

Fires varied. There were small ones caused by incendiary bombs which would set a roof alight and could be brought under control by one or two fire appliances. Bigger ones needed more, and then the regular big fire engines were called out, if they were available. At the beginning of the War, for us in the Auxiliary Fire Service, ordinary London taxis had been requisitioned and a small pump on a trailer was hitched by rope onto the back of the taxi. There were still one or two of these at 34 A 2X and I had on several occasions the duty of driving one. It was practically impossible to reverse, as the rope did not make any solid contact between the two vehicles. Later, proper covered vehicles became available, large enough to allow for storage of hoses, seats for the firemen and the miscellaneous gear that was essential such as hook-ladders to scale buildings on the outside.

I remember one night when many fires had been notified to our station, and I was ordered to one in the Notting Hill Gate area. By the Serpentine Bridge in Hyde Park, there still exists, even today, a small Georgian House, then an ammunition store for the nearby Guards' Brigade on duty at Buckingham Palace. When I drove past it on that night, I saw it was on fire and an Army sergeant, standing outside it, ordered me to stop and fight the fire. Rightly, it was absolutely forbidden to attend to any other fire than the one to which one had been assigned, and of course I was glad not to obey the sergeant's order—a fire of an ammunition store was not exactly my favourite duty.

The 8th of September 1944 was to become a historic day. It was a warm Sunday morning and I was on weekend duty at 34A2X, when, to our great surprise, the bells were rung at the station. There was no air raid in progress and no air-raid warning siren had been sounded: Our appliances were ordered to the Guards Barracks next to Buckingham Palace, about one kilometer from Sloane Square. We soon saw that a major 'incident' had occurred, as many ambulances and other fire engines had already arrived. We were told that the first of the expected rockets, a V2 or A4, had been fired at London, and had impacted on the Chapel belonging to the Guards Regiments.

We were ordered to relieve others who had worked for hours with pneumatic road drills to break up the thick concrete roof of the Chapel. It had collapsed on the full Sunday congregation, and when I had cleared a hole with my drill, I found only the corpses of men and women below, laboriously to be extracted. A heavy road drill is not easily handled by an unskilled operator, and when it slipped through a hole, it continued to drill into the bodies below. This was certainly my worst war time experience.