

# Former Chief John W. Forbes Among First To Form Fire Co.

(Second in a series of five articles profiling the chiefs of the Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Company.)

Among the first to pursue the idea of forming a volunteer fire company in Stuarts Draft was John W. Forbes II, who became chief three years after the Draft unit was created in 1950.

In those early years, Forbes said, volunteers went door-to-door collecting money to keep the company going.

Most people, believing that a fire company in Stuarts Draft was vital, were as generous as they could be. But Forbes, whose 18 years as chief give him the honor of having served in that post longer than anyone else, remembers one not-so-generous resident who soon had a change of heart.

That individual, when approached for funds, refused to help, saying he "did not believe in such matters," Forbes said. A week later his house caught fire and was saved by the efforts of the fledgling fire company.

So embarrassed was the man that he swore he would donate \$20 a year from then on.

"It was no picnic getting called out all hours and getting no sleep some nights...But I wouldn't trade it if I could," Forbes said of his service to the fire company.

The two saddest fires Forbes remembers both involved loss of life. One occurred on Route 608 South near Cold Springs, when a house burned to the ground killing two people. The other, a house fire on Route 624 in Lyndhurst, took the life of one man.

Forbes remembers the worst fire related fireman accident in the Draft was on Nov. 24, 1943, involving a structure fire on Route 608. Responding to the call, Capt. W.M. Beard was killed instantly when his truck was rammed by a train he didn't see coming since there were no signals at the time.

"I saw the truck and heard the train coming. I frantically waved to stop him. But it was too late. The driver never saw him," he said.

During Forbes' 18 years, the fire department...

honorary member and honorary chief and in 1978 received an award in appreciation for his service to the community and fire department.

Today, at 74, Forbes, who served a total of 21 years with the

fire department, would like to be remembered as a willing volunteer who spent many hours in service to his community. "Many times I had to leave my family to help someone in need. But I wouldn't trade it if I could," he said.



## Former Fire Chief

John W. Forbes II, who was chief of the Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Company from 1953 to 1971, has the distinction of having served in that post longer than anyone else. Now retired, he is currently an honorary chief for the company. (Photo by Kinsinger)

During Forbes' 18 years, the fire department covered the area from Greenville to the Dooms and Waynesboro areas and from Afton Mountain to Fisherville, a radius of 10 miles and diameter of 20 miles.

During his term as chief, Deihl Motors of Stuarts Draft for seven years supplied the department, free of charge, a new red chief's car. Also one John Beam high pressure and vollume GMC truck was put in service and a utility van was purchased.

Forbes retired in 1971 because of failing health. He was elected