**May 20, 2013: Convoy, OH - ** Once he turned 21, Don Wilson decided to join the Convoy Fire Department.

"At that point in time I had a couple of relatives on the department, and I thought it was a good thing to do and a good opportunity, so I thought I'd try it a couple of years and see how it went," he recalled.

Apparently it went well. Wilson has announced that he is retiring this year after serving 50 years with the department, 38 of those years as chief. He is stepping down to spend more time with family, the time commitment, and because 50 years seemed like a nice, round number.

He said, "I can't really do the department like I should be doing it. In 50 years we've made some changes, and change comes a little harder. I think it's just the right thing for me to do, to step aside and the let the younger ones step up and do it."

The Convoy Fire Department is not huge, but the crew sees plenty of action, both sending squads for emergency response, but also tornado spotting, assisting at accident scenes, as well as fighting actual fires. Wilson estimated 150 responses with the squad and another 40-50 in fire and other runs per year.

At the time Wilson joined the department, the minimum age was 21. That was 1963, and he admitted that was a different era entirely.

"Not much comparison!" he laughed. "About the only thing we have in common today with 1963 is putting the wet stuff on the red stuff! We do a lot of things differently. We didn't have near the personal protection equipment that we have today. It has improved immensely over what we had back then."

Over the course of 50 years, Wilson has battled blazes along side many with the Convoy Fire Department. He guessed that around 150 people had been a part of the department over the past half-century, along with many township trustees, county commissioners, mayors and village councilpersons, and other various officials.

In the mid-1960s, Wilson took on the job of fire chief for a period of five or six years. It was a time he enjoyed, but by the end of the decade he stepped aside from the chief officer position. Then in 1979, there was a shakeup in the department, and Wilson was asked to return to the chief's office. He turned down the opportunity, but an answer of no was not working. Eventually he conceded to take back the job where he would stay into 2013.

"I've had a good time being the chief. I've had a good run," Wilson summarized. "I've had the opportunity to work with some of the best people in the world, both within the county and the village here, and with some of the people in the fire service in other areas outside of Van Wert

County."

The Convoy Fire Department and the village itself has benefited from the leadership and experience Wilson has brought to the post, both as chief and as a rank-and-file firefighter.

"There are good aspects on both sides," Wilson explained. "I think I probably have more enjoyment being chief officer. You're in the position to see the big picture and not so much the just the little things. You get a scope of the whole project and what it looks like, and that's better. But there are good aspects to being lower on the totem pole too. You don't have to worry about the whole thing and get frustrated!"

All in all, Wilson is happy with his decision to stick it out in the fire department. "I always thought as a kid that firefighting would be fun," he said. Through 50 years, I've been blessed. I've had a good opportunity."

Story By Ed Gebert, Times Bulletin