

floor above the fire to vent and search for occupants.

By all standards, it was a routine fire with one room on the ground floor of a row dwelling of ordinary construction—a room and contents fire requiring at most a deployment of two lines. What transpired in the new few minutes following arrival became a routine fire with extraordinary circumstances.

As Ladder 2's forcible entry team entered the first floor of the fire building to start the primary search, Engine 10's backup man (Fire Fighter George Jackson) advised them that the search of the first floor was already complete and "negative." The forcible entry team then moved to the adjoining building to evacuate that property, while Fire Fighter Jackson ascended the stairs to assist Cpt. Young and Fire Fighter Galasso in expediting the search of the second floor.

Under ordinary circumstances, the first 1½-inch attack line, initially supported by the 500 gallon tank, would have been quite sufficient in abating the fire conditions in the kitchen area. The value of a second available hoseline usually stretched by the second due engine would normally be taken to the floor above as a routine precautionary measure, most often during or after the primary search. During the early stages of this fire however, a number of critical events occurred that seriously complicated what should have been an otherwise routine operation.

The occupant of the building, in attempting to operate a thoroughly corroded burner control knob on a stove while using a pair of pliers, forced and snapped the gas pilot orifice away from the burner's Venturi tube. What ensued was a forced, gas-fed range top fire that rapidly communicated to kitchen cabinets above the stove. The occupant fled the building before the arrival of the fire department. By the time Engine 10's nozzleman brought the line into position at the entrance to the room, the fire had extended beyond the stove and cabinets above to involve wall, ceiling and other contents. Engine 10's attack team was not aware



Young

that they were confronting a fire condition supported by a forced gas supply.

As the seconds ticked by the initial stream was having small effect on the volume of developing fire. In the interim, Engine 10's pump operator was having difficulty with the closest hydrant, only 150 feet away, that involved a tightly frozen outlet cap. The dwelling was quite small: three rooms on the ground floor and four rooms including a bath above. The small interior floor space was the reason that Engine 10's backup man (Fire Fighter Jackson) was able to complete a primary search of the two other first floor rooms in those seconds preceding Ladder 2's arrival.

Fire Fighter Jackson, a seasoned veteran with 24 years on the job, knew immediately in the first few seconds after the nozzleman started water on the fire that conditions were not improving as they should. He also knew that the second due engine wasn't in yet and that an additional line would not be available within the next minute or two. With this understanding, Jackson also realized that an extra pair of hands during a primary search makes the operation go a lot faster. What he or the other search team members above the fire did not know was that there was an initial water supply problem out in the street. The turn of events happened very quickly.

As Engine 10's pump operator radioed the officer at the nozzle to back out due to an expected interrup-

tion in water, the kitchen flashed over in explosive involvement. Simultaneously on the floor above, Captain Young with Fire Fighters Galasso and Jackson, had just completed the search and were regrouping to board the top of the staircase when they heard the urgent message from below. As they hastened their descent of the short staircase, they were stopped in their tracks by a barrier of withering heat.

The doorway to the kitchen was located directly under the stairs to the second floor. As the room flashed over with the pressure of burning gas, the fire belched out of the kitchen doorway and entered the flue of the open stairway. Just moments later, Engine 10's nozzle ran out of water and there was nothing between Ladder 2's search team and the beast, except the short span of the L-shaped stairs.

In boarding the top of the stairs on the second floor, Captain Young made sure he was the last man down. Extremely heavy smoke conditions momentarily caused Galasso and Jackson to lose direction of the stairway. Young pointed them to the top step landing and they started down, first Jackson followed by Galasso and finally Young. Fire Fighter Jackson was the first to feel the breath of the dragon. He shouted in pain as the other two members above him became engulfed in waves of blistering heat. A flashover of the second floor felt imminent. Captain Young, as the last man on the stairs, was the first to reverse direction and retreat upward. Fire Fighters Galasso and Jackson rapidly turned to follow the ascending stairway in pursuit of Captain Young.

The full brunt of the beast was loose and the deadly flame, preceded by blistering waves of heat, roared up the open stairway to the top floor landing. Captain Young ran while shedding his SCBA, and instinctively dived head first toward the first opening he saw—a 12-inch space above a window air conditioner and through the narrow broken window pane to the outside. Fire Fighter