared about her grandkids and about people in general.

And then Bill Clinton came in, and I think his first stop was to the Capitol Hilton. No, it was the Hilton at 16th Street and K Street someplace in there. But he wanted to meet the fire chief and the police chief. So [on Inauguration night] we normally would precede the President and the entourage before they got to the Hilton and before they got to the Capitol Hilton, the Statler or whatever, we would precede them. It would be the fire chief, the police chief, the Secret service agent. And somebody else or the person in charge of the public agencies. I don't know one of them. So we would precede the president and the entourage before they got in. We'd make sure that there was no overcrowding. We'd make sure that everything was clear. So when the president got on the scene, he could walk right in. There would be no issues. We'd take care of all the issues. Whether it was overcrowding or anything else, we'd take care of all of those issues. And the minute the president came in, we would move to the next hotel. And usually it was like 10 or 12 hotels that night. And so we'd take care of all of that. And we do that. We'd hop, skip, hop, skip, skip until the president had covered all of the hotel, and usually it was 2 or 3:00 in the morning. And then we would release everybody and, and then we would eventually go home. But we would hop, skip, all hop, skip all night long until the President hit the last facility. And we were sure that he was going into the White House, going back to bed. And so that was part of our job. And so I did that until. I guess I got promoted to deputy chief and then assistant chief and then finally fire chief.

01:05:14 **Amy Mauro**

Before we get there, there's one chief I haven't heard much about. Norman Richardson, can you tell me what you remember about him?

01:05:21 **Ray Alfred**

Norman Richardson was a smart guy. He was a big guy. And I remember him getting promoted to chief. That would have been before Coleman. Just before Coleman. And he and the deputy mayor, Elijah Rogers, they didn't get along very well. And that weighed on him a lot. Yeah, that weighed on him a lot. I think it eventually drove him out of the department, because normally - Elijah Rogers was always, always around, and he a nice guy, but, you know, it seems that he and Norman didn't get along. I don't know if it's because Norman didn't appreciate him being around all the time. I don't know what it was.

01:06:27 **Amy Mauro**

What was he doing when he was around?

01:06:30 **Ray Alfred**

Well, you know, he always challenging you. Elijah Rogers was always challenging you about something. What about this? What about that? What about this? And it was always stuff that probably should have happened. You should have known. But I don't think Norman Richardson ever got used to it. As a matter of fact, it got pretty bad at the end of his tenure.

...

01:08:52 **Amy Mauro**

That's a tough atmosphere to work in.

01:08:54 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah.

01:08:55 **Ray Alfred**

That just ate him up and he eventually - they couldn't find him at one point, they didn't know where he was. He wouldn't show up. Barry would call him. "Where is he?" You know, and we didn't know. And so, he eventually stepped up and decided he didn't want to be around anymore. And I think they promoted Coleman. But it was a tough time for him. But nice guy, big guy. But he was very nice. I think that the job kind of drove him crazy.

01:09:47 **Amy Mauro**

How about TR Coleman? What was he like? And were you his special assistant?

01:09:54 **Ray Alfred**

Yes. I was his Assistant Fire Chief of Operations.

01:10:02 **Ray Alfred**

He was a nice guy. I was with him. I was his driver. I drove him for Truck 17. I was the truck driver. When he became captain, he came to Truck 17. And so we fought a lot of fires together. And so I knew him. I knew his family, I knew everybody. As a matter of fact, a lot

of times he - Thomas McCaffrey got promoted. So it was Tom McCaffrey and I who were the two assistant chiefs for Coleman. And so we used to do a lot of, we used to socialize together a lot. We'd leave and go to Ocean City. Go to Atlantic City. You know, just have dinner or we'd go to the Hogates, which was right there on the river.

01:11:00 **Amy Mauro**

I remember.

01:11:02 **Ray Alfred**

And I don't know if the other the other seafood restaurant was, but.

01:11:06 **Amy Mauro**

Phillips. Was it Phillips?

01:11:10 **Ray Alfred**

Phillips.

01:11:11 **Amy Mauro**

Right.

01:11:12 **Ray Alfred**

We knew the Phillips family. They would always come in. So we would go and we would take Tom McCaffrey and I and our families. And so we always functioned well together. We understood Coleman. And he was pretty fair to us. And we knew him. I knew him because he was my captain. And then he got promoted and we all got promoted and went up the ranks. And at some point, we were his assistants. And so we knew him. Nobody had to tell us anything about him. We knew what he wanted. We knew the kinds of things he liked to see happen. And so we got along well together. As I said ... our families knew each other. And so we knew his kids. We knew everything. And so we knew the kinds of things he liked to have happen. We knew he was very proud. He liked to make sure things were done right. And a lot of people didn't understand him. They kind of didn't like it because he was a stickler for details and he wanted to see stuff happen, and wanted to be respected by political leaders and everybody else. So he didn't take too much. So anyway, he was a good guy to work for. We knew exactly what he wanted, and we tried to provide it.

01:13:16 **Amy Mauro**

And you were Assistant Chief of Operations in Washington, D.C., in the late 80s, which must have been an experience. Tell us about it.

01:13:27 **Ray Alfred**

Well.

01:13:29 **Amy Mauro**

So for the public's knowledge, that means you were in charge of fire and EMS operations citywide.

01:13:41 **Ray Alfred**

Yes. And I knew ... the department pretty well. I knew the operations. I had been kind of all over the place. I had dealt with the White House. I had dealt with Congress. ... I knew most of the members of Congress. I had been before the Congress with the budget, and I had done all of these things. And so, I pretty much knew what to expect from them. I knew what they would be asking for, even with City Council. Matter of fact, at one point, a couple of Councilmembers wanted me to run for City Council, and I didn't. I wasn't ready for it. I didn't want it, I knew it because I was an ANC Commissioner and I had my own commission area, Pennsylvania Avenue, from 38th Street to the river and probably to Benning Road, and some other part. I had that area southeast that was my commission area. And so I used to do a lot of things for the seniors in that area. I used to go out and get commodities. I used to bring them butter and cheese and all of that stuff, and I did it in my fire department car because I thought that a lot of them could not do for themselves. And so I just took it upon myself to do that. But I did that for I don't know how long. So I knew the area and there was nothing I didn't know about the District. I knew the members of Congress. I knew just about everybody. I knew the White House.

Matter of fact, I used to jog at Haines Point. Yes, I used to jog that every morning. And who would I meet every morning? Bill Clinton. He and I would speak to each other. "Good morning, Mr. President. Hi. How you doing?" And so we got to know each other, simply because he was jogging with his entourage, and I was going the opposite way, and we'd meet every morning. But it was interesting, I guess because I knew so much of the folks - the Hill, the White House. I just knew everybody. And so when I got promoted to chief, it was like, man, okay, so I'm here. And it was an easy transition.

01:17:07 **Amy Mauro**

Did you ever, thinking back on that time where you saw that advertisement for being a firefighter in Washington, DC. Did it ever occur to you that you would get so high in the ranks?

01:17:23 **Ray Alfred**

No, no, because I was simply looking for a job. I was out of the military. I had served my country. And now I wanted to start a career. And it was the fire service. And when they called me, it was like, okay. I'm ready. And let me go to work. And let me do what I have to do.

01:17:45 **Amy Mauro**

And then it sounds like a lot of the leadership saw something in you to put you in these positions as PIO and as special assistant. So you would get all of this exposure.

01:17:58 **Ray Alfred**

I guess I don't know. I knew the media. I understood the media. As a matter of fact, while I was in the fire service, I had decided that I wanted to go into broadcasting. And so I got my third class license for radio, And I started applying for jobs. I went to Howard University when they first started their broadcasting. That was the first place I had gone. And they decided they wanted students to take over their broadcasting. And so that knocked me out of a job because I was ready. I had decided I was going to do it. What I was going to do. I was ready, I had my license. But they wanted to turn that broadcasting over to the students and that's exactly what they did. So I went out to a couple of government agencies. I'm trying to think of a couple of them, that had some off of it. And I'll share this with you. It was some place down at 17th - somewhere down 17th Street. And I went in for an interview. And they turned me down because I didn't sound black enough. And the guy told me. "No, I'm sorry. You don't sound the way you look. You gotta sound like you're black. I'd say. "Well, what does that look like?" And so for that reason, I didn't get the job.

01:20:23 **Amy Mauro**

That reminds me of the story, but it's the opposite. When Jim Vance started his career, he was told he sounded too black.

01:20:31 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah, I remember Jim Vance.

01:20:33 **Amy Mauro**

He didn't back off of it. And then it sort of became his signature.

01:20:40 **Ray Alfred**

Exactly. His delivery? Yeah. We were good friends, as a matter of fact.

01:20:42 **Amy Mauro**

He was great. I grew up with him on my TV screen. I was a big fan.

01:20:47 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah. Jim was all over the place. I mean, there was no place in Washington he didn't go to cover the news. But he was good at what he did.

01:21:01 **Amy Mauro**

Okay, so I think we're there. Tell us the story of becoming the fire chief. Coleman decided he was going to retire.

01:21:11 **Ray Alfred**

Coleman decided he was going to retire. And I had gone - I was always in City Hall for some reason or another, I knew Marion Barry. I had worked in all his campaigns and all of that,

and he called me in and said that Coleman's retiring and he needed a fire chief and asked me if I was interested. And he and I talked for a minute and that was it. I was already Assistant Chief of Operations, so I knew all of operations. And so I said, "Yes, I'm ready. I'll take it." And so he said, "You're my fire chief." That was it. And so now for me just getting around to the department, I knew operations because I was running operation. I knew services. A lot of guys thought that they would get the nod and they didn't. And they were upset. But, you know, so be it. But it was interesting. Now taking on the department and I knew the kinds of things I wanted to see happen. Always concerned about apparatus and certainly the department was changing a little bit. Southeast was beginning to get busy again. ... I don't know if you remember the movie. What was it called? It was a movie that was produced. It was all about fires. And the movie had just come out. The actors put on a big lunch for us at Engine 28 on Connecticut Avenue.

01:24:06 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah. And they. Oh, man. They had fantail shrimp. They had everything. And we had a great time. And I remember the actor had a jacket with the title of the movie on his chest. And I said to him, "That's a nice jacket. How about I'd like to have that?" He said, "Well, here." But they autographed the jacket and I still have it. But it was a good time. I think I probably knew more about the department than any chief before me, because I had already been all over. I did the first annual report. I still have a copy of that. I ran PIO. I did all of that. And then anytime we - I remember, the fire chief called me and said, "I want you to go to Georgetown, M Street. They're about to have a big dinner for the White House at one of these little restaurants, and they were just still clearing out stuff. They had no windows, still putting carpet down the steps. They were cooking big old shrimp as big as my hand, and they weren't ready. But they were determined. And it's like 3:00 and the dinner is at 6:00.

And so the fire chief sent me over to see, to help the fire marshal figure this all out. And so I got there. And I mean, there's no windows in the front at all, no doors, no nothing. They're still putting carpet down. And they said, "Well, what are you guys doing? Are we going to have - we're going to have the White House staff coming." And I said, "No, you're not, you're not ready." So we had this big argument. And so I said, "Well, okay, so if you want this to happen, you're going to have to have an engine company in the alley behind 34th and M, and you're going to have to have an engine company in the front, because if anything happens with staff from the White House in here, fire breaks out and somebody gets hurt, I'll never hear the end of it. The fire chief will never live it out". And so they paid for overtime for companies to come there and do. But it was just amazing. But it was always something.

The embassies were always an issue. We could never go into the Russian embassy, which was right at 16th Street between K and L, and the Chinese embassy, which was right at, right on Connecticut Avenue. ... They would never let us in, because it's all foreign country. And so if they had an emergency, they would meet us at the door with armed guards, and they were selective about who they let in. We had at one of the embassies at 16th and Euclid, we found a dead body stuffed in a trash can. A naked body in this trash can. And so when that happens, State Department and Secret Service and you know, the routine.

And so that was always something happening. Accident on Connecticut Avenue where the Russians, the folks working in the Russian embassy get hurt. At 23rd and Mass Avenue. Automobile fire where the ambassador got burned up, and we didn't notice it until we put the fire out that he was in there. And so we had to call State Department. We had to call Secret

Service. You have to when that happens, you.

01:29:16 **Amy Mauro**

Was it an assassination attempt or an accident?

01:29:24 **Ray Alfred**

I think it was assassination.

And so, you know what happened there? You call in all the big folks and State Department and Secret Service and so we were always running into something.

01:29:45 **Amy Mauro**

What were the highlights of being fire chief?

01:29:53 **Ray Alfred**

Well, obviously, at one point it was bringing in a new a new President. Preparing for it, because on November the 3rd, when the election is over with, we know who the President's going to be. We start preparing for the President.

We start preparing for the balls that are going to happen because we normally had 10 to 12 of those. We had to prepare and figure out how many people were going to work overtime, and where are we going to put them, and where are they going to be, and how long are they going to be there. And planning for the inaugural at the Capitol, we were right in there with everybody that's involved in planning the swearing in of the President. Always kind of interesting. The day of the swearing in was always interesting because you had all these people from all over the country want to see the president being sworn in and coming in with their fur coats and their fancy cars and all of that. And so you have to sort of work around that to try to make it convenient and make sure nothing happens, make sure the president gets sworn in and make sure he gets through all the ball sites. And so all of that happens.

01:31:45 **Amy Mauro**

So looking at your dates, it looks like it was George Bush and Bill Clinton.

01:32:05 **Ray Alfred**

Yes. And it's kind of funny because every time he's in town, we talk.

01:32:12 **Amy Mauro**

Clinton or Bush? Oh, no. Well, Bush is no longer with us. So, Clinton - really?

01:32:19 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah. He always teased me about the fact that I look younger than he does. And I said, "Well, I'm just as old as you are." So it's kind of interesting. Every time I see him, we talk.

And I used to talk to George W Bush. Not H.W. but the son. So when he comes to town we talk every now and then.

01:32:57 **Amy Mauro**

And how did you meet him?

01:33:01 **Ray Alfred**

Well, I knew his father. I got pictures on the wall of his father. We had never had the president kick off Fire Prevention Week in the country. So I talked to the international. I used to be on the board of the International Association of Fire Chiefs. So I convinced them that we ought to kick off of Fire Prevention Week by the President of the United States. And so they agreed. And so I took Engine 16. And we had a fire prevention competition, essay competition. And we brought a young girl to the Capitol. No, no, to the White House and had her meet the President. And then we presented George H.W. Bush with a helmet and I think a coat, a bunker coat. As President of the United States, we wanted him to have a helmet and a coat. And it was the International Association of Fire Chiefs and International Association of Firefighters and Volunteer Firefighters. We all showed up at the White House and presented him with a helmet and a coat. And so I've got pictures of that. And that was the kickoff of Fire Prevention Week for the country.

01:35:09 **Amy Mauro**

That's great. I know we had a conversation about what you might do with the extra. There was a duplicate turnout coat. Right?

01:35:20 **Ray Alfred**

Yes, I still have it.

01:35:22 **Amy Mauro**

Yeah.

01:35:25 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah, I still have it. I thought about selling it, and then I thought about if we do the Fire Prevention Museum. Yeah. That. I'll donate it to the museum. But then that'll probably make me want to go Globe and get one for each of the last ten presidents and have that in the museum, I don't know. We'll see what happens. But I still have it. I still have it. Matter of fact, we're trying to figure out. I have all these pictures. Some on the wall and some in boxes and stuff. But the ones on the wall, I'm trying to figure out what I'm going to do with them. Because obviously, if your kids don't want them. You know, you don't know what you're going to do with them, but I'll try. I'll figure out what to do.

01:36:55 **Amy Mauro**

Well, Kate and I would love to work with you on that if you're interested in donating them to the Museum. If you shared snapshots of them with us, we could talk about digitizing them

and adding them to the museum's collection. So let me know.

01:37:12 **Ray Alfred**

I might do that. Yeah. All right.

01:37:16 **Amy Mauro**

Before I ask you my final two questions that I ask everyone I interview, do you have anything else that you want to share that you haven't shared yet?

01:37:27 **Ray Alfred**

I don't know. I don't I can't think of anything. Obviously I look forward to what's going to happen in this round of elections to see who becomes our leader. I got my preference, but I'll wait and see what happens. And then I know the city is getting to the point where it's. There's no moving room. No, it's filling up fast because everybody that goes to Washington that I know of, they talk about how crowded it is every time I go to Washington. Sometimes I almost get lost because it's filling up so much. Every place there's a hotel or apartment complex or a building of some kind, to the point where there's not much room anymore. ... I still have folks. Every now and then I go. They want to show me something that exists now. I can't wait to bring to fruition the issue of the fire service museum. I can't wait to get that done. If it's going to happen, I hope we can convince the liquor store owner to sell us the place. And so we can continue with trying to get funding and get it done.

01:39:36 **Amy Mauro**

I thought of an important question before I ask you the final two, which is, during my research, I saw that the fire department changed its name to include EMS in 1990, which was under your tenure. Can you talk about that decision and what you remember about working on improving EMS.

01:40:01 **Ray Alfred**

Well, we knew that the demand for service was changing, not just in Washington, but throughout the country. Places like New York, for instance, who considered themselves firefighters and didn't want anything to do with EMS, were finding themselves having to train their firefighters and catch up with everybody else in the world. So it was an interesting period where we didn't have enough EMS units and we had to augment, we had to supplement, we had to do whatever we could to get to the scene. And so the only way to do that was to begin to train our firefighters, if we did nothing but teach them how to do CPR. We had to do something. And so the issue of training firefighters to become EMS folks, initially there was some resistance, but then they realized that they weren't fighting as many fires and the city couldn't afford to have them just sitting in the firehouse waiting for the next big fire. That never really came as often as it did. And so, I think the union got convinced that yep, we'll take on this and we began to train firefighters to the EMT status. And that was good for the citizenry. And so we began to work on that. And then everybody else in the world started working on the same thing, because the demand for EMS service people thought that to get to the hospital, they needed to call for an ambulance or rescue unit. And the only way to do that, to accomplish that was to train our folks so that they could do all of

that stuff. And so it started.

01:42:35 **Amy Mauro**

And when you added EMS to the name of the department, was that controversial among firefighters?

01:42:42 **Ray Alfred**

No, I don't think it was. I think the firefighters understood that they were fighting less fires and pretty soon the demand to cut the number of people, reduce the number of people in the fire service because they weren't fighting as many fires. So we had to find something else for them to do. That, in fact, would benefit the community, the citizenry. And so it was EMS. It was an easy transition. They were already there. They were already in the street. And so now what we had to do in the administration was begin to say to the leadership of the city, "So we're going to need more money because we have to train our folks to take care of the EMS calls and the calls that are going to come in, and we're going to have to buy more rescue units and more ambulances because we don't have enough." And so had to prepare the leadership of the city for an increase in monies to take care of all of that. And so it happened. And now it's like more and more rescue units, and now it's purchasing more rescue units because we run the wheels off of them. People are calling for fingernail hurts and hurt fingers and heart attacks and cuttings and shootings and accidents and everything else. So the fact that we get - and I don't know how many tourists we get a year now, it used to be 19 million, but we've got tourists coming in. They want to see the seat of the capital, they want to see the museums, they want to see everything else. And they're getting sick. And we having to transport them and all of that. So we just got to be prepared.

01:45:00 **Amy Mauro**

Well, we've come a long way in EMS and we're very proud of where we are today.

01:45:07 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah. And it's pretty much throughout the country. I used to say to my colleagues in the fire service, "You guys haven't seen anything until you've had to deal with fire and EMS in the nation's capital."

01:45:26 **Amy Mauro**

Yes, absolutely. Okay, so last two questions. First one is how does your time in the DC Fire and EMS Department continue to influence you today? ...

01:45:48 **Ray Alfred**

Well, I love the nation's capital. And I sort of always want to be involved or connected some kind of way. And if we get the museum done. But it helped, I guess, for me. Helped me understand the people that are coming to the nation's capital, what they want to see and, and how it is we need to prepare for them, to respond to their emergencies, to take care of them while they're here in the nation's capital. Let alone the number one citizen in the nation's capital, the President and all of the congressional leaders. Although I don't think especially

the congressional leaders understand what's involved and how much we have to prepare for all of that just to protect them and their constituents...

01:47:37 **Amy Mauro**

So I think if I understand what you're saying when I asked how the department continues to influence you today, it's that high level of understanding what it takes to keep the nation's capital safe. Is that fair?

01:47:55 **Ray Alfred**

I think it's fair. I think whomever is in charge of the department have to continue to understand the nation's capital is different than any other city, major or otherwise, that we've got national and international leaders coming into the nation's capital. We've got their families, we've got foreign dignitaries coming in, and the nation's capital has to be prepared. Every foreign embassy is part of a foreign country that we have no say about, but we have to protect them. But then we've got the resident population that we have to prepare for. We have to protect. We have to respond to their emergency medical services care, fire protection. So that makes us different. Whether it's New York or Los Angeles or Atlanta or anyplace else, we're different in the nation's capital. Our concerns are different. In addition to everything else that every other major city is having to deal with.

01:49:48 **Amy Mauro**

Well, my last question is what do you want people who visit this website to learn about the department to know - what do you think is most important to know? It sounds like you just answered that question in a way. Anything else that you would want them to emphasize?

01:50:07 **Ray Alfred**

Except obviously, you've got a bunch of dedicated folks. It's always interesting to me to watch the action that takes place in Washington as we recruit and train and try to promote firefighters because they all come from someplace else. Half of them don't know the District. A lot of them probably aren't interested, except to be able to work. But that, I guess, for me, is the sad part. I mean, I think they care about their jobs and worry about the people that they have to protect when they're protecting. But once that shift is over with, it's like they're out of here. You know that they're no longer worried about what's happening in those same districts. Some of them might be. But for the most part, they go on to Maryland or Virginia. You know, and a lot of them are volunteering out there. And not being paid anything. But when they come into the District, you know, they want to be paid. They go out into Maryland and Virginia and they volunteer. And that's the I guess, the sad part. I'm glad they're taking care of their communities when they are. But, the District residents are having to pay for it.

01:52:10 **Amy Mauro**

And they're paying for their work here, not for their work out there.

01:52:17 **Ray Alfred**

Yes, absolutely. But that's the way it is. That's the way it's been. And until the District is able and I don't think they ever will be able to get Home Rule where they can at least charge them for taxes for the salaries they pay them. And I don't think that's going to happen. I think probably they'll be successful in getting the Congress to do something and continue with the federal payment, and increase it whenever the Mayor and the Council think they need an increase.

01:53:01 **Amy Mauro**

Well, let's see what happens in November.

01:53:05 **Ray Alfred**

Yeah, I think it'll always come to the point where the Congress will say, "Okay, we'll increase your federal payment by \$100 million."

01:53:16 **Amy Mauro**

It's not easy to get them to do that, actually.

01:53:19 **Ray Alfred**

I know it's not because you've got people from all over the country who has no interest and where they think the city is not providing them anything. So it's just Maryland and Virginia, you know, that's really benefiting because people are living. Although I know there are folks that are flying in from Florida to work on the fire department here. And that exists. But you're right. They're not going to want to dish out any money to the District because they don't think that they're getting anything. Yeah. But we'll see.

01:54:13 **Ray Alfred**

We'll see. I guess as long as the federal payment remains. And it's not a hassle like it always is, where you got to beg Congress for an increase in payment. Although more and more people are coming in from their states and their communities and all over the place. And they're asking for more money for their own territory and their own communities. There's always going to be a need to increase, because I think while the District might not grow in geographical size, I think people are still going to be coming in. People from all over the world are going to be coming here and using our water and sewer and traffic lights and everything else, and riding our buses and our metro. And it still won't be enough from those communities, but I guess they'll work it out.

01:55:30 **Amy Mauro**

We always do. And so does the fire department. So do you have anything else that you want to share before we close?

01:55:38 **Ray Alfred**

Not that I can think of.

01:55:40 **Amy Mauro**

Okay, well, if you think of anything and you want to talk again, just let me know. But I want to thank you for your time today and also your service to the city. Everything that you contributed and continue to contribute, even after retirement, it's very much appreciated.

01:55:56 **Ray Alfred**

And if there's anything I can help with, let me know. Who knows? I may decide to move back to Washington.

01:56:07 **Amy Mauro**

Oh, well, that would be good.

01:56:09 **Ray Alfred**

I don't know.

01:56:11 **Amy Mauro**

Take your photos with you.

01:56:14 **Ray Alfred**

I will, I will. Yeah, I'll keep the photos. And if I decide to box any of them up, I may just send you a box, I don't know.

01:56:26 **Amy Mauro**

Okay, I'm going to turn off the recording here.