

Willie Drummond Interview

00:00:08 **Amy Mauro**

My name is Amy Mauro. I'm Executive Director of the DC Fire and EMS Foundation. We are recording on June 25th, 2024. It's around 3:15 p.m. and I'm here at the home of Willie Drummond, a retired firefighter. I am with Kate Fogle, the Foundation's archivist. And together, Kate and I are running a project called the History of the DC Fire and EMS Department in Photos and Videos. We're very fortunate to have a grant funded by the DC Commission on Arts and Humanities for this project, as well as a grant from HumanitiesDC, which is funding the oral history component of the project. So we are very grateful and excited to be here today, and I'm going to ask Mr. Drummond to introduce himself as well and to spell his name.

00:01:10 **Willie Drummond**

My name is Willie Drummond.

00:01:18 **Amy Mauro**

Great. So I think we can just start at the beginning, looking forward to hearing about your life in general and your time with the Department. So tell us, Willie, where you were born and raised.

00:01:30 **Willie Drummond**

Well, I was born here in Washington, D.C. I'm a Washingtonian and raised here in Washington, D.C., and I left Washington in 1958 when I went into the military. So that was with the Navy. And then when I came back home from the Navy, that's when I joined the D.C. Fire Department. I came back home and a couple of my buddies was in the Navy with me, and they joined the fire department because they was a year or two older than I was. And they encouraged me to join the DC Fire Department. So that's how I got on the fire department. Hanging out with my buddies. So I joined the fire department in 1963. And I just went along with the Department. I was upset because I should have joined the fire department in October of 62. But the Navy held my paperwork up, so I had to wait till 63 to join the fire department.

00:02:31 **Willie Drummond**

During that period of time, the fire Department hired 300 black guys because they wanted to integrate the fire department. Even though people say that the fire Department was integrated, it really wasn't. They had Afro-Americans or blacks, whichever way you want to call it. They had sporadic guys throughout the fire department, but what the fire department wanted to do in the city, they wanted to put a guy in every firehouse, which we didn't have prior to 61, and on every shift. So they hired between 1961 and 1963, they hired 300 black firefighters that put one guy on every shift in every firehouse in the city. So if you had an engine and a truck in the firehouse, you had two blacks on that same shift. And we were working three shifts. So we worked three days, worked three nights, and then we was off three days. So it was somebody on all three shifts - that was the plan ... between 61 and 63.

00:03:39 **Willie Drummond**

And for the most part it came about. We had a couple of fire houses that didn't necessarily have a guy on each shift, but for the most part, every firehouse in the city, they had guys on each shift, you know, Black guys on each shift. So that worked out. And I was appointed to Engine 17 on March the 3rd, 1963. That's up at 12th and Monroe Street, NE over there at Catholic University. And, there was one other Black guy in the firehouse, Clark. He was on another shift, and we were the only two there. I was on number two platoon. He was on number one platoon. We didn't have nobody on number three platoon at that time when I went there. And, later on, we got another guy on the number three platoon. But that was the idea to put somebody on all the shifts throughout the fire department. And like I say, in most parts, it came about and it worked out. You know, it worked out for what the city wanted to do at that particular time.

00:04:46 **Willie Drummond**

I really never had problems at 17 Engine, basically, no. But we had a changeover because a guy on the other shift, he had to switch because he and his driver couldn't get along. So I had to switch shifts. So we switched

shifts so that they would be on different shifts and that eliminated the problem on his shift. So it worked out alright. Because on the shift that I went to, it was Lieutenant Schaefer there. And we got along fine. So that was, I guess, a benefit to me because I learned a lot from Schaefer.

00:05:27 Amy Mauro

Can I pause for a bit, I just want to pause before we talk more about daily life in the Department. I want to hear more about your inspiration for going there. Just a little more about your early life, if you don't mind. And so you mentioned that you were born in Washington, D.C.. What neighborhood did you grow up in?

00:05:47 Willie Drummond

10th and Spring Road. Up at New Hampshire Avenue and Georgia Avenue up there.

00:05:52 Amy Mauro

And you joined ... the military

00:05:55 Willie Drummond

Went to high school at Cardoza.

00:05:57 Amy Mauro

Okay, and you joined the military when you were 18, is that right?

00:06:07 Willie Drummond

No. 15.

00:06:07 Amy Mauro

When you were 15. Wow. Tell us, can you just tell us a little more about that time of your life? Because I think it's interesting for people to learn about motivations for joining the fire service. And usually it's those formative years. A lot come from the military. And so I just want to hear a little bit more about that time in your life.

00:06:26 Willie Drummond

Well, in 1958 ... my father had passed in 1949. ... He was burned to death. He worked for the United States Capitol, Architect of the United States Capitol. He worked there, and he was killed on the job down at the South Capitol ... Right there at the freeway, South Capitol and I Street. They have a big plant down there.

00:06:58 Amy Mauro

The power plant.

00:06:59 Willie Drummond

The power plant. Right. The power plant down there that supplies power to all of Capitol Hill, the Senate and the House and all the buildings on Capitol Hill. That's where he worked at. He was a boiler tender. And they had something go wrong in the boiler. And he was burned to death down there.

00:07:19 Amy Mauro

I'm sorry.

00:07:20 Willie Drummond

And he died over at the Casualty Hospital over there at Eighth and Massachusetts Avenue.

00:07:24 **Amy Mauro**

Eighth and Mass, I remember.

00:07:26 **Willie Drummond**

And that's where he passed ... My mother was a single mother then and I told her, I said, I want to join the military because, you know, I can make me some money, make things a little bit easier. So she said, okay, because she had to sign for me because I was 15. And so she signed for me to join the Naval Reserve at Anacostia Naval Air Station at Anacostia, right there at the South Capitol Street Bridge. So I joined over there at 15 years old, and that was my last year in high school anyway. So I went there, made \$79 a month. And so, you know, that was good because she got most of that every month because I didn't need no money, because the military was taking care of everything I was eating and food and clothes and all that. So it worked out real good. Just sent her an allotment, I think I sent her an allotment of about \$70 a month.

00:08:26 **Amy Mauro**

And that was 1958.

00:08:29 **Willie Drummond**

58. And it worked out fine. Then I went aboard the USS Wasp. It was out of Boston, Massachusetts. And the crazy thing about it is we had an explosion on the ship, killed three guys because we had a helicopter that ran away, what they call a runaway. The engine ran away and it exploded. Killed the pilot and killed the two other guys that was on the hangar deck and hangar bay one. And I got burned and sent to the hospital, and all because I was in the second explosion, not the initial explosion, but the second explosion, because we was down there trying to put it out. And my job was aviation gasoline. So my workstation was in the hangar bay where the fire was at. So they asked everybody that worked in their different stations because we had to draw the gas out of the pipes, back down into the tanks in the bottom of the ship. So my station happened to be right where the fire, the explosion took place. So I went in there to shut down the pipes, because you can't pull the gas back down into the tanks unless you close certain valves. So they knocked the fire down. I went in there, closed the valve, and we had a secondary explosion. And that's when I got burned. And then ... that was my introduction to basically big fires because every guy in the Navy goes to firefighting training because you don't have nobody you can call. So you learn, you know, but we had a fire and we was 250 miles east of Norfolk, Virginia.

00:10:27 **Willie Drummond**

So the captain told us after we was fighting this fire for a number of hours, that we got two choices. We can either swim or we can fight fire because we were stationed in Boston. And he said they got a hospital ship coming out of Norfolk to catch us. And so we fought fire, I guess, almost all night long. And we was able to save the ship and went on to Boston and they transferred two guys that got burned over to the hospital ship. And then we went on into Boston and we stayed there for overhauls and repairs. So that was my real introduction to real firefighting, because, you know, I never seen a real fire before then.

00:11:13 **Willie Drummond**

When I lived in Washington, I lived right around the corner from 24 Engine. So I saw them going out but never saw a real fire because we didn't have no fires on that block that I lived on, on Spring Road. So, you know, I survived this thing, and I got burned, and they sent me to Newport, Rhode Island to the hospital up there and got some skin grafts done and all. But then I came back home and when I came home, in terms of fire fighting, like I say, my buddies all was in the Navy with me because they were on different ships. But we were in the Navy together because, Bumbry, he was at 21 Engine. He was my guy in the Navy with me. He was on the USS Valley Forge and I was on the Wasp, and we was down in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. We was down there during the overhaul and repair on my ship. And his ship was being done the same thing, because after you come out of repairs on ships, you got to go down there and be trained, retrain yourself so that you make sure everybody, because you get new guys, and then you got to make sure everybody know the jobs. So we went down there for a six week shakedown, and his ship was down there on a shakedown at the same time ...

00:12:43 **Amy Mauro**

And so Bumbry is the one who went to DC fire before you?

00:12:46 **Willie Drummond**

He went first. Right, because he was a year older than I was ... He was stationed in 21 and he had Joe Ford up there and 3 or 4 other guys that was up there, and it was good. And then I used to hang out up there with them, and they told me, go take the test. I took the test 4 or 5 times. Because you could take the test at that time every week down at 18th and E Street, down at the Civil Service building. You could take tests every week for the fire department, police department... So I went down there 3 or 4 times so I could, you know, raise your score. Because each time got a little easier to take. So, you know, you could raise your score and then you could get called up, you know, get called to take the job quicker. So I went down there 3 or 4 times, took the test and all, and got a high enough score that they called me. And then then the Navy wouldn't release my records because I got sick in the Navy and I was in a coma for four and a half months. And they said that was going to be a reflection and you're never going to be able to get over it, and it's going to interfere with your being a fireman and all that. But then we worked it out and I went to VA and, you know, the Veterans Administration and finally the Navy gave me a clean bill of health to take the fire department job. And the fire department, they was all upset because the Navy saying one thing. Then I had to go to the doctors in the fire department, and finally they said, okay, and that's how I got on the fire department. But that's why I didn't come in 62. I had to wait for the fire department and and the Navy to get together to give me a clean bill of health to come in the fire department. So they did, and I came on the fire department.

00:14:44 **Willie Drummond**

But I had been hanging out at 21 Engine with Bumbrey and them. And they said it's a good job. It paid good money. And that was the key to it, paying good money because it paid \$5,060 for the year. And I think I was working at that time for Giant making about \$2 or \$1.75 an hour, you know. And then I went to work for the United States Capitol, down in the Architect of the Capitol. I worked down there because my brother worked down there. And I don't know, it's just a combination of different things that happened. You know, my whole family's life was centered around the Architect of the Capitol. I lost my father down there. I lost my brother. He lost his leg down there. In fact, they have a plaque down there for the Drummond family because, you know, my brother set a world record [what is this?] that summer. And that fall, he was supposed to go to college, and he lost his leg working at the Architect of the Capitol during his summer job. But before that he ran on the track on the relay. He was a great track runner at Cardoza High School. He got accolades all over the country where they ran track and all. So the guys down there at the Architect told me, you do not need to work here because your family's had problems here, so you need to go. And that was one of the biggest pushes, because I wasn't interested in the fire department, even though Bumbry was there and all my buddies was there. Because of my father. You know, he died from the fire and all, but the guys at the Architect said, no, you need to get out of this job. And, you know, it's not nothing that's going to really take you down the road. And the fire department is paying good money and, you know, you got a better life. So between the Architect of the Capitol guys talking to me don't stay here. And Bumbrey talking to me, this is a good job; you don't work every day. And that's how I got in the fire department. Between the two of them, you know, one saying don't and the other saying yes. So I went to work for the fire department, \$5,060 a year. That was a big time money, you know.

00:17:12 **Amy Mauro**

Glad I asked because that's really fascinating. The lead up. You know, I grew up on Capitol Hill, so I feel like I grew up on the Capitol grounds. So you'll have to tell me where that plaque is.

00:17:24 **Willie Drummond**

So it's in the Capitol, it's in the Architect's office in the United States Capitol.

00:17:29 **Amy Mauro**

That's really cool.

00:17:30 **Willie Drummond**

They took me on a tour. They took the family on a tour when they redid the Capitol, you know, they shut the Capitol down and redid the dome.

00:17:39 **Amy Mauro**

Yes.

00:17:39 **Willie Drummond**

And they took the whole family on a tour of the new dome, you know, after they did. My niece, right now, she works for the Architect at the Capitol. She's his administrative person at the Architect of the Capitol. And my brother, after he lost his leg, he was the chauffeur for J. George White, who was the Architect of the Capitol. He drove him for 20 years with one leg. But if you saw him, you wouldn't know he had one leg because he had a prosthetic and he walked as good as he did, you know. But we have a long family history with that architect of the Capitol down there and my oldest brother that he played for the New York Giants. He was running back and a punter for the New York Giants. He was an All-American, Afroamerican All-American fullback, and he worked down there. But luckily he didn't get hurt. And my youngest brother, we wouldn't let him work down there because I'm not going to take no chances with him. So our youngest brother, he didn't work down there, but his daughter, who's working there now as the administrator, she works there. So it's a full circle in terms of the Architect.

00:18:59 **Amy Mauro**

Well, I hope she is safe in that office.

00:19:03 **Willie Drummond**

She was there during the January 6th riots. Oh, yeah. She was there because the Architect takes care of all the buildings up there. So she was, you know, one of those key people, getting the right people at the right place, calling and making sure that the electricians, the plumbers, all the workers was doing what they needed to do and being in the right spots. That was her command center there with the Architect, you know what I mean? Because, she said that was a real busy time because they're trying to keep things right. Yeah, but we've had a real history down there. And this ain't got nothing to do with the fire department. But I mean ...these are things that encourage people to do what they do. And like I say, the Architect, the people down there told me, you don't want to be here. And then my buddy Bumbrey, he over here begging and said, man, you hang out up here with us all the time anyway, so you ought to be a fireman and I did. And I'm not sorry that I did because it's been a tremendously great blessing for me. You know, the fire Department has done me very well.

00:20:18 **Amy Mauro**

So also very fascinating that effort to bring on 300 black firefighters. So in 1961 in the city, it was pre Home Rule. So we had the three commissioners running the city. Was that a decision that they made? What do you know about the politics surrounding that? Because I think it's pretty ahead of its time in 1961.

00:20:46 **Willie Drummond**

Walter Washington was one of the Commissioners

00:20:46 **Amy Mauro**

Oh ok.

00:20:49 **Willie Drummond**

And I met him and because he lived in LeDroit Park, that's where his home is at. Still there today, you know, they have made it a historical place, and I had met Walter Washington, after I got on the fire department. But he's the one with the big encouragement to integrate the fire department. Walter Washington was the black Commissioner, and they had two White commissioners because Congress appointed one and one was appointed by the Council ... and one by the President of the United States. He appointed one of the Commissioners because the city was Commission run. The president made an appointment. Congress made an appointment. And that's

how they had the Commissioner from the Council.

00:21:42 **Amy Mauro**

And the Council was appointed by the Congress, right?

00:21:44 **Willie Drummond**

It was appointed by the Congress. So that's how we had three commissioners. And they decided that they wanted to increase the number, and they did the same with the police department. I don't know the number with the police department in terms of how many officers they hired at that time. But the fire department was hardcore because you could actually see you had X number of firehouses, X number of shifts. So you could see the personnel that you put in place. With the police department, because they work all around the city and out on the street all the time, you couldn't actually say these guys was here, these guys was there. But in the fire department, when that fire truck went out, they had five, four guys riding the front piece and one guy driving the other piece so you could see who was on it. It was, you know, very obvious. So that's what they wanted to do. And it worked out real good.

00:22:33 **Amy Mauro**

And so you arrive at Engine 17 and you're the only Black person on the shift, right? So what was that like? The early days.

00:22:45 **Willie Drummond**

Well, on my first day at the fire department at engine 17, they lined everybody up and introduced us on Sunday because I came to work on Sunday. So they lined everybody up and said this is the new guy, you know, the probationer. Lieutenant Shafer, like I said, he was a real good guy. And like I told him and they asked me if I had anything to say, I said, my name is Willie Edward Drummond. I said I answer to all three. Nothing else. And as long as we do that, Willie Edward Drummond, we'll do fine. And I don't play games and we're going to be good. And I'm glad to be here. And that was my introduction. So that carried me about five years because everybody always said he'd come telling somebody what he ain't going to answer to. But see at that time I weighed 265. You know, I just come out to the military and all ... and then being at 21 Engine with Bumbry and all them guys up there, they had a real problem up there because they call that the KKK firehouse in Washington DC. 21 Engine was the KKK firehouse. And them brothers up there caught hell all the time. So they told me up front, now you might have a little problem, but you probably won't. But I never had a problem at 17 Engine. But listen -- to them, I made it very clear when they asked me if I have anything. Willie Edward Drummond, I answer to that and nothing else. And I don't play games. So we get along fine and I never had a problem at Engine 17. Well, I did one time down the road, but that was a while back, that was down the road. But that was the way it was in the fire department. Some firehouses was fine, some firehouses was crazy, and 21 Engine was crazy. I was never stationed there. I worked there, but I never was stationed there.

00:24:43 **Willie Drummond**

But 17 ain't never had no problems with them. You know, we got along very well. In fact, it was a Jewish guy on the back step. Older guy, and he really told me how to survive in the fire department because he being a Jewish guy, he had a whole lot of problems with folks. But he said, this is how you survive. They have a book called Rules and Regulations. Memorize it. If you know that rules and regulations, nobody can hurt you in the fire department because you know what you can do and what you can't do. That was the best advice I ever got from anybody in the fire department. I learned that rules and regulations book. I could recite it word for word. It was only about 50 pages, you know, a book. It was real small, but it told you what you could do and what you could not do. And that was the greatest advice he gave me. He said, learn that book because that keeps you out of trouble. And that's what I did. And he and I rode that back step together. And because he couldn't get a driver's job, for whatever the reason, I don't know. But he never was a driver. But he was an old guy. He was in his 50s. But he wasn't upset with them because he was a millionaire. He bought apartment buildings and things. So he worked for the fire department because of the health benefits and things, you see. And that's why a lot of guys work for the fire department, for the health benefits and things. But that was the greatest piece of advice he got. Because down the road, throughout my career in the fire department, I've had chiefs tell me, you went right to the edge. I said, because I know what that book say, you know, take it right to the edge and stop. You can raise sand, you can do things, but you need to know where to stop at. And that has saved me a whole lot of times

in the fire department, because "one more step and, you know, I could have wrote you up" ... but that's what saved me in my whole career in the fire department, knowing the rules, I knew what the fire department could do to me. But I also knew what I could do, you know, to. So that was the greatest advice I got from anybody in the fire department in terms of taking care of yourself. And I tried to pass that on to other young guys when they, you know, coming along. Learn the rules and regulations because you need to know what you can and what you can't do.

00:27:08 Willie Drummond

But 17 was a good fire house. It was a single fire house. And it was in Catholic University. So everybody around you was Catholic. The house next door to to the firehouse. I think that guy and family over there had about 12 kids, and they used to sit on the fence and say, you can't name us. The kids were so close to each other, they would switch on you, you know? You know, they would switch... in terms of you were looking at them and you say, well, that's you know. "No, that's not me," you know, because they switch on you and whatnot. But it was really a family affair. And during the holiday seasons their mother always brought us goodies over to the firehouse and everything. And the greatest thing I never have understood is the father went to work every day with a different suit on. And he and like I say, he must have had 12 kids. And they all going to Catholic schools. But that man went out that house every day in a different suit. Sharp as a tack. He walked down there, got on that bus. What kind of job he had, I don't know, don't have an idea. But he and his wife was right there taking care of the kids and everything, and they were always in the firehouse. And we was always, you know, talking to them.

00:28:35 Willie Drummond

But those are the things that made the the job great up there. And I think that's the reason that nobody at 17 Engine ever really had a problem because you was a family to the community. You know, everybody knew each other and the kids. And that helped move forward the fire department. And that helped because, you're in a new environment that you've never been in before. And I guess you would say you was part of the family of that area. Because I grew up over in northeast. During the time I grew up in northwest when I went to high school. Then I moved over in northeast. And during that whole period of time, I never really had interaction with White folks until I went in the Navy. You know what I'm saying? During high school, Cardoza was all Black, and all the junior high schools and elementary schools was all Black. And it's no fault of nobody. It's just the way it was. You know, you lived in an area and that's what the area you lived in was. But being at 17 Engine I got to really interact. I mean I met a few guys when I was in the Navy, but never really sit down and talk to people and just being comfortable with people in the whole neighborhood. So it was a great learning experience for me that I learned that people are people, you know, it doesn't matter. People are people. And if you just sit down and talk to people, that's what you get. People are people.

00:30:13 Willie Drummond

The fire Department is great as a unit. Everybody's family members or whatever. Everybody has somebody in there that they don't necessarily like or they don't get along with 100%. So, you know, that's just the way it is. It's the same in the fire service. Even today, because I had a meeting last week and I told the guys, hey the fire department was fantastic to me. And guys always say, why are you always saying that? And I say because it was individuals, not the fire department. Individuals. And that's the difference. Individuals can make a difference to you. But the fire department, I wouldn't be sitting here if it wasn't for the fire department. I tell people that on the regular. I got a high school diploma. But the fire Department took good care of us. All them personnel in the fire department. Individually -- that's another story.

00:31:07 Amy Mauro

So tell us. You spent five years at Engine 17. Did you apply to be promoted after that? Tell us more about how your career progressed.

00:31:19 Willie Drummond

I was at Engine 17. And I was in the United States Navy Reserve and the Pueblo incident that took place off the coast of Korea. They captured the USS Pueblo. They called my unit up and put us on active duty. So I went on active duty for a year, and I road the USS Franklin Delano Roosevelt aircraft carrier. We went down to Jacksonville, Florida. That aircraft carrier was made up of all reservists, no active duty guys. The whole reserve

force had their own aircraft carrier, the USS Franklin D Roosevelt. So we went on board the USS Roosevelt. And I stayed there almost a year. And, we was ready to go to the Far East because of the Pueblo incident, because they called up the reservists to back up the active duty because they snatched the Pueblo and kept it for, I think, a year or two over there. They put all them guys in prison and all that. And so it worked out because I went from Washington, D.C., I went to a unit up in Watkins Glen, Pennsylvania. I was up there for a short while, then we went to Jacksonville, Florida, and then we went on board the USS Franklin D Roosevelt. And we stayed on that for a year down there in Jacksonville with them. The country, I guess, was preparing for whatever they were going to do next. But it started because of the Pueblo incident.

00:33:02 Willie Drummond

That was also the time of the 68 riots. I was on active duty with the military at the time, away from the D.C. Fire Department. So I was not in D.C. Fire Department during the riots in 68 because I was on active duty with the Navy, you know, good or bad, whichever way you want to say it. You know what I mean? It just happened. They had the Pueblo incident, taking place and the possibility we might go to war over there in Korea and all that. Then they had the 68 riots, you know, with King being killed and all. And I came home. We was being shipped out of Watkins Glen to Jacksonville, Florida to catch the ship. So they let us have the weekend off. I came home for Friday, Saturday and Sunday to make sure everything with the family was all right. And then I went to down to Jacksonville, Florida. But I wasn't here during the riots, so they said it was tough. But I don't know nothing about that because I wasn't here. I was down in Jacksonville, Florida on that ship.

00:34:03 Amy Mauro

I bet the city was pretty different, though. When you got back after the riots.

00:34:06 Willie Drummond

Oh, yes, ma'am. It was a totally different city. The city was. ..You wouldn't know it. The city was burnt out. I mean, H Street, everything. It's just totally destructive, you know, throughout the city. And then the people were different, you know, the fire department was half and half. When I say half and half, the fire department basically was in an understanding position, but not necessarily totally happy with all the things that happened. I wasn't here, so I don't know what they went through and all during that period of time. But when I came back, I could not go back to Engine 17 because they had a full complement of personnel. So they sent me to Engine 8 over in Southeast Washington. So I went over to Engine 8, and then I was put on the ambulance over there because a new firehouse was just built. We was the first group of guys to go into the the new Engine 8. They tore the old Engine 8 down, built a new one. So we were opening up the new engine. So, you know, when I went over there, we just opened the door and we put a brand new ambulance in there, and we had the engine company in there, and we had Squad 3 in there. And so that's where I went coming home back from the military. And I stayed over there and I rode the ambulance out of there, and I road the ambulance out of Engine 4, Truck 4, because Truck 4 was by itself at New York Avenue and M Street. That was Truck 4's house and the ambulance. They had a truck in there and the ambulance in there, so I rode out of there. They had a Chevrolet station wagon.

00:35:59 Amy Mauro

As the ambulance?

00:36:00 Willie Drummond

And they had a Chevrolet station wagon at Engine 4 up on R street...One of the things about the fire department, when I came on after you got out your probation, you went to the ambulance. We had eight ambulances. You went to the ambulance for two years. Now everybody went to the ambulance for two years. Everybody jumped up and down, holler, scream, cried and whatnot. But like the chiefs, not the fire chiefs, but the chiefs, you know, battalion chiefs and all, they said, you're brand new at your probation. You need to know the city. So that's why they chose to put the guys on the ambulance because you road the city and you learn the city and you learn the area where your firehouse was at. So you had a good understanding of how the city was laid out and how the things in the city and how people in the city responded in different sections. What happened in Northeast or Southeast or whatever. You got a different clientele of people in all sections of the city. So everybody road the ambulance for two years. Then you could pick the firehouse you wanted to go to. You did your two years, then you could pick where you wanted to go and which was good. See? So that's how you get to go to different

places.

00:37:28**Amy Mauro**

Which house did you pick?

00:37:29**Willie Drummond**

Eight. Because I had done my two years on the ambulance, and I had just come back home because I was going to be, you know, still at 17, but because of the military, I had to leave and come back.

00:37:42**Amy Mauro**

That's my first due engine where I live now.

00:37:44**Willie Drummond**

Eight engine.

00:37:45**Amy Mauro**

Yeah. My kids go to Payne Elementary School.

00:37:50**Willie Drummond**

Anderson was a wagon driver at Engine 8. Would never take the test to be an officer. He was in the United States Marine Corps, and he looked like a marine 24/7 when you saw him. His clothes was always starched perfectly, and he could tell you almost 70% of the people in his first due district who they were by name. He walked his district every day. When he's working day work, he walked it in the evening. And when he worked night work, he walked it in the morning. And when he was off, he walked his district. Everybody in the 8 Engine district knew Anderson. He was the sharpest guy you would ever want to meet. In fact, we had a fire over there one time when we had a snowstorm and we had six, eight inches of snow on the ground. When the alarm came in, he told us exactly who lived in the house and where the fire hydrant was at. The fire trucks could not even drive down the street because there was so much snow on the ground. And he told us, we need to get 500, 400ft of three inch hose, 2.5 inch hose, and we could drag it from the hydrant where we're at to the house. And he was right on the money. And we had the civilians came out and helped us drag the hose down there, because we couldn't get the fire truck down there and put out the fire. But he was the sharpest guy, one of the sharpest guys I've met in the fire department in terms of knowing his district and whatnot. Because in those days before 68 and even after 68 to the early 70s, you walked your district every day.

00:39:38**Willie Drummond**

Because that's what you got quizzed on in the firehouse. They had drills in the firehouse every day. You sit down every day, and you got drilled in the firehouse on your district and and you know how to do different things and all that. And to me, that was fantastic. And if you was in a double house, you know, like a house that had an engine and a truck or a house that had a squad in it, everybody in that firehouse had to be turned over or operate all the equipment that was in the firehouse. If you was on an engine company, you went over to the truck company. If you was on the truck company, you went over to the engine company. If the squad was there, you went over to the squad. But you knew how to operate everything in that firehouse. And you had to go down to the training school and, you know, test out and everything, because that's what the captain of the company required.

00:40:30**Willie Drummond**

Because in those days, the captain would come visit your shift. If he wasn't on your shift, he would come visit your shift at least once a month and talk to you. And you would lay out your gear on your bed upstairs and make sure your clothes was right and everything. And he found out if you had any problems or didn't have problems. And he ran the firehouse. You couldn't get transferred. Nobody could come into that firehouse unless it went through the captain. He was the almighty, powerful person. If you wanted to do something, you had to see the captain, you know? And if you had some requests, whatnot. Whatever shift the captain was in, you come by on

the day. You know, if you weren't on his shift, you come by and sit down and talk to him. If you had a problem and whatnot, and he'd take care of it. But the captain ran his firehouse. Nobody came in that firehouse or out of that firehouse without him saying yes or no. It sounds crazy. He's a captain. But the chief would not send a man to the firehouse if the captain said he didn't want him, because that's the respect that the captain had. Because the chief was a captain, too, at one time. So that was the respect that they had. But captains was all powerful in the firehouse. He's the one that said who got a driving job. You know, technician job. He's the one that said it. If he said no, that was the end of that conversation with no chief or nobody to buck him. Whatever he did in his firehouse, the chief would go along with him. Because to be a chief, you had to be a captain. So you came through the system. So you knew how the system worked. But, you know, it was just great that the the fire Department was good, the chiefs was great, the captains was fine, and whatever the captain said it was fine.

00:42:20 **Willie Drummond**

But that's the only problem that I had at 17 Engine, because we had a technician job coming out. And Gerhart came on the job on 3/2/63, and I came on the job at 3/3/63, 30 days different. The wagon driver job came up. And Gerhart and I got along fine. We hung out in the street, played sports together and all. In fact, I met his girlfriend when they got to be girlfriend and boyfried, I was at his wedding, you know, the whole bit, you know what I mean? And he lived up in Pennsylvania.

00:42:58 **Amy Mauro**

And Gerhart's the captain?

00:43:00 **Willie Drummond**

No, Gerhart was a firefighter. Engine 17 is named after him.

00:43:05 **Amy Mauro**

Oh, okay.

00:43:05 **Willie Drummond**

He was a firefighter. Never took the test. Ran the firehouse. He did all the paperwork in the firehouse on all three shifts. Because you do have to do paperwork for people to get a promotion. I mean, to get your in grade paperwork. You have to put it in so many days ahead of time and all the paperwork ... he took care of all the paperwork in the firehouse. The lieutenants didn't have to do nothing but sit back because Gerhart took care of everything because that's what he liked doing. You know, he died in a fire in Pennsylvania when he was 60 something years old, still a volunteer. He was in his car, heard the alarm, went to the fire and died up there. But Jackson Gerhart, good as gold. I mean, you know. Anyway, so the power of a captain. A driving job came open, and the captain said it's Gerhart's job. He said, because I believe in seniority. I said, I got no problem with that. You're the captain. Ain't nobody going to buck it. Ain't nobody going to say nothing about it. Two months later, driving job came on. I know I got this job because I got five years in the firehouse on the next guy. I've been there five years before this guy. He said, we're going to have a test. I lost the job because the guy got one question right, that I didn't, and I fought it and I told him it's wrong. And we got on the fire truck and we cut down the woods and found a fire hydrant in the woods that I says, no way he would have known that. Or somebody told him. The fire hydrant was down by Providence Hospital in the woods, no way he could have known it. Wasn't even on the paper.

00:45:07 **Amy Mauro**

And was this at 17 or 8?

00:45:09 **Willie Drummond**

17. But you know. You live with it and you let it go. You know, the captain said, nope, we're going to have an exam. That was in that conversation. I said, but you just let Gerhart - you just gave him the job two months ago. And because he was senior to me about 30 days and I'm senior to Stanley by five years, you know. But I say, captain, don't worry about it. But I tell you what, I ain't driving no more, though. But Stanley can drive. Stanley couldn't find his way around the corner. But that's okay, because he passed the test and beat me out. So he is the

driver. If he can't find his way round the corner, that's left to him and his lieutenant. It ain't my word. I'm on the back step. I'm doing fine, you know. But I ain't driving. And I didn't drive. I didn't drive 17's wagon no more. You know, that was my rebellion. But I didn't fault nobody in that firehouse. I didn't fault Stanley. I didn't fault him or nothing. You know, we hung out and drank some liquor together along the way, too, you know? I mean, but it wasn't his fault. He took the test. He beat me out. That was his way. Even though I said somebody told him that fire hydrant was in the woods back there. But, you know, that's just part of living and part of the fire service. There are horror stories in the fire service sometimes along the way about little things like that. But those to me, I count as little things. You know, I don't call them big things. You know, that was just something, but it was fine.

00:46:48 **Willie Drummond**

Then after I went down there ... Engine 8 ... I went to the Fire Prevention Division. And I went to the Fire Prevention Division because I needed to work day work... I called up, in fact. I went down to the Fire Prevention Division, and Hopster was the assistant chief. And I knocked on the door down at his office and I said, chief, I need to work all day work. And he said, first of all, ain't nobody called me and told me you was coming here. You done broke every rule in the book because you supposed to get permission from your lieutenant, get permission from the captain, get permission from the chief, get the deputy involved, and then you can come see me, because I'm the assistant chief of operations. And I said, chief, after I tell you my story, if you don't believe in it or you don't like it, then you can put me on charges. So I went in his office, sat down, and told him my story. He called Chief Johnson, who was the battalion chief down at the Fire Prevention Division, and Chief Johnson said, I'll take him into the Fire Prevention Division. They called 17 Engine because I had gone back to 17 and they called 17 Engine and told him, Drummond is no longer at 17 Engine. He's at the Fire Prevention Division as of today. And that's how I got to Fire Prevention Division and I stayed there. And then went to the training school.

00:48:30 **Amy Mauro**

How many years were you in fire prevention?

00:48:33 **Willie Drummond**

From 68 to 90. 91 or 92. When I made sergeant, then I went down to training school. And then I made lieutenant, I went to Engine 5, and then I retired. But I was a fire investigator in fire prevention. After that, you had to be in the fire prevention division for five years before you could be an investigator. That didn't hold true either, because they made other guys that were less than five years. But that's another story. Ain't nothing to get excited over. I mean, it isn't, you know, sometimes you fight for what's right, but sometimes it's not worth the fight. You know, they made it. They made one guy a fire investigator who had, I guess, four and a half years on the job, you know, in the Fire Prevention Division. And the man told me, you got to have five years. I said, why you let him go on the job? I said, but don't worry about it, because I'm going to be there in the next couple of months anyway, so it don't make no difference.

00:49:42 **Amy Mauro**

So what do you think? What was the difference between you, the two of you?

00:49:45 **Willie Drummond**

He liked the guys, the guys liked him. He was a real flamboyant kind of guy, and everybody liked him, including me. You know what I mean? I wasn't mad with him. He was an entrepreneur. He sold extinguishers. I don't know the name now, but they was made out of halon, and he sold them to the State Department and got me involved. And I sold some to people. Halon is the the best firefighting agent in the world. You can strike a match and can put it out before the match actually grows. I mean, it saved the Russians. Used halon on all their space operations. Well, when halon first came out, you would die from halon because of the toxicity of the halon. But then they refined it and all. Then you could breathe it in and it would not kill you, but it could put out a fire before you could say hello. I mean, a spark in the halon would kick itself off. Now that's just my thing ... The entire Smithsonian Institute is protected by halon. They have a warehouse full of halon because you can't make halon no more because of the UN. In 1989, they outlawed halon because it affected the ozone layer. So you cannot use halon. But the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, and a lot of other museums around the world are protected by halon because it's that fast. I have halon in my garage, you know, but you can't buy it. I

got 1301. You know, it doesn't hurt people, but you can't buy it no more, and you can't use it no more. All the computer systems and centers around the country was protected by halon. And, when I was working for the State Department, all their computer systems was protected by halon. And even today here in the United States, most of the Pentagon is protected by halon, you know, but it's what they stored before they stopped making it. They stored it. ... And that's what he sold. He sold it to the Pentagon. I mean, he sold it to the State Department. They had it on their automobiles so that they wouldn't have fires in automobiles with dignitaries and all. Sold it to Secret Service. They put it on the White House cars and things, and he and I got along fine. And we got to be entrepreneurs together.

00:52:39 Willie Drummond

And I sold a line with him too and whatnot, but he became a fire investigator. I became a fire investigator a few months later, and I stayed a fire investigator until 91 or when I made sergeant ... Because when you retire, you need some more money. So I took the test and got promoted to sergeant. And even though I could have retired as a sergeant because we went ten years and did not promote anybody, so we had senior sergeants, you know, we pay depending on the day you came on the job, they made 100 senior sergeants, and it was based on the day that you joined the fire department. Well, they ended up with 101 sergeants because they authorized 100, but they ended up with 101. So I was the 101 because my captain at the Fire Prevention Division told me, don't worry about it. They don't mean nothing. You don't need to be a sergeant. So then I had to write a special report to the chief and say why you got guys that are being made senior sergeant because you got paid. You got guys being made senior sergeants. And I got years on them on the job. These guys, y'all came on in 63. These guys came on in 66 and 67. But my captain did not send my name in because, you know, your captain had to send the list in when guys came on the job. So he didn't send my name in. But anyway, so I got to be the 101st guy because they said it was unfair to make the hundredth guy lose out being a sergeant because of somebody else's mistake. So they ended up still making 100 and they made 101. So they made 101 ... life is what it is, and it's fine. So I stayed at the fire investigation that entire time, and I did 10,000 fires.

00:54:52 Amy Mauro

Investigated.

00:54:53 SPEAKER_S3

Mhm. And people say, how can you say that? The day I went to Fire Prevention Division, my lieutenant down there at the Fire Prevention Division asked me some questions about what I did. The first couple of days I was there, and I couldn't tell him. I couldn't remember, not because of memory loss or nothing, but I just didn't pay no mind on what I did. So I said, I know how to get around this. I got me some five by seven books, green books like that. And every day I went to work. I wrote the date down there, and what I did from that day forward, every day at work, I could tell you what I did and the time I did it, and I did that the entire time I was at the Fire Prevention Division. I got a stack of books like that. My wife can't stand them, but I still got them, you know. But I'll tell you what I did every day, because I got to ask the question I couldn't answer. So I said, this is the way to do it. But the book was only for the job. It wasn't personal, you know, I didn't put people's names and stuff in there unless it was pertaining to the job, you know what I mean? You know, it had no phone numbers and stuff like that in there.

00:56:01 Willie Drummond

But I did over 10,000 fires while I was investigating. I went to all the fires. If they had a fire, I went to it even before they would call you on the radio and ask for an investigator. I would just respond to the fires because it was a fire. A guy told me, the more fires you look at, the easier it is for you to recognize what to do, because everything burns different at different times. So you could have a trash can burning. And it looked this way today. You see the same kind of trash can tomorrow it look totally different because of the circumstances of the air and all these different components that go into it. So that's why I went to all the fires. That's why I have so many fires that I went to because I went to all the fires, you know, kitchen fire, automobile fire, trash fire, anything that said if they were putting water on it, I went to it if I was working. And that was just my way of learning how to look at different fires, because you could go in a building and look at something and say, no, that's not what you just said it was. It's something totally different because I've seen it before. And that's one of the things I think I pride myself in is the fact that I took time to learn how to be a great investigator. And like I say, the only way to do it is go to it. I show up and, "what are you doing here?" I come to see you had a fire, didn't you? And that's how I got to meet so many guys in the fire department. My shift, we was working eight

hour shifts. 7 to 4, 8 to 4, 4 to 12 ... three, three and three. Then they went to 24 and 48. And we were still working our shift. Then we went to two, two and four. We worked two days, two nights and off four days. So that's how come everybody say how, because our working schedule was different than the firefighter schedule. So it means I get to work with everybody.

00:57:58 Amy Mauro

Three shifts. Yeah.

00:57:59 Willie Drummond

So I got to work with all the shifts, all the time. You know, today I'm working with this shift. Tomorrow I'm working with another shift because of the way my work schedule was. And then we worked out of a full engine. We were working out of 6 Engine, the old 6 Engine down on Massachusetts Avenue. ... I started when 6 Engine moved to the new firehouse up on New Jersey Avenue. They turned the old 6 Engine into the community relations office. So the old six became the community relations office. Chief Burton W Johnson, he was the fire marshal. Then he became the fire chief. And when he became the fire chief, he and I was at the Pennsylvania Textile Institute up in Pennsylvania because we used to go up there when he was the fire marshal. I would drive him up to the Textile Institute because they have a week course up there. And just like dormitory living... And they eat in the cafeteria, like college students and everything. And they do a week thing up there. So we went up there for about three, four years, and I drove him up, you know, and that's when we went up there and he got promoted to fire chief. We was at the Textile Institute when the phone call came and said, you're now the new fire chief. So I said, chief, are you going back home now? He said, no, we're going to finish the week out and I'll go back home. So he stayed the whole week and then we came back home. But I took him up there as the fire marshal, and I brought him back ... as the fire chief. So we finished the week out up there like normal. Then the guys said, I guess you're going to get promoted now because you got the fire chief. You know, you've been coming up here all this time. I said, no, it don't work that way.

00:59:53 Amy Mauro

And that was Mayor Barry who appointed him, right?

00:59:56 Willie Drummond

Yes, ma'am. [Editor's note: Marion Barry did not become Mayor until 1979. So Mayor Walter Washington would have appointed Burton Johnson as Fire Chief in 1973.]

00:59:56 Amy Mauro

So can you tell us... I guess you worked pretty closely with Burton Johnson. Can you tell us a bit about him?

01:00:01 Willie Drummond

Well, when I told them I needed to work all day work? Chief Johnson was the Battalion Chief Johnson ... who brought me down there. And then when he became the fire chief, I stayed down there ... But Chief Johnson was my mentor. He he did a lot of different good things for me. He was a Mason. And when I applied for the Mason, he taught me how to be a Mason because I had one hour every day with him. Because you have to go to school in the masonry. So every day I had an hour set aside with him to teach me how, you know, I had to go in there and learn how to be a Mason. And he was taught me everything that I knew about the Fire Prevention Division. He encouraged me to be an investigator, but to be the best investigator. And so he and I was good friends. He and I never worked together as firefighters. We just worked together in the Fire Prevention Division, but he was well known throughout the entire city.

01:01:09 Willie Drummond

Then he said, we do a lot of things in the city, but we don't do enough for the city. So he wanted to start a community relations division. So I was in the Fire Prevention Division. Ted Holmes was in the Fire Prevention Division, and he took us over there and we became the community relations division. But the city itself had what they call, uh, I'm going to think of it in a minute. It was before the ANC. Each ward had one, and it was six

...

01:01:49 **Amy Mauro**

Six.

01:01:49 **Willie Drummond**

Six, six, six, six. I think of the name of it, but it was an organization similar to what they call the ANC to today. The ANC took care of just little areas. Each ward had a group of community guys, and it was a policeman, a fireman, the Department of Transportation. Every agency had a person that was assigned to the group, and they had meetings every month. And you went to the meetings and you answered questions for the fire department or police department, and you work with them and try to solve problems and all on the community level without advancing it up the line. And we had some problems with some shootings and whatnot because we went through a real terrible period during that period of time where ... Back then it was killing somebody every minute anyway. And we worked with the community, you know, with that and all kinds of other problems. And then we had the Metropolitan Police Boys and Girls Club came underneath of that, where we sent kids down to Point Lookout down in Maryland, and we sent 3 or 400 kids down there every two weeks. First we started every two weeks. Then we had to cut it to one week because so many kids was wanting to go in there. But these are the kind of programs that Chief Johnson put together, you know, along with Marion Barry. Barry was a very community kind of guy. And Chief Johnson just picked right up on it.

01:03:29 **Willie Drummond**

We introduced the smoke detector program. The city bought smoke detectors and put them out. Community relations went out there and worked the smoke detector program all over the city, because at that time, before the smoke detector program came in, we would lose between 100 and 120 people every year from fires. We put the smoke detector program in place, and I think in something like 10 or 12 years we were down to like 4 or 5 people dying from fires, and one year we had nobody dying in the District of Columbia from a fire. Thanks to the smoke detector program. See, programs can be worked and whatnot, but the smoke detector program actually stopped people from dying from fires in the District of Columbia.

01:04:13 **Willie Drummond**

The Fire Prevention Division helped out on the other side of the coin. If you had a fire in your house and a fire, you know, did any basic damage, the investigators would come out. They would write you a \$50 ticket for not having a smoke detector because you could get them free. So there was no reason why you should not have had them. So we would write \$50 tickets to people if we had a fire and they did not have a smoke detector, we didn't care if it worked or didn't work. If you had one, that's fine. I had wrote a lady up one time up on Rock Creek Park, up there off 16th Street. And me and the police got into it because I wrote the lady a \$50 ticket for not having a smoke detector. He said, but she got it sitting on the kitchen table or kitchen dining room table downstairs. I said, what good is it in a box down there downstairs? So what I'm saying... To me, that was not part of the the big picture. If you got a smoke detector, you're supposed to have it up. Not sitting on the dining room table. But we resolved it. She still got a \$50 ticket, But I mean, because, you know, you got to prove the point. If you're going to have a good program, have a good program. You can't bend back and forth, you know what I mean? And I wrote some people tickets that I really I mean, I actually went out to the fire truck and I was trying to find \$50 to give him. Because they were just that.

01:05:48 **Amy Mauro**

Poor.

01:05:48 **Willie Drummond**

Or that bad off. But the rules, the rule - \$50. You ain't got no smoke detector, it cost you \$50. You could have went to the firehouse and got one for free. But I had to do it. I didn't have to do it, but I did it because that was part of the job. And if I do it for this person, I got to do it for that person. That just was my way of looking at it. But everybody around knew, oh, you making that lady pay that? Yes, I'm making a lady pay. And if I come to your house, I'm gonna get you for \$50. You don't have one because you can stop down the firehouse and pick

one up for free.

01:06:19 **Amy Mauro**

I'd give my own mother a fine.

01:06:22 **Willie Drummond**

Basically, that's what it amounts to, you know? But the word got around, that you can go to fire, get a smoke detector and save people's lives. So, you know, in the big picture, it paid off because like I say, we were losing 110, 120 people a year from fires. And we get down to 10 or more a year.

01:06:42 **Amy Mauro**

Wow. We're around ten or less now. We've had years with less.

01:06:50 **Willie Drummond**

We've done really well since we had the smoke detectors program. You know, smoke detectors to me, is the best thing that ever happened for people.

01:06:58 **Amy Mauro**

Yeah.

01:07:00 **Willie Drummond**

Chief Johnson is the one that pushed it, and community relations. And we was out in the community all the time. And the thing that really helped the whole system is we had eight wards in the city. We had eight battalions in the city, and every battalion chief had to go to one meeting every month. He had to go to a meeting every month, all three shifts, one meeting a month that the battalion chiefs had to go to the community meetings and, you know, speak to whatever was going on in that particular area and all that. And it was a community relations type thing. You know, everybody got along because you knew people and you talked to people and you knew the problems sometimes before they actually got to be a problem.

01:07:50 **Amy Mauro**

Can you tell us more about Chief Johnson as a leader?

01:07:53 **Willie Drummond**

Oh, he was fantastic. Chief Johnson was. First off, he's a Washington boy. Second off, he came up in fire prevention. He was at Engine 4 as a firefighter and then came down to fire prevention. Did all the right things, encouraged to bring guys down to the fire prevention division to do a job. One of the things that I really liked about Chief Johnson was that Chief Johnson told you, you have a job to do, but you also have a job to do. In other words, you take the situation at that moment and make a decision. Everyone's not going to be the same, and all the decisions are not going to be the same. But take the moment and make the decision and then stand with it. He never encouraged us to just make everything black and white. Take the moment and deal with the situation. And if you deal with the situation for that moment, somebody else may not have done it the same way, or somebody else may not like what you did. But they weren't there at that moment. And to me, that's one of the greatest things he did. And that's what helped me when I was a fire investigator, because what happened at that moment is what you got to be concerned with, not what somebody said or what's going to happen. It's at that moment, and that's what makes the difference in how you can move forward and whatnot. And that's what he preached to the guys in the fire prevention division because he said, people are people.

01:09:27 **Willie Drummond**

We would go to lunch and we'd be sitting down at lunch for free. Because I tell everybody. People say I'm crazy, but I do. It's nothing wrong with somebody inviting you to lunch for free. I'm not saying that you're supposed to take graft or anything. That's not what it's about. It's about a camaraderie or a friendship between

two people. It's not about I'm paying you a \$20 lunch to get you to do something. It's just the way people do business. Basically, you're the fire marshal. I know you're the fire marshal. Have lunch on me. If a \$20 lunch is going to get me something for free, you know you're not the fire marshal. We would go to lunch because Chief Johnson and I, we had a very good understanding in terms of what I was doing and whatnot. We had a luncheon and we were sitting down and having lunch, and I called the maitre'd over and I said, uh, Chief Johnson said the exit lights are out. He saw it, I didn't. So he said, "lights out over there, Drummond." I said, okay. So I called the guy and you know what the guy said out of his mouth? "It must have just went out." The chief nodded his head. But that's the kind of guy he was. The guy had us go out there and talk to people when we inspected their places, and then impose upon them the importance of keeping things the right way. And the boy didn't hesitate. "It must have just went out. I got a man coming to take care of it."

01:11:06 Willie Drummond

But that's because of the communication between the guys and the fire prevention and the people out there doing business. You talk to them and you explain to them what your job is. And that's what I spent more time talking to guys about what they need to do than actually do an inspection, because they don't know what they're supposed to do. They opened a business, and that's what you got to go in there and teach them what they're supposed to do. And then Chief Johnson always said your job is to help the person have what they want. Go in there, you see things wrong, explain to them what it is and tell them how they correct it or not correct it or whatever, but they don't know. I worked in Georgetown. I was the first black inspector to ever work in Georgetown. Never had one in Georgetown until me. I went to an apartment complex up on Massachusetts Avenue, up there at Wisconsin and Massachusetts Avenue. And I went in there, and I cited a guy for something, and the first thing out of his mouth said, "I've been doing it this way for 40 years." I said, but I'll see you tomorrow. So the next day I went back and I said, you told me you've been doing it for 40 years, but here's the book. You've been doing it 40 years wrong. I wasn't even going to try to explain to him that what he did was wrong. I took the book to him and gave it to him and said, see right here, you've been doing it wrong for 40 years. My job was to help him do what he wanted, not beat up on him because he did it. And that's one of the things that Chief Johnson encouraged us always to do: teach the people what they're supposed to do because they don't know. People don't know.

01:12:50 Willie Drummond

And that's one of the biggest fallacies that as an inspector, if you don't teach people, you're not an inspector. I mean, I just left a job, and that's one of the biggest things that I ain't going to talk about that the Pentagon is depending on but your job as a fire inspector. And that's how I learned from Chief Johnson. Your job is to teach people what they're supposed to do, what they can do, and what they can't do because they don't know, you know, they're not fire inspectors. They don't read, you know, fire books and whatnot. They do their business to what they want to do. You go in there and help them do what they want to do, and that's what your job was. And that's what he encouraged all the inspectors to do. And that's what the biggest things that he taught us down there in the Fire Prevention Division, you go out there to help people have whatever they want, make sure they do it the right way. And if you do that, you've done a great job because it's not about writing people up. It's not about kicking people around. It's about helping people do what they want to do. And if you do that, you're at the top of the list. And then the city benefits and people benefit.

01:13:58 Willie Drummond

Just like going to the boys club, you know, police boys club, just like the community relations. We spent a lot of time talking to community people. We spent a lot of time out there in, in the city engaging with people and the fire trucks. They engaged too, because we had times where the fire trucks, we went out at least once when I was working at Engine 17, we would go out at least one day on our three day shift. We would just ride around the district, stop the fire truck, talk to people. That's what everybody did. You learn your district. You learn the people in your district, you see, and you become part of the community, not against the community because that's what you do. You go out there and let them see what you do, and you find out what they're doing and all that, and that's the difference. Even before I went to community relations, the fire engines went out at least one day on their shift just to ride around the district, see what's going on, and talk to people.

01:15:07 Willie Drummond

See, you know, we were like the school's best resource in the world. From September to October, we had ten fire drills in every school in the District of Columbia. When I was in the fire Prevention division from

September to October. You know who did them? The fire trucks, the engine companies, the truck companies. They went out there, went to the principal's office and said, okay, what days do you want to have it? They did it in September. They get a list together. And you went out there and you did the fire drills. You put them kids on the sidewalk or out in the playground and all that. We did it every year, but it made a difference. You ain't never heard of a kid getting hurt in the District of Columbia schools? I don't know what they do right now, but we did it.

01:16:00 Amy Mauro

They're supposed to do the same thing. So in our remaining time, and I don't know what what time you've got, I was thinking we would go until around five.

01:16:11 Willie Drummond

Whatever time. My time is your time.

01:16:14 Amy Mauro

So let's go to a higher level. Now that we've learned about the specifics of your career, can you talk about what would you say, looking back, are some of the highlights, the things that you remember the most that you're most proud of? And we may have already covered some with all the work you did in fire prevention.

01:16:37 Willie Drummond

I guess the biggest highlight I have is working in the training school. Because about the time I was in the training school, I worked for Chief Arthur and Chief Greene. Greene was the deputy. Arthur was the battalion chief. They said, we're going to be hiring about 300 guys. We're going to be hiring about 300 personnel. Because you can't forget about ladies, you know, because we had ladies. And I want to make sure that they graduate. We graduated 299.

01:17:16 Amy Mauro

Wow. Out of 300. In how many years?

01:17:20 Willie Drummond

In two and a half.

01:17:21 Amy Mauro

Wow.

01:17:26 Willie Drummond

299 out of 300 and the 300th person, we recycled her back to the next class and she just retired last year.

01:17:34 Amy Mauro

Who was that?

01:17:36 Willie Drummond

Oh I don't know her name. I know when I see her, but she was recycled back to the next class because, see, rules and regulations, they were firing people in the training school because people didn't know the rules and regulations. The book says if you are within a certain percentage, you can be recycled to the next class. And she was inside that percentage. And so we recycled to the next class. And then she, you know, passed and and retired. You know, I think last year she retired. But you got to know what the rule says. And if you know the rules it helps you out. But we did the 300. We did 299. Then we added the one. To me, that's the greatest thing that I've done in the fire department. I've been to great fires in the fire department. As a fire investigator, I've had the most expensive fire that ever took place. The post office fire down there at L'Enfant Plaza. I spent a

week down there, and I mean, that was a over \$200 million fire. Then they call it the cat fire there at New Hampshire Avenue and Massachusetts Avenue. I spent two weeks in there. They had the fire down at Pennsylvania Avenue and 14th Street at the National...right there next to the National Hotel. There was a big restaurant right there that everybody went to, and I spent three weeks in there trying, all done with denatured alcohol. It takes a lot to time to go in there to find it all. But the biggest fire that I ever had.

01:19:14**Amy Mauro**

When you say you spent three weeks, was that investigating?

01:19:17**Willie Drummond**

Day and night. Just, you know, it was my fire and the chief just let me, you know, let me just stay on until I found it. Denatured alcohol, you know, it was found. I found it in all three locations. They have never been able - ATF have never been able to reenact the post office fire. I mean, that's what they do ...

01:19:54**Amy Mauro**

We've been looking at photos in the museum. So some of these fires I've seen photos of.

01:20:00**Willie Drummond**

The Post office fire. It's the greatest fire that I've ever had down there, and it was one of the blessed fires that we had because Chief Green was on Engine 2 and when they came up the stairs to the building, they chose to go to the right instead of to the left when they came out of the stairway. It was the greatest savior in the world because he had his Engine 2, Truck 1. They was right there in the stairwell together, and they all chose to go to the right and not to the left. To the left they had a set of wooden doors. On the other side of that door was 2000 degrees of heat. If they had opened that door, they would have killed everybody in the hallway. But they went to the right, not to the left. To this day we talk about it. You walk through the building that was burnt out, and you see little metal stoves this tall with a little ring on the bottom like that. Those were the desks that were in there, and that was all that was left of them. Wooden desk and a little thing. Stamped metal about that tall, about three inches tall. And a little round metal piece on the bottom. And everybody walking. What the heck is it? That was the wooden desk. That's how much heat was in there. And if they'd have went to the left, that's what they would have been confronted with. But you know, that's the Man looks out for us. You know, He really looks out for people for that reason, you know?

01:21:39**Willie Drummond**

But I was very fortunate with the time that I was actually on the back step fighting fire, that I never got hurt. And to me, that's a blessing, you know. But we've been real blessed in terms of the Man holding His hand to us and firefighting. But I guess the biggest thing that I really enjoyed about the fire department was the people that I met in the fire department that took time to help people. Not that I say it again and I keep saying it, the awesome people in the fire department, I wouldn't give you two seconds for it, but in terms of the fire department and the personnel that was in the fire department, they've been great. They have helped people and they've done the things that's supposed to be right. Even when we had the Hammond case, where to this day, I'm still mad with him about it because we lost that case. Because the man say, "hit the hydrant." That was a word that volunteers used out in the county. Ain't no black I ever heard of hitting. No hiding. What the heck are you talking about? But that was a word that they used when they laid out going to a fire. But we didn't know that. But anyway, those kind of things are the ones that you remember that hurt.

01:22:50**Amy Mauro**

What? What was the Hammond case? Can you tell us more?

01:22:53**Willie Drummond**

That was the Hammond case. We sued the city because of discrimination in terms of promotions. And the greatest thing came out of the Hammond case is they did make some changes. You took the exams in the firehouse for all your all the driving jobs. You had to go to the training school and be tested at the training school. So they took it out of the hands of the officers in the firehouse, and they put it in the hands of the the

individual. Now that worked good for about 99% of the time. But then again, you had some people that said they're going to send a guy that didn't pass the test in the firehouse to go down there to the training school to get experience. And I say, if he ain't passed the test, he ain't supposed to go to training school. But they did it a couple of times, you know what I mean? But you had to fight. Just let it be known, you know that. Hey, he didn't pass the test. So why is he going to training school? Because if you pass the training school and the other guy got the job even though you didn't pass the test in the firehouse? You got the job because the training school said you passed the job. The test in the firehouse is only to get you to the training school. Then you go down there and and they, you know, going to test you on how to drive and do all the things that go with that. So you could actually lose in the firehouse and win at the training school if you let it happen. And it did happen so.

01:24:22 **Amy Mauro**

And so the hit the fire hydrant.

01:24:25 **Willie Drummond**

That was just - they're saying that because of the terminology. We're saying that the terminology was geared to White guys from the county.

01:24:38 **Amy Mauro**

Right. They had volunteer experience.

01:24:40 **Willie Drummond**

And the District of Columbia did not never have a volunteer except back in 18 something. But we didn't have volunteers in the district. So the lingo used in the county and what's said in the city is night and day difference.

01:24:55 **Amy Mauro**

And they would use that to disadvantage you during the testing process.

01:24:59 **Willie Drummond**

That's what they did. And they did it and got away with it, because we had a chief set up on the stand and said, well, you should have known. And the judge went with it. What can I say? You know. So we lost the Hammond case for promotions. But in the long run down the road, we got some things back, because that's why we went through ten years of not promoting anybody. Then we got on the short end of the stick when ten years was up. Because when we started promoting after ten years, that's how come we had senior sergeants, senior lieutenants, senior captains. Two things happened during that period of time while the Hammond case was taking place. We didn't get no promotion. The only people we could hire was cadets. We couldn't hire nobody off the street. Nobody got promoted or anything. So they made senior sergeant, senior lieutenants, senior captain. The piece that I still fight to this day. And as long as you know I see him. I tell him all the time. A lieutenant was promoted to captain because he was a senior lieutenant. He got promoted to captain. A sergeant got promoted to lieutenant because he was a senior. These are guys that actually had these ranks before they went to seniority. So that means a lieutenant was made captain. A sergeant was made a lieutenant. Now you got firefighters that's going to be made senior sergeants to to be a senior sergeant. Okay. The union wrote it in the testimony that the lieutenants and the captains will stay, and the sergeants will go back. 90% of the captains was white. 85% of the lieutenants was white. 90% of the sergeants was black. The sergeants had to go back to being firefighters. The lieutenants and captains stayed when they got made. Senior sergeants, I mean senior lieutenants and captains. They never took it off. They stayed there. All the sergeants went back to being whatever they were. To this day, they say it didn't happen. I say, look at the books. The book don't lie. To this day, blacks took a real beating from that, and they never recovered from that when they hired and started promotion, the regular promotion. We made 100 sergeants the first day. 80% of them was white boys. That was not even on the job when they when they took the test, they got promotion dates before they came on the job. See, because the fire department has what they call common practice, which ain't good. It's good for White boys, but it ain't good for Blacks, because no Black has ever won a common practice thing. Never. Like I say, when I took the driver test the captain said seniority. But it's a common practice that the senior man get. Ain't no such thing as common practice. Flip the coin over. If a White boy does. You know, if a Black guy did something, White boy say, well, it's common practice. He said, okay, and the district government goes along with it because there's nothing in writing that

says common practice is in the DC fire department. Nothing. But it works every day until the Black guy brings it up. Then it doesn't work. I mean, I'm just being honest, you know? But that's just the way the government, I mean, that's just the way the fire department is.

01:28:35 Willie Drummond

We hired the guys. Now we're moving to today. We hired guys in the DC fire department whose kids and we talked about nepotism. Chief Ellerbe's brother couldn't get promoted in the fire department because Chief Ellerbe became the fire chief. But Chief Ellerbe's brother got his promotion when he wasn't even here as the fire chief. So when his turn came along to be promoted, he couldn't get promoted because now his brother came along and he's the fire chief. So you can't promote him because of nepotism. But we turned around and hired at least 10 or 12 firefighters whose daddies was battalion chief, fire chiefs and assistant chiefs without even taking an exam because they had some experience in the county. If that ain't nepotism, I don't know what it is. I mean. The fire department. I say it again and I keep on saying it. The fire department is great. It's individuals that makes the problem with the fire department. They change things to suit certain people. We've had a lot of Black fire chiefs in the fire department, and none of them ever had the opportunity to do the things that they wanted. Chief Ellerbe, perfect example. Chief Ellerbe, to me, was a real smart individual. He really didn't need this job financially because he had outside financial things. Chief Ellerbe told the fire department, I want to change some things in the fire department. I'm the fire chief. I want to make some changes. ...

01:30:30 Willie Drummond

One of the greatest things that we did in the DC fire department in district government was do away with 25 mile limits on where you had to live. When we allowed guys to live anywhere they wanted to, they lost the fire department. People live anywhere they want to. They lost the fire department. During my period of time on the DC Fire Department, everybody lived within 25 miles of the United States Capitol. You could get a waiver if you wanted to live somewhere different. And we had a number of guys that got waivers. That was not the problem. The problem was you was connected to the city and the community. And again, we back to the community thing where being responsive, going out in the community, learning your district, talking to the people you had, the community relations over there where people did programs and the companies went out and did the school things and all. This is how this was a community thing. 70% of the guys in the DC Fire Department, Black, White, lived in the District of Columbia at one time, went to schools in the District of Columbia. No Blacks went to Anacostia High School until here lately, that was all White school. People don't know it. Eastern High School, that was an all White school. You know, they built Spingarn High School for Blacks. That's how Spingarn got built, because we couldn't go to Anacostia and we couldn't go to Eastern. So they built Spingarn. But these are the things that people don't know and understand. But these guys went to school there. They lived in this city. They enjoyed this city. They lived within 25 miles of the Capitol.

01:32:05 Willie Drummond

And that's what the community relations did is made people part of what the fire department did. We had the boys club, we got Camp Brown down in Maryland. We had firemen down there with fire trucks down there, along with policemen down there. I mean, so we was involved with the community and community relations. We even had a dance program. We would get the different fire trucks to come to the senior citizens complexes downtown and around the city, and they come dance with the senior citizens during the daytime. The fire trucks come up, guys, go in there and dance with the senior citizens. I mean, these are things that we did as a community relations and the city fire department themselves. Don't nobody know. Ain't nobody. I bet you \$10 nobody even knew. We used to let the fire trucks go to the firehouses. You know, go to the apartment building and dance with the seniors. But they did go in there, spend a little time in there, dance with the seniors and enjoy themselves and all. But that's the community reacting to people in the community and all that. You know, five minutes, you said you opened a new apartment building. We would ask the people that was going to move into the apartment building to come to classes. We hold classes in the buildings themselves to teach them about all the different things that's in the building, you know, all the fire stuff and all the things they do in terms of cooking appliances and things and what you should and should not do. We was active with that stuff. The engine company was active with it. The fire trucks was active with it. We did that because we was all part of the city, and these came about because of the chief being in charge and the chief saying that this is what we're going to do and that's all that matters. We was a quasi military organization. So if the chief said that that was the end of it, we stopped.

01:33:49 Willie Drummond

We went from two years on the ambulance to one year on the ambulance because we got a flex of White boys on the job. And they say, all right. So chief said, okay, we're going to let you do it for one year. Then the next thing you know, nobody road the ambulance. The only way you got on the ambulance, you got to ask, but could I ride the ambulance? But these to me, are the things that has hurt the fire department.

01:34:13 **Amy Mauro**

You know, they are required now to ride the ambulance.

01:34:15 **Willie Drummond**

Oh, I know that now. It changed back. But to me, it was good because you learn the city. You knew the city, which is good, you know, and that's to me.

01:34:26 **Amy Mauro**

Also, EMS is 80% of their jobs. So that's another reason.

01:34:29 **Willie Drummond**

That's what's important. Yeah, but we were doing it when we knew. I agree with you. ...

01:34:44 **Amy Mauro**

Now they do it on rotations. I don't know the exact number of weeks, but it's on a regular basis.

01:34:49 **Willie Drummond**

But that's good because they learn the city. Right? You know, it's tough when you call for a piece of equipment and can't get there because you don't know where it's at. Yeah. I mean that's the way I look at it, you know, that's why the ambulances you learn because you could drive around. You didn't just sit in the firehouse, you rode around. You know, that's good, though. That's a good thing, though. But I don't take nothing from the fire department, but I just take things from the people that ran it and people that ran it made some changes that to me, I don't like, but I don't try to, you know, get into it because it's not my place, you know what I'm saying?

01:35:24 **Willie Drummond**

I enjoy the fire department. Two things that the fire department taught us when we was in the fire department. Learn everything you can about the fire department if you worked in a firehouse, know everything in that firehouse, because any time something goes down, you can help pick it up. Because if you was in the engine company, you could pick up on the truck company. I went to 13 engine one day. I'm the officer in charge. I'm a sergeant. I was detailed to engine 13. The first thing the man says to me is we don't have no truck. I said, why, we don't have a truck. It's sitting right there. He said, but don't nobody know how to tiller it. What do you mean? Don't nobody know how to tiller it. They had a straight line truck. They did not have a tiller on the back. So nobody ever went nowhere to learn how to tiller the truck. I'm the sergeant. That was your lieutenant and captain job. To make sure y'all went somewhere and learn how to tiller. I was at 17 engine, went to 26 engine at least once a tour to learn how to tiller a truck you see or go down to ten engine to learn. But that's what we did in the battalion. These guys got a truck. Nobody can tiller it. We get a box and we first due and nobody can drive, tiller the truck. I'm in charge. I ain't supposed to be riding in the back tilling. But these are the differences in times is what I'm trying to get at. You need to have the people in the firehouse know how to operate everything in the firehouse. You can't just be isolated on one piece of equipment and not know the other piece of equipment, because anything can happen.

01:36:56 **Willie Drummond**

You know, my brother was at Squad 1. He had a White squad driver up there. He was a squad driver 18, 20 years. We ran out of money, so we had combination units. The squad and the engine ran together. So depending on the call, depending on what piece of equipment, you took out the firehouse. Now he's a truck driver. I mean, he's a squad driver, but he was laying out on the back step of the engine company, and if it was a squad run, then

the guys on the engine would come over to the squad and they'd ride on the squad. But they knew both pieces. They knew how to work the engine and fight fire, and they knew how to ride the squad. And do you operate the equipment then? They don't. I don't know if they do it now or not. I can't speak to something that I don't know, but you knew everything in your firehouse. I mean, you know, I was an engine company man, but I could tiller, I could drive the truck. I could put the ladder up because everybody, you know, that's what it made you learn. Everybody learned every job in your house. If you was in a house that had a squad, you learned how to ride the squad. If it had the hazmat unit in it, you learn the hazmat unit. So it just depends on how the people in the Department make things work ...

01:38:18 Willie Drummond

We set the tone on everything in the country here in the District fire department. We had the the best training academy in the United States. People came here from all over the world to look at our training academy. We're one of the first training schools in the United States that had a burn building where you could go in there and burn and whatnot. We had a room where we could raise the temperature and the heat inside the room to see how much heat a person could take and all that. And then they would have a big clock outside, and then you could see how much heat you actually took. Nobody in the country did that but us. We had the best apparatus division in the United States. People came here to see how we did it. We could fix everything from the front door to the back door on a piece of apparatus. We had guys that came down there as interns. They started at the bottom, sweeping the floors in there. Next thing you know, they mechanics and all. We set the tone for the fire service in the United States. I mean, it's bar none. And you go around the country and you talk to people. I'm not talking about these young guys right now. I'm talking about the old guys. They'll tell you, we set the tone for fire fighting in the United States ...

01:39:38 Willie Drummond

In fact, they got a fire fighting training film at the training school that I'm in. And I'm sitting inside the room smoking my pipe, and they showed it around. And the reason I did that was because I was trying to impress upon the young recruits, if you have the right equipment on and you follow what your equipment does and do the things you're supposed to do, you're not going to get hurt. That was to build confidence in the equipment and whatnot. They like to build it up. I go in there and sit down right there, and they'd be in there fighting fire, and I'd be sitting there smoking my pipe. And they say, but how? Because I had confidence in the equipment that I had on, and I had the knowledge of what I was doing. People don't realize you can take that coating and live just like this with it over your nose, and you could walk 100ft through a fire, through smoke and fire, because it's air inside it. It's not contaminated. But you have to know that just because that bottle run out don't mean you got to die. Because you got that coat on. That coat is what's going to keep you living if you know how to do it. All you do is pull it up over your nose and keep on going. But that's what you learn when you talk to old guys. Because when I came on the fire department, we had no self-contained breathing apparatus.

01:41:06 Willie Drummond

You survived, you know, and we've lost a lot of these traits because of modern stuff. And. Everything good is not good, and everything new is not new. So, you know.

01:41:24 Amy Mauro

I have two more questions for you.

01:41:26 Willie Drummond

Yes, ma'am.

01:41:27 Amy Mauro

So how does your career with the fire department continue to impact you today?

01:41:32 Willie Drummond

Oh, it's because the DC Fire Department allowed me to do something that I never could have done because of my working for the DC Fire Department and the Fire Prevention Division, I was able to get a job at the State

Department as a fire protection specialist. First black guy that ever was a fire protection specialist at the State Department. What the fire protection specialist does is he inspects consulates and embassies around the world. You go out there and you inspect them just like you inspect buildings here in Washington DC. I was fortunate enough to go to 177 countries and 249 cities with the State Department. I was fortunate enough to work with over 200 fire companies to make sure that they respond to a US embassy or consulate, that they knew what to do and how to do it. Because I went to training with them. I had exercises with them where they responded to the embassies or the consulate. So in terms of working with the fire department, the fire department allowed me to do things around the world that I could have never done. I mean, I've, I've been to Portugal where we set a smoke bomb off at the US embassy in Portugal, and they responded the entire operation like the building was on fire. But guess what? We knew what they was capable of doing, and we knew what we needed to do, and we came up with plans to make things easier and better for them. And I've done that all around the world. I did it in China. I've been to China ten times, you know, I mean, and I'm not boasting about what I do, but I'm saying but that's what the fire Department allowed me to do. People to people program. I was on the people to people program. I spent seven weeks in China teaching the Chinese fire department electrical fires and the dangers of them and all that came from them because I have a high voltage expert I work with at Pepco.

01:43:53 Willie Drummond

When I was working for the DC Fire Department, I worked for Pepco and went to school with them, and they taught me about high voltage expert. 13,000V of electricity. You do not want to touch it. You don't want to be around it. That's the most dangerous electrical number in the electrical system. But I learned that by going to school with Pepco because we've had fires in the city and they taught me how to investigate them, and they taught me what was and was not, you know, and then, like I say, I'd be able to use that around the world. And like I say, I've been you name it, I've been to it and helped train fire departments in Africa, Asia, see what they can do when they're going to come to protect our people and our embassies and chancellors, you know, make sure that they know what to do and what not to do. I've trained over 5000 people around the world... In fact, in Sri Lanka, I got a basic award for Sri Lanka because I had training there. And the next month they had a fire in the embassy and the ladies that worked there put the fire out. Because we did live fire training, you know, with the hose and everything. And they had a fire there, and the ladies used the hose and put out the fire and all of it came about because we had training on it ... with fire extinguishers. You know, we actually set fires and let them put it out with the fire scenes and all that.

01:45:29 Willie Drummond

So that's what the fire department really did for me, because they made me a world traveler and, you know, and I could have never done that without the Fire Prevention Division. And that came about because the fire department allowed me to do things. I've been all over the United States. You know the only thing that I dislike is I applied to ATF to be one of their investigators for ATF, and they said no. And I told him, I said, it's okay, but you'll not find a better inspector in the United States. You won't because I'm certified to investigate, to look at pictures and give a determination. And it ain't ten guys in the country can do that because I've done that in court 3 or 4 times. Look at pictures and give a determination. Because I'm an expert in court in the United States Court, the District Court, US Superior Court, US Court of Appeals, the US Court of Bankruptcy, the US Court of Appeals in Virginia, the US Superior Court in Virginia, the bankruptcy court in Maryland. I've been declared an expert in all them courts, you know, so I feel good.

01:46:50 Willie Drummond

But it all came about because of the training that I got in the DC Fire Department and the people that was in the DC Fire Department. Chief Johnson, Burton W Johnson, he was the fire chief, got me in community relations. So I knew how to talk to people and work with people and make sure that we could do the right thing. Bernard Johnson, he was my captain. He was my lieutenant, and he was my captain. Then he went to Fire Prevention Division, and he was the deputy fire chief. And we used to run together anytime they had a multiple fire. And if I was working, he called Carl Levin. That's me. He called Carl Levin. He'd say, respond on the box because he and I worked hand in hand together because he wasn't what I call the greatest firefighter.

01:47:34 Willie Drummond

But he and I worked together because by me being a fire chief in the United States Air Force, I learned a lot of different things in the Air Force than we have in the regular firefighting. And I was able to take some DC fire department stuff to the United States Air Force, which they adopted, because we treat large plane airplanes like

an apartment building instead of standing up, it's laid down. So now instead of fire, the Air Force firefighters go to a building, to a fire and surround it. And with foam, they now cover the wings and leave the top of the aircraft open and cut a hole in it so everything can go up in the air so the people inside can survive. And if you look at some of the crashes that have happened around the country, you'll see them. That's something that I introduced to the United States Air Force. And now firefighters around the country do that, that they don't put that foam on top of that aircraft. They open that aircraft at the top to allow that fume and smoke to go up. Then you can walk people out because everything's going up. That's what I learned about being in the fire department.

01:48:46 Willie Drummond

You know, we never had training for the president's helicopter. I gave the DC fire department their first set of silver gear. That's where they can run into. ... I took it from the Air Force and gave it to them, because I was the fire chief, and I had the equipment and I had money, and they didn't ever have none, because all they had was the regular firefighting gear. So I gave it to them down there downtown. You know how I did it. That's another story. You know, I gave them their first twin engine unit. You know, they had a big twin engine set up at 31 Engine. I went to Bethesda down to Belvoir and got it and brought it to him. ... But see, because you have an opportunity to do things to benefit other people and you take advantage of it. I knew people in the military side of the house because I was in the Air Force. ... There was some Air Force stuff that we transferred to D.C. Fire Department because, you know, we could do that. And that's how you work, you know? Personally I've done very well. And I'm not mad about nothing that I've done. The only thing I tell people is. The fire department is going to make my correction someday.

01:50:26 Amy Mauro

Make your correction. Huh?

01:50:29 Willie Drummond

I'm a lieutenant. I retired as a lieutenant, but I get paid as a sergeant.

01:50:35 Amy Mauro

That sounds like a big error.

01:50:37 Willie Drummond

No - common practice.

01:50:41 Amy Mauro

So last question, and then you can tell us what we've we've forgotten to ask. So for a visitor to our new website that will launch on October 1st, say it's someone who knows nothing about the fire department. They're looking at the website to learn its history. What do you want the public to know about the years you spent with the department? So 1963 to 91.

01:51:08 Willie Drummond

95.

01:51:09 Amy Mauro

95? So what are the most important things that you want people to know about that department?

01:51:16 Willie Drummond

That the fire department was very community oriented and the fire department was really an excellent expertise, had the expertise in their jobs. They knew what to do and what not to do. And the biggest thing was that they was able to save lives with smoke detectors. To me, that's the greatest thing that happened in my time is being able to go from over 100 people dying from fires down to where we lost maybe 1 or 2. At the end of my career, to me, that's the greatest thing. And that all came about because of Chief Johnson. He introduced that smoke

detector program, community relations. And if they don't learn nothing else in the fire department, that's the greatest thing that I saw in the whole fire department. You know, we've lost a few people along the way in the fire department service, but it wasn't necessarily because of the wrong that was done. It's just something that happened, you know? So to me, that's the greatest thing and what makes them better. We started the smoke detector program. Now everybody in the country do it right. Nobody did it before us. We started it. Now you got a guy up at the National Fire Academy. Clark? Who's Doctor Clark up at the National Fire Academy. Doctor Clark worked for me. At the Community Relations.

01:52:37 **Amy Mauro**

We know him well.

01:52:38 **Willie Drummond**

Yeah, but he worked for me at community relations. I was at community relations. He came over there and, you know, and that's how he and I got to working together, you know what I'm saying? Because we used to go out and do programs in the schools and do programs, you know, out in the school and do the different magical things and all, like with the flower and all that... You know, when I see him, I always tell him, I say, aren't you glad you know me?

01:53:08 **Amy Mauro**

I hope he says, yes.

01:53:10 **Willie Drummond**

No, it's because we work together. Yeah, I know, I know.

01:53:14 **Amy Mauro**

So anything else you want to add? Anything we forgot to talk about?

01:53:17 **Willie Drummond**

Nope. The fire department's been good. It's like I said, it's just a few people that did things that were not necessarily right. But you learn to live with what it is, but you don't die of it. And that's what I do. I learned to live with the good of the fire department and firefighters. Been good to a lot of guys. It's no way you can take a guy with a high school diploma, teach him and let him have a great career and one that he can be proud of, and he can walk around with his head high. You can't do that with everything, but you can do that with the fire department, you know? And there's a lot of guys around here that has a lot of respect because of being in the fire department, because they went out there and helped people, you know, and that's the key to it. They went out there and helped, but they won't say it. Some of them won't. But they went out there and helped people. You know, they didn't go out there and tear people's places up. They went out there and helped people. But the big thing is the smoke detector, I think is the greatest thing that happened in my lifetime in the fire department, because it saved people's lives.

01:54:21 **Amy Mauro**

It's pretty amazing, you know?

01:54:23 **Willie Drummond**

And the second thing, and it's not nothing to do with the fire department when, you know, when when the telephone company went to, you could answer a phone and the phone would ring and you could answer the other side? We had a fire one night, and the young fella on the telephone was saying, my house is on fire. And we had a tendency at the communication division to call the number back, especially if it was a child, and they called the number back and they said, uh, that line is not busy. One of the persons in the communication section, which I did not know myself at that time, said, you know, they got this new thing where you can call the phone and it's no busy signal on it. So the chief dispatcher said, dispatch the companies and the house was on fire. But we learned that moment that things changed, that benefitted people because we were called when kids called the

communication division. You call this number and see if it's busy. But they had that new system where it didn't show busy. And, you know, the chief operator said, let's send the companies. And it was a Friday. So advancements help and it's great, you know, and that's the same thing we did with smoke detectors. We did the same thing with the telephone. And those are to me, the two greatest things that happened in the fire department that I think helped more people than anything. You know, because I worked at the communications section because we had a switchboard up there. You need to pull the plugs and all. I worked up there for about six months, and that was a good experience. But there was the two, I think the two biggest things that really helped people from the fire service side of the house, you know, we did a lot of good communication, communication things. But I think those are the two biggest: smoke detectors, and that's being able to call the people and send the companies to the houses and all, you know. But, we've been doing good, and the fire department has been good. You know. But I'm fine. See, because I try not to to put negative things out for people.

01:56:38 **Amy Mauro**

Well that's good.

01:56:39 **Willie Drummond**

Thank you.

01:56:40 **Amy Mauro**

Thank you so much for your time. We really enjoyed it. Yeah, that was great. And if you think of anything else you want to share, just let us know.