

FIREGROUND COMMAND: THE ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL 1985-1989

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INTRODUCTION:

(1) Chief Alan Brunacini's (1985) original fireground command organizational model has much in common with other incident command and management systems (Coleman 1997, United States 1987, 1983). However, there are significant structural differences that have operational merit. These advantages have been lost in the new National Fire Service Incident Management System Consortium (1993) model of an incident command system. It is to our advantage as emergency managers to remember them and consider their incorporation in future management systems.

THE 1985 FIREGROUND COMMAND SYSTEM:

(2) In his book, Brunacini (1985) did not provide a detailed explanation of the factors that led to the eventual configuration of the fireground command system organization. However, an examination of his text suggests the following as basic underlying tenets:

- a. The system was intended to be used by a single commander, operating as an individual, perhaps with an aide, but without the large General Staff structure used in wildland fire incidents (Carlson 1983). All of the illustrations in his book show a single fireground commander.
- b. The system was intended for use in urban, suburban, or structural firefighting. None of the pictures or tactical examples addressed other than a structural fire context.
- c. Although logistics were addressed as an important component, there is no indication that this model was intended to be employed for extended incidents over days or weeks. This is consistent with the structural firefighting focus.

(3) Brunacini believed the development of an effective organizational structure was a critical function of command. The key to this organization was the establishment of sectors and the appointment of sector officers. This sectoring process was appropriate:

- a. When demands for supervision of arriving resources could overload the commander.
- b. When the size of the incident indicated that the supervisory tasks would exceed the fireground commander's span of control. Interestingly, unlike the various incident command system models (see, for example, National Fire Service Incident Management System Consortium 1993, 1996), the fireground command system did not specify maximum, minimum, and best span of control parameters.
- c. When units were operating in locations isolated from the fireground commander.

Table 1. Functional Sectors

Type	Characteristics	Title And Roles
Hybrid Geographical and Functional	Located in a specific location to perform a specific function	<p>STAGING – establishes physical staging area and manages resources in it.</p> <p>ROOF – perform offensive operations and perform assessment and ventilation.</p> <p>ACCESS CONTROL (LOBBY CONTROL) – operate in the lobby or entryway and serve as a gatekeeper.</p>
Operations Support Functions	Support the entire operation by performing a specific function	<p>WATER SUPPLY – provides a continuous water supply for firefighting.</p> <p>REHABILITATION – supports operations with rest and medical care.</p> <p>WELFARE – provides for victims and survivors.</p> <p>HAZARD – provides hazard control.</p> <p>MEDICAL – provides emergency medical services.</p>
Staff Functions	Perform management jobs that allow the operations to move forward	<p>SAFETY – evaluate hazards and advise of unsafe conditions.</p> <p>PUBLIC INFORMATION – provide appropriate information for the media.</p> <p>RESOURCE – orders and manages people, equipment, and supplies.</p> <p>POLICE LIAISON – coordinates operations with law enforcement</p>

d. When conditions were unusually dangerous.

(4) Sectors in this model could be either geographical or functional. At first glance it is tempting to view this as being directly analogous to the Division (geographic) and Group (functional) resource allocation model of the incident command systems. However, this is only partly correct.

(5) Brunacini stated that geographical sectors were responsible for operational activities within their physical area. They were designated by direction (north, east, etc.), by numbering of the sides of a building, by standard terms (front, rear, roof, etc.), or by floor number. This is similar to practice in various versions of the incident command or management system.

(6) However, the functional sectors represent a significant departure from other models, as they appear to fall into three classes: hybrid geographical and functional, operations support functions, and staff functions (Table 1). This differentiation is somewhat artificial as there is some overlap between the types suggested – for example, Staging and Resources may share space and resources, and Staging could easily be seen as an operations function. The important point is that these sectors fit in a variety of types of roles that could be seen as either functional or staff roles in other systems.

(7) If all 12 functional sectors were activated in conjunction with some number of geographic sectors, it would seem reasonable to believe that the fireground commander would be overloaded. This is especially likely if we accept Brunacini's position that the commander should focus on the geographic sectors actually involved in fire suppression. Brunacini recognized this, and suggested the functional sectors represented routine operations that could be supervised by the staff of the Command Post. Although the composition of that staff was not identified, the implication that can be drawn from diagrams in his text is that these are Aides.

(8) The fireground organizational model appears to have been optimized for the management of short incidents, in a relatively limited area, that did not generate requirements for very large numbers of resources.

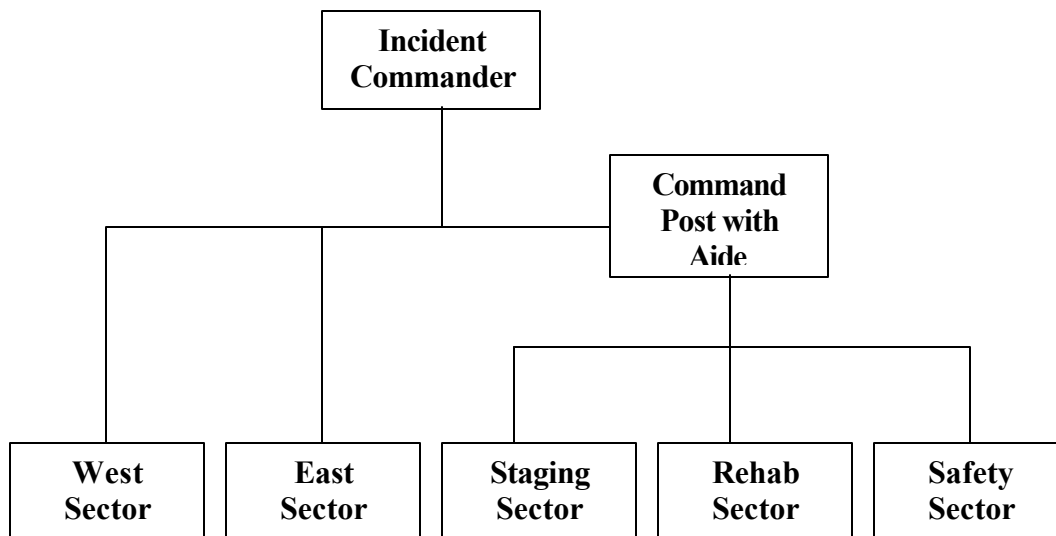
a. The organizational structure was very flat, with at most three levels (response unit, sector officer, and fireground commander) on the geographic operations side (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1. Fireground Command System Organizational Structure



b. The span of control was focused on tighter oversight of a smaller number of ongoing operations sectors and looser oversight of support functions. Span of control was thus a more flexible concept.

c. The system recognized that support functions were of a more routine nature and could be managed very effectively by experienced sector officers with minimal commander involvement.

d. Brunacini accepted that the mix of sectors activated would vary from event to event. He identified standard sectors that might be required, but did not exclude the use of non-standard sectors.

THE 1989 MODEL:

(9) By 1989 the Fireground Command system, as described by Brunacini in 1985, appears to have evolved. A description of the Phoenix Fire Department Command Procedures introduces two new elements to Brunacini's system (Chief Brunacini served as Chief of the Phoenix Fire Department at this time) (National Fire Protection Association 1989). Both impact the functioning of the Command Post.

a. For large incidents, a new level of supervision was introduced, Operations Officers. Located in the Command Post to ensure direct contact with the Incident Commander, these positions supervised multiple Sectors assigned to common types of activity.

b. The staffing of the Command Post was clarified, significantly increasing the size of this command and control function. In addition to field incident technicians, the Command Post included sectors and functions which worked in personal contact with the Incident Commander.

In a large incident this would have included the Operations Officers and staff members performing strategic planning, technical support, liaison, public information, and safety functions.

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