Control Officer Harry Simmons Celebrates 40 Years With London Fire Brigade

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Harry Simmons, of Noak Bridge in Basildon, has completed 40 years in service, joining the Brigade in 1969.

Control Commander Harry Simmons was taken by surprise when he arrived to work to a celebration organised by his fellow colleagues and family members, marking his 40 years with the London Fire Brigade.

Harry, of Noak Bridge in Basildon, joined the Brigade in 1969. He said: "I remember my brother and I walking past Homerton fire station and stopping to watch daily fire drills. We both always wanted to be involved in fire fighting."
Four years later, Harry's brother Eddie also joined the Brigade as a fire fighter.

After three-week training at Lambeth, Harry was posted to Stratford control room where he spent the next ten years and this was where he received the first of several promotions. Harry said: "It was very scary at first when I joined. I was only 19 and was the youngest in the team. It was a very different environment to what I expected it to be - very disciplined."

In his 40 years, Harry has worked in a number of control rooms across London and has dealt with some of the capital's biggest incidents. He said: "I was on duty when the Paddington train crash happened in 1999 and when two of our fire fighters died in a Gillinder Street fire in 1992."

Harry was also in charge of the watch that dealt with the major fire on the Olympic site fire in 2007, when almost 200 calls were received to that incident alone.

For a number of years Harry was in charge of Control Training School where he was responsible for training control officers and new entrants and also played a major part in training existing staff for the first computer aided control for London.

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Harry has also had his time working for the London Special Operations Group, dealing with London resilience issues and advising on mobilising techniques to make sure London is
prepared to large scale emergencies.

Since 2006, Harry has been the Control Commander responsible for supervising the Green Watch at Brigade Control.

When asked about the changes that have taken place at the Brigade in the past 40 years, Harry replied: "When I joined, we used a paper-based system to record incidents. We used forms and had to fill them out manually. It was only in 1990 when we received our first computer aided system, which radically changed the way we operate and mobilise appliances.

"Four decades ago, not everyone had a telephone in their home, which meant we received a much smaller number of calls. It would be impossible to deal with the amount of calls we receive today using a paper based system. That's why we've got some of the world's best mobilising equipment to make sure Londoners are safe and we are prepared to deal with any emergency."

Harry added: "People ask me how I have managed to survive in the Brigade for so long. Well, my answer is that whilst we get a lot of good, bad and indifferent things thrown at us, it is the people that get you through the tough times, and the people that help celebrate the good times."