



A fireman rests after fighting the three-alarm basement fire in Willowbrook State School.

100 firemen quell fire at Willowbrook

Some 100 firemen fought heavy smoke and dripping tar for more than three hours yesterday afternoon before bringing a three-alarm fire in Willowbrook State School under control. Seven persons required hospital treatment.

The fire broke out shortly before 2 p.m. in a remote corner of the basement of Building No. 4, a two-story brick building used as a kitchen.

The basement area was used to store civil defense equipment in cardboard boxes and contained a pump for the refrigeration unit.

Firemen first attempted to reach the fire by stretching a

hose down through the basement to the corner where the fire was located.

Fire Department officials said that the hose had to be stretched 200 feet before the fire could be reached.

They added that firemen were forced to feel along for the hose because of the thick smoke and that, when they arrived, they almost immediately had to turn back because their masks were running out of air.

"The smoke and distance made it similar to a sub-basement fire," Chief John O'Mally of the 22nd Battalion said.

As firemen tried to fight the blaze by crawling through the

basement, Ladder Co. 82, which has a pneumatic drill among its equipment, was called to drill holes through the concrete flooring.

As the ladder company attempted to drill three holes through the 10-inch floor, the superpumper and its three satellites joined the 10 engine companies and five ladder companies already on the scene.

Firemen coming up from the basement struggled over to a place in the courtyard to rest from the heat and the smoke.

As the holes were drilled, hot tar came spurting out of them. The tar had been applied to

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Firemen assemble in front of Building No. 4 at the Willowbrook State School to fight the three-alarm blaze there. The fire raged out of control for more than three hours.

S.I. Advance Photo by Tony Carannante

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help water proof the basement.

When the holes were finally drilled after an hour, tar dripped down on the men underneath trying to work the hoses on the blaze.

After the holes had been drilled, the main body of the fire was put out by spraying water through them. The fire was declared under control at 5:15 p.m.

Four firemen, a Fire Department photographer and two officers were injured fighting the fire.

Capt. Daniel Alttillo of the Division of Training was overcome by ammonia fumes when the flange on the refrigeration piping broke.

Overcome by smoke inhalation were Lt. James F. Lessing of Engine 154, and Firemen Nicholas Grausso of Ladder 83

and Robert Vigar and Frank Schmidt of Engine 166.

Anthony Delle Donne of 939 Castleton Ave., West Brighton, a photographer for the department, had his right leg punctured by a piece of flying metal, and Fireman Joseph Petosa of Engine 155 suffered a gash on the left hand.

All were taken to St. Vincent's Medical Center for treatment and were later released.

A spokesman for the department said that during the afternoon all men who fought the fire in the basement had to be relieved because of smoke exhaustion.

Deputy Chief Salvatore Valenza directed the operations inside the building, while acting Deputy Chief John Hess directed the entire operation. Chief Walter Hill of the 22nd Battalion, the first unit on the scene, initially directed the

operations.

Special units that arrived on the scene were Rescue Co. No. 2 from Brooklyn, three Fire Department mask service units and ambulances from the Fire Department and Sea View Hospital.

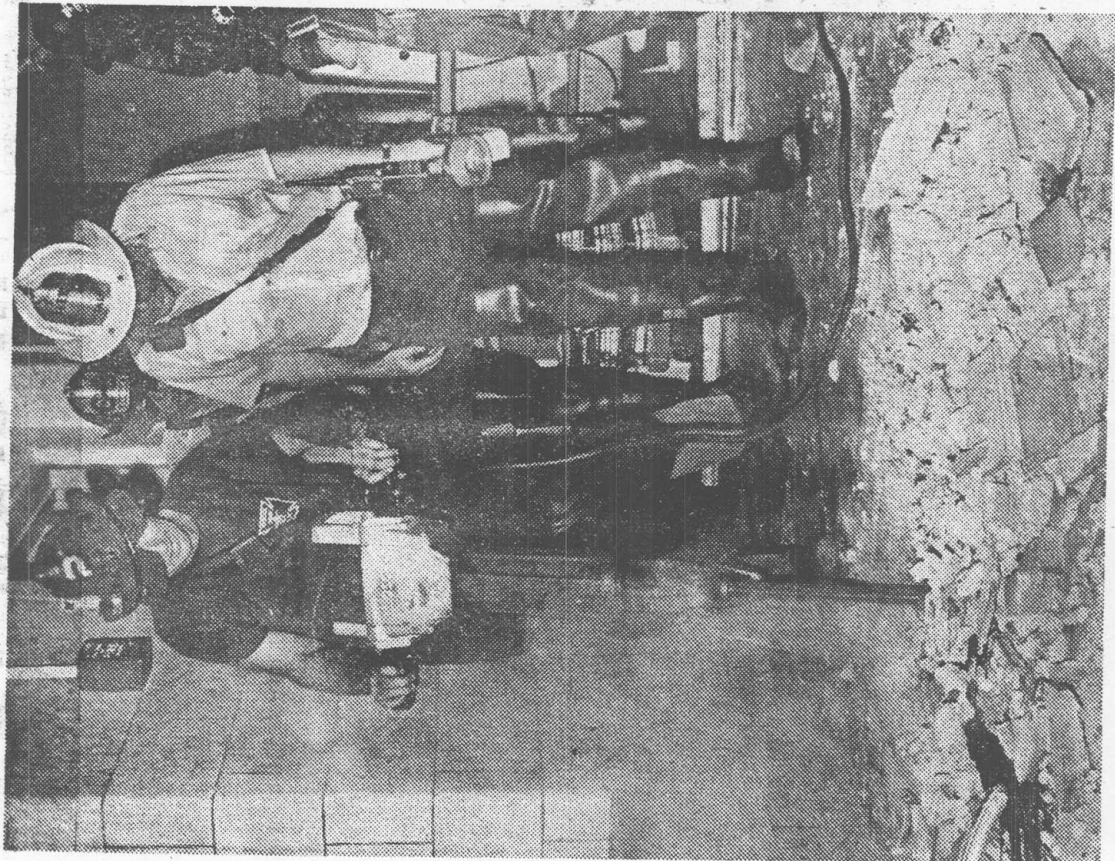
No one in the building at the time of the fire was injured, but the building, which serves meals to some 2,500 residents at the facility, was closed and the residents taken elsewhere to eat.

The last unit left the scene after cleanup operations about 9 p.m.

The investigation of the fire is under the direction of First Deputy Fire Commissioner Vincent M. Canty.

Since May 16, the department has answered over 237 false alarms at Willowbrook, including four yesterday before the fire broke out.

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Firefighters cut through floor of the room above the fire in order to put hoses in holes on the intense flames.

5-1. Advance Photos by Tony Carannante



Paul Monserate, a plumber, goes over the blueprints to Building No. 4 at Willowbrook State School during the three-alarm fire in the basement.