

leadership of the fire school, where he served until his death.

Chief Henry D. Smith took over for Brayton in 1957 and served until his retirement in 1986.

During Smith's tenure the school, like the fire service itself, underwent many changes. The school experienced many ups and suffered some downs.

The fire service became more professional. Sayings such as "high tech" and "state of the art" started becoming synonymous with fire service equipment. Training became very technical, with strict guidelines and procedures.

The school kept growing and expanded to include overseas programs and in-house training of foreign firefighters. As attendance grew, so did revenue, providing more money for advanced equipment, upkeep, and personnel training.

The school became more polished and it didn't take long to acquire a reputation for turning out first-rate firefighters. The word got around and subsequently the school began to become known worldwide as *the* fire school to attend.

But for as good as its ups have been, its downs have been pretty rough. There was trouble with the Environmental Protection Agency, various water groups and a faltering Texas economy.

But through smart management, sincere concern and effort, and maybe even a little luck, the school has overcome its major problems.

The EPA has given the Brayton facility a clean bill of health, and the water problems, or potential problems, have been solved. The school has even managed to weather the state's economic ill health quite well. There was concern that several programs, especially the industrial programs, would buckle under the weight of the economic stress, but it didn't happen.

Current division head, Charles L. Page, said despite problems the economy may throw the school's way, the staff is dedicated to maintaining its training level of excellence. And, Page says, the school will keep with its goal of establishing more extension courses and fire schools in other areas where interest is indicated.

Although the crunch was felt, it wasn't as painful as feared. Part of what makes A&M's fire school work where others have failed is the grass-roots support.

Tom Foster, assistant division head with Fire Protection Training, says the instructors are a key to the school's fiery success.

Most state programs are paid for by the state they are in and most are measured by the number of people that state can afford to hire to do the training. Instructors for the summer programs at the Brayton field volunteer their time out of dedication to the fire service.

Foster says that if the school had to hire someone every time it needed a course taught or something done, the cost of training would go up. The relatively low tuition costs are one reason attendance has remained high.

Many participants who attend the College Station programs, either as students or instructors, use their vacation time. Many,

prosper and they work to see that no one hurts it.

Along with instruction, many of the fire school's alumni donate supplies and services from their profession to help with the upkeep of the school. When firefighters rolled into town this summer, they found the fire school was sporting a \$200,000 face lift. Equipment had been repaired, new supplies bought, and a rather extensive cosmetic job done.

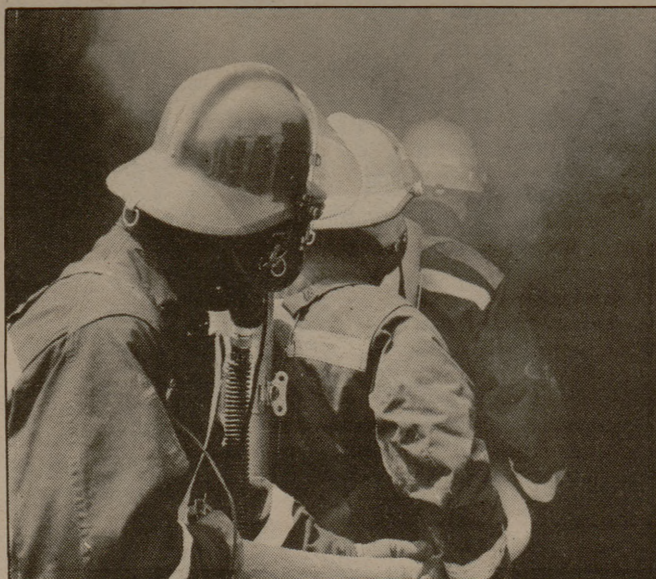
Although the instructors provide a strong foundation, the firefighters themselves are the most popular, or unpopular with the local community.

In working with its students, one problem the school has been faced with is a language barrier. Since the fire school trains students from many different countries, the staff's linguistic abilities are sometimes stretched.

The long-standing reputation of being the wildest of all the students of the fire school. Whether or not they really deserve it depends on who one asks.

The students get frustrated with the firefighters because they must compete with them for what precious little parking space there is. Aggies are forced to ease up on the gas pedal due to the high visibility of the firefighters' vehicles, which for the most part bear a striking resemblance to local police cars. Students also have to share their entertainment and favorite restaurants with the visitors.

On the face of it, the University students really don't mind sharing their fun with the firefighters. And bar and bookstore owners mind them even less because the visiting firemen add a hefty extra treat to the College Station economy.



**Above: Two industrial firefighters call it quits after a long day on the line.**

**Left: Complete with breathing apparatus, firefighters prepare to enter a smoke-filled building.**

**Below: Industrial firefighter Joe Simon of Illinois takes a breather between classes.**

