

A HISTORY OF THE NEW VERNON VOLUNTEER FIRST AID SQUAD
By B. William Dudley

Sometime in July, 1973, our fire chief, Dick Walter, showed me a contest form he had received in the mail from Grumman Health Systems Division of Grumman Aircraft on Long island. The contest was sent to rescue squads and fire departments in New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York, to announce that Grumman planned to manufacture ambulances. Grumman wanted to start off on the right foot by establishing a design contest in order to obtain ideas that could be used in their new ambulances. Grumman felt that too often in the past manufacturers of emergency vehicles had decided-: how such vehicles should be designed. So this time, the philosophy was to find out exactly what features fire departments and rescue squads felt were important. Theoretically Grumman would glean fresh ideas from the very people who actually used ambulances and who could tell Grumman's designers what they felt an ambulance should include and what they should not include.

So it was that Dick Walter showed me the contest forms after one of our Wednesday night drills. He was about to discard it but wondered if I might be interested in looking at it or if I thought it should be filed away in the circular file. At lunch hour the next day at work, I perused the forms and mulled it over in my mind. The contest rules indicated that the winning design would win a Grumman Mark III Rescuance then valued at \$13,400.

I began filling in the first page of the contest forms with such information as chassis, weight, engine size, options such as power steering and disc brakes, four-wheel drive, winch, and on and on. My imagination soon started to envision a more detailed approach so I began drawing my idea of a very functional ambulance similar in concept to the now well-known modular type of vehicle. One page grew to two and then three until I had nine pages of drawings of the vehicle exterior, drawings of the-interior, specifications for the chassis and a complete list of components to be included inside. After several lunch hours and typing help from my secretary, I approached Dick Walter to have him sign the entry on behalf of the New Vernon Volunteer Fire Department, since Grumman would not accept any entry from individuals.

The design was mailed with the feeling that I enjoyed the exercise, but certainly did not expect to ever hear a word from Grumman Health Systems. The summer went along as usual until the early morning of the first Thursday in October. We responded to a working fire at 4:21 A.M. at Hilltop Stables. The fire was a bad one and had been burning for a long time until it burned through the floor of the main barn. We were called when the floor collapsed and flames shot upward and out of the barn. We responded with all equipment except engine 34 (the Ford), which-was out of service with no brakes. Engine 35 which had just been completely cleaned, waxed, painted underneath, and ready for Saturday's parade in Morristown, was positioned near the barn and supplied by a hydrant on Sand Spring Road. Needless to say, Engine 35 rapidly accumulated ashes, dirt, and grime everywhere. The next afternoon, we washed and packed hose and began recleaning our prospective parade entry. During the packing of hose, Dick came to me and said he had received a call from Grumman that my entry was one of three finalists. They requested that we send someone to the International Association of Fire Chiefs Convention in Baltimore on October 23, 1973. Dick and I looked at each other in complete surprise. He had forgotten about the contest, and I had put it out of my mind. I am not the lucky type of person and never seem to win even the most

modest of door prizes or raffles.

Dick and I told Joe Barrett, our President, and it was decided that Dick, Joe, and I would go to Baltimore. Even if we did not win an ambulance, we figured we might win some sort of useful prize and the convention itself should prove interesting.

Saturday's parade in Morristown was preceded by open-house at several fire houses in Morris Township where we fraternized with our brother firemen in the usual tradition of beer, fried shrimp, beer, poker, beer, and inspection of their parade entries. Assistant Chief Tom Rady, who had worked many hours spearheading the efforts to ready our own red Mack Pumper, told scores of other firemen how engine 35 had been involved in the Hilltop Stable fire just hours ago and how it was virtually smothered in cinders and dirt.

As we marched up South Street approaching the reviewing stand on-Saturday, an announcer introduced us to the dignitaries and recalled to everyone that we had just been through a devastating fire. This must have impressed the judges for we won a trophy for our truck which we felt was a real accomplishment after such a recent fire. We usually don't receive many truck trophies in Morristown.

The morning of October 23 was cold, damp and very foggy when Joe picked up Dick and me. We headed for the turnpike and soon realized that the heater in Joe's car did not work at all, and did we get frozen! The fog was so bad that driving on the Turnpike was a virtual whiteout. We were continually on watch for trucks appearing suddenly in front of us, but we eventually reached clear weather near the end of the turnpike. Arriving in Baltimore, we wandered around until we found the convention hall and parked.

After registering, we headed for Grumman's ambulance display to tell them we were here and to find out what time they wanted to make the announcement. We were to be back at 2:30 P.M. so we decided to visit all the exhibits and then have lunch. All three of us were extremely interested in seeing what new equipment was available as well as innovations in fire apparatus and ambulances.

Returning to the Grumman display, we examined the Mark III Rescuance which was the same model as the grand prize. At that time, I admit that I had the traditional butterflies, and secretly hoped we might win. Charles Kerbow of Grumman introduced us to the other two finalists. He then announced that the time had come to make the awards. In true pageant fashion, he announced the second runner-up, which meant we were now one of two finalists. He then announced the other fire department as the first runner-up. While I was applauding, Joe and Dick both slapped me on the back and said "Hey, you have won!" I guess I was stunned at first. I was presented the keys to the ambulance while we all posed for the picture that now hangs in the firehouse. The thrill of winning something this significant was quite exciting and called for a drink. After a few interviews, we went to celebrate. I called home to tell my wife, Sally, what happened. I had also-promised to call the observer Tribune as soon as we found out the results.

That night, we stayed in a motel in Baltimore and were transported anywhere we wanted to go by members of the Baltimore Fire Department. So we went back to the hotel near the convention center where there were numerous hospitality rooms open to us. We even met a fire chief from Bolivia who was a most distinguished gentleman attired in his official uniform. After dinner and

more fraternizing, the three of us attempted to retire. With three in one room, Dick and Joe snored so loudly that together with the excitement of the day I did not sleep very well.

There were mixed feelings when we returned and revealed what had transpired in Baltimore. There was concern about what this might mean to the Fire Department that was founded in 1921. To investigate the alternatives, an ambulance committee was formed to answer a few-basic questions:

- (1) Do we need an ambulance in Harding?
- (2) Can we staff it 24 hours a day?
- (2) Can we finance it?
- (4) If we do not keep it, do we sell it or give it away?

These were the basic questions and to get some answers, I asked Dr. Arthur McLellan, Director of the Emergency Department at Overlook Hospital and a Harding resident, to speak to us. We felt that we should call a public meeting to determine the interest that residents might have in staffing a squad.

On January 7, 1974 we had 54 Harding residents come to the meeting in the firehouse. Dr. McLellan spoke to us about the various emergency medical situations we could expect and how vital it was to provide a timely response. The residents at the meeting signed their names and indicated their interest in participating in a squad should we decide to go ahead with it. We told everyone that we would let them know what we decided.

The committee met with several other fire departments and first aid squads to learn how they were organized, what problems they had, what their financial experiences were, their number of calls and other details we felt would be enlightening. Some interesting aspects of other squad organizations were quite educational. one squad had male and female members; however, being part of a fire department, the firemen were the only ones eligible to hold office in the squad. Another squad was part of a fire company and as such, the squad had absolutely no influence in preparing their budget nor could a non-fireman squad member hold any of office over the rank of sergeant. They indicated that if they had a hand in their own budget and could have their own officers, they would be perfectly content with being part of their fire company. The result of their discontent eventually led-to their complete separation from the fire company.

Another squad was completely independent from any fire company, but did not allow women in the squad. They did have occasional problems responding during the day. Two nearby fire departments had first aid squad operations as part of their organizations, but first aiders had to become firemen first and women were not included. In fact, lawsuits were filed against both of these fire departments by women to allow them to join the first aid squads without being firefighters.

These interviews revealed some glaring deficiencies as far as their organizations were concerned. We were most fortunate to see these problems so we could map a route that would avoid such difficulties. Soon, however, we had determined that we should recommend to the Fire Department that we pursue the organization of a squad that would have its own officers and operate essentially on its own, but ultimately exist under the wing of the Fire Department. There were still some members that were afraid that the squad did not belong in the Department and should be

separated. The committee found that other squads were able to raise the necessary funds quite easily because of the appeal of an emergency medical service. The consensus was that adding a squad to the department would result in better results at fund drives and the value of providing such a personal service as an ambulance squad would place the entire Fire Department in an even more favorable status in the community. A fire is an impersonal occurrence, generally, and not everyone has a fire. Also, the procedure in firefighting of extinguishing all of the fire and pulling apart a wall or ceiling to be sure it did not spread further-is a destructive process and some homeowners think we are causing them unnecessary expense. When someone is sick or in severe pain, the sight of trained first aiders in white uniforms is a very friendly sight indeed.

One problem began to appear. If we decided to definitely proceed and form the squad, the decision might be made in the Summer and the actual organization and bylaws might not materialize until the Fall. The state requires certain minimum training of about 60-81 hours. If we were to wait until the Fall of 1974 to begin training, then the members would not be ready to answer calls until Spring of 1975. I decided that we should approach the people who attended the January 7 meeting and propose that they consider beginning a training program with the understanding there may or may not be a squad in Harding Township. Forty-eight people decided to begin training and I started the first class the last Tuesday night in January in the basement of Christ the King Church. I taught Red Cross Standard First Aid, Advanced First Aid, CPR and Emergency Childbirth one right after the other.

By the end of May, we had 48 people, about half men and half women, trained in all of the state's requirements except defensive driving and extrication. We were able to get people through extrication courses locally until all completed the class and in the Fall we would hold a defensive driving course at the church. With a new squad about to be born, and I the only one who had any experience responding to emergencies, I approached the Summit First Aid Squad on June 17 to see if we could have our newly trained people ride with their crews. Summit agreed to have one or two people report to their headquarters and ride on calls to gain experience. A weekly schedule was posted in our firehouse so our first aiders could sign up and periodically this schedule was copied and given to Summit so they knew who was coming and when. We had 55 people trained including 7 EMT's and nearly everyone had the opportunity to go on one or more actual calls. For nearly four months, including the Summer, we had people riding with Summit not only gaining experience riding and learning how a squad functions, but also providing Summit with extra first aiders to fill in for their Vacationing members. Several of our members actually rode every week with Summit and even continued after we started answering our own calls.

While we had our first aiders riding with Summit, I had a great deal of work to do to get our ambulance and squad officially on the road. Equipment was the largest project. The ambulance was equipped with lights, cot, cabinets, oxygen system piping, suction system and siren. We still needed bandages, and splints, oxygen masks and regulator, portable suction and resuscitator, first aid kits, blood pressure cuffs and stethoscopes, orthopedic stretcher, obstetrical kit and handtools. We also needed a radio telephone system for communicating with the emergency room of the hospitals that have similar equipment. Another radio had to be installed that would provide communications with our dispatcher. In order to alert the crew on duty to respond to a call, we had to obtain as many Plectron home alert radio receivers as we could get funds to purchase. Snow tires were needed with winter around the corner. Uniforms were needed for all members. I felt very strongly that every first aider responding to the scene of an emergency must be in uniform so he or

she can easily be identified immediately as someone who should be there. A person in regular clothes may be a first aider but how would the patient or police or bystanders or other first aiders know without interrupting that person to see credentials.

To begin the monumental task of equipping the ambulance, I needed to see if we could get funds. After obtaining permission from the Fire Department, I approached a very wonderful couple in town to see if they had any ideas and if they might also help with a donation. In anticipation of people asking me for specific examples of what items we would need and their prices, I prepared an extensive list of nearly everything to equip the ambulance itself. This list totaled \$4,580.50. I gave a copy of this list to these kind people so they might have a range of prices from which to choose. Shortly after my visit, I received a check for \$4,850.50! Needless to say, I was thrilled and flattered at this tremendous support to get us started. I wasted no time beginning to order what we needed.

Soon word filtered into the community, and we received other anonymous gifts and a number of contributions from other people I asked for help. In all, we had nearly \$9000 to work with. Since Plectrons took 12 weeks to receive, I immediately ordered 10 so we could have some to trade from crew to crew. The hospital radio was ordered as was the telephone and other parts I needed. When they arrived, I had to redesign part of the radio and the telephone section to make it all work with the hospitals. I also contacted Morristown Memorial Hospital to get a copy of their FCC license and then filed an application with the FCC for addition of our ambulance to their license.

Uniforms became somewhat of a problem. We needed white coveralls for 55 people at a cost of \$20 each. Until we had enough money, which would not be until money from fund drives were available the following June or July 1975, members paid for their own uniforms and were to be reimbursed later.

Other legal matters had to be resolved as well. I had to determine whether we needed permits for siren and red lights, special permit from the State Department of Health, certificate of need, determine the extent of our liability on calls, insurance coverage, certification of our members, and official adoption of us by Harding. Harding Township ordinance No. 6-74 was passed September 27, 1974 officially designating us as the first aid squad for the Township of Harding and covering us under worker's compensation insurance. Registration and plates were obtained with the help of Dick Walter since we wanted to get no-fee plates.

The bylaws committee of the Fire Department, under the able leadership of Bob Schaul, presented its proposed reorganization on October 2, 1974. The basic philosophy was that since the parent organization, founded in 1921, was the Fire Department, the new organization should be still controlled by the original group which would become known as the Fire Company. Out of the cocoon emerged the New Vernon Volunteer Fire Department within which are two companies, namely, the Fire Company and the First Aid Squad. Each company elected its own administrative as well as line officers and each company operated independently except for matters of mutual concern to the entire department. A Board of Governors was created for the purpose of overseeing the overall operation.

The newly created board consisted of nine members: The President of the Fire Company, the

President of the First Aid Squad, the Chief of the Fire Company, the Captain of the First Aid Squad, the Vice-President and Treasurer of the Fire Company and delegates elected at large, one from the Fire Company and one from the Squad. The Senior Trustee also is on the Board but as a nonvoting member.

The President of the Board is the President of the Fire Company, the Treasurer of the Board is the Fire Company Treasurer and the Secretary of the Board is the Vice-President of the Fire Company.

Early each year each company submits a budget to the Board of Governors. A joint budget review committee is appointed by the board to review and modify these budgets and to formulate one overall budget for the entire department including buildings and grounds, insurance, and company budgets. Fund raising is a joint effort with all funds going into the department's coffers. The department treasurer provides moneys to both company treasurer as they need it. All our funds are derived from voluntary contributions from our residents with no demands on tax dollars.

Each company meets once a month separately (the Fire Company on the first Wednesday of each month and the Squad on the third Monday) and the Board of Governors meets usually the fourth Monday each month. All board meetings are open to all members of both companies and all activities and topics discussed at board meetings are reported in full to both companies. Decisions that affect the companies are made after the companies have discussed them and made their comments or recommendations.

The new bylaws are also unique in that women are eligible to join either company. This is quite an obvious need if the Squad is to be able to operate during weekdays, but heretofore this has not been the case with firefighting.

During all of this groundwork, I spent many weekend hours installing radios, stocking bandages, mounting brackets, assembling first aid kits, modifying some of the features of the ambulance, designing and building the hospital radio system.

I spent a fair amount of time learning what we needed to legally operate in Harding. There was some concern, especially with another squad formed as a result of a split with their fire company, whether we were required to obtain a Certificate of Need from the State Department of Health. Our interpretation of the law was that a certificate was required of health care facilities and as such we were not such a facility. A bill was later passed to amend the Health Care Facilities Planning Act to specifically exempt volunteer first aid and rescue squads.

However, we did come under the jurisdiction of the New Jersey Highway Safety Act of 1971 (C.351, P.L. 1971) which required that the Township of Harding certify us as a squad. The Township also passed an ordinance on September 24, 1974 officially designating us as the First Aid and Rescue Squad of the Township of Harding and that we were to be covered under Harding Township's Worker's Compensation insurance.

Now that we were official, we aimed for November 1, 1974 as the beginning of our service to our residents. Some members of the department thought we should wait until January 1, 1975, but I argued that we were trained and ready to respond so it was ridiculous to wait. We elected tempo-

rary officers and I was pleased to become our first Captain, and Dick Tomlinson was our first President. After polling the members, Lieutenant Joan Geraghty worked on a roster and we located all those who lived close enough to the firehouse to be the assigned drivers. I appointed crew chiefs from those who were Emergency Medical technicians and those who spent extra hours riding with Summit. The aim was that within a year all crew chiefs would be EMT'S.

During my two-week vacation in August 1974, I sat down and wrote a set of operational instructions and procedures to serve as a guide for-us. The more I wrote the more I thought of to include and the document soon approached a book. I attempted to answer most of the basic questions any new member might have. In fact, I could tell when someone had not read the manual. The manual is continually reviewed and updated with corrections and additions provided to all members to keep their copies up-to-date.

A committee was formed to create a notice -that would be mailed to all residents. The notice was in two parts, one with emergency numbers and how to report emergencies; and the other was a brief description of the squad and its training. Newspapers, school papers, church bulletins, and the bulletin board in front of the Post Office also announced that we were starting service on November 1. Since all ambulance calls were directed to Morris County Radio for the Morris Minute Men First Aid Squad prior to our existence, it became quite simple to have the dispatcher call us instead of the Minute Men. This worked well even if a resident did not learn of our own squad.

Our only problems in the beginning were really minor ones. We only had ten Plectrons which had to be traded among members on duty. To be sure we did not falter in the beginning, I arranged with County Radio to wait 6 minutes after calling us out and if the ambulance had not gone 10-8 by then to call the Morris Minute Men and it would be their call. Also, County Radio initially had to call some members by phone until we finally had enough Plectrons. Some of the dispatchers did not like doing this, but after all that is what we were paying for. Needless to say, they were definitely happier when I told them we all had Plectrons. Once in a while a few members would hear a call and drive across town to respond when not even on duty. This created problems for the regular crew and I had to make it clear that people were certainly encouraged to respond to an emergency if it was in their own neighborhood and retreat after turning the situation over to the regular duty crew. Members were not to respond across town to calls unless on duty, passing by at that moment, or called by Plectron when extra people were needed.

The number of calls during our first years increased substantially compared with the years prior to our existence. One contributing factor was that being in town, people were not as reluctant to call for help. We have a crew on duty in town every minute everyday and our people would just as well prefer to be responding to a call as sitting home with their Plectrons.

The year before, in 1973, there were 88 calls in Harding Township. Our first full year of service, 1975, logged 176 calls for assistance; and in 1976, the calls rose to 246. These calls include emergency medical activity as well as response to fires, routine transportation of patients between nursing homes and hospital, and standby at horse shows.

In addition to logged calls, there are numerous other activities that require our time. Continuing education and training in the form of lectures at our meetings as well as lectures and seminars at

local squads and hospitals are available to all members. Every crew is required to drill on a predetermined topic for a minimum of two to three hours each month. Everyone is also encouraged to drill frequently on other topics they feel they need practice on.

To keep abreast of state and local activities including new laws and policies and to participate in communicating with state legislators and local hospitals, I applied for membership in the New Jersey State First Aid Council (NJSFAC), and the Morris Area Ambulance Association. The Eighth District of NJSFAC meets at different squad headquarters the third Tuesday of every month and the Ambulance Association meets every other month on the third Wednesday at either Community Medical Center or Morristown Memorial Hospital. The location alternates yearly and is at Memorial during even numbered years. Meetings of both organizations are open to any member. The NJSFAC district meetings provide excellent opportunity to meet our neighboring squads and to exchange ideas. Twice a year NJSFAC holds conventions, one in may and one in September or October, the latter one being the main convention. Conventions are open to all members.

The future of our squad depends on each member's dedication and enthusiasm. So far the residents of Harding Township feel that we are doing a magnificent job. We have obvious needs for equipment, supplies and a room for storage, training, and a place to "camp out" during inclement weather. A new ambulance is always an eventuality as vehicles wear out and need replacement. Presently, we only have one ambulance which was free. Do we need two ambulances? Perhaps when we get a new one, we should use the old one as a backup and for horse shows, etc. All of these areas of concern are reviewed by a long range planning committee which is charged with investigating our overall needs for the next five to ten years.

Looking back over the beginning of our squad, I am very proud of all of the hard work every member has contributed in getting our operations to a level of proficiency that is truly professional. I know I have tried to keep a hand in every aspect of our operations and training even to the extent of responding on most calls during our first year. I wanted to be on hand if the crews needed help and to see if we needed equipment we did not have or if there were areas of training we needed to cover, and also to see that we did not develop bad habits that would haunt us in years to come.

The one thing to remember is that the New Vernon Volunteer First Aid Squad is 100 percent dedicated people giving a great deal of their free time for the well-being of our friends and neighbors and to help anyone who is in pain or suffering. So, reminiscing about October 23, 1973, the real winner is the Township of Harding.

