They Fight Tragedy Around the Clock

Civil Defense Corps Off to the Rescue

"Man trapped in sewer cave-in!"

A volunteer member of the Chicago civil defense corps takes the call in headquarters at 1244 N. Wells st.

Location of the emergency is relayed to a driver and a squadman. They speed to the rescue.

Another worker starts calling the homes or business places of volunteers — bookkeepers, shopowners, even executives — in the phone chain.

Each, in turn, makes his call, grabs his gear, and drives in his own car to the scene of the emergency.

The fight against tragedy has become a daily — sometimes hourly — task for some 60 men in this unique group which has answered 1,995 calls since it was organized in January, 1958.

At headquarters are four trucks — two heavy duty trucks, one light truck, and one air compressor truck.

Around the clock there are from three to five men on duty. The 60 volunteers average serving about two to three shifts a month.

Who are some of them? What do they do for a living?

There's Chief William John Meyers, 22, of 1733 N. Drake av., an apprentice splicer for Illinois Bell Telephone company; James Nichols, 33, of 2115 W. 70th st., a television antenna installer; Robert E. Doyle, 24, of 1420 Belle Plaine av., an inhalation therapist at St. Elizabeth's hospital.

Some of them, like Michael Gavin, 21, of 3823 Southport av., a warehouse manager, can't leave their jobs during working hours, but a call in the middle of the night tumbles them out of bed into action.

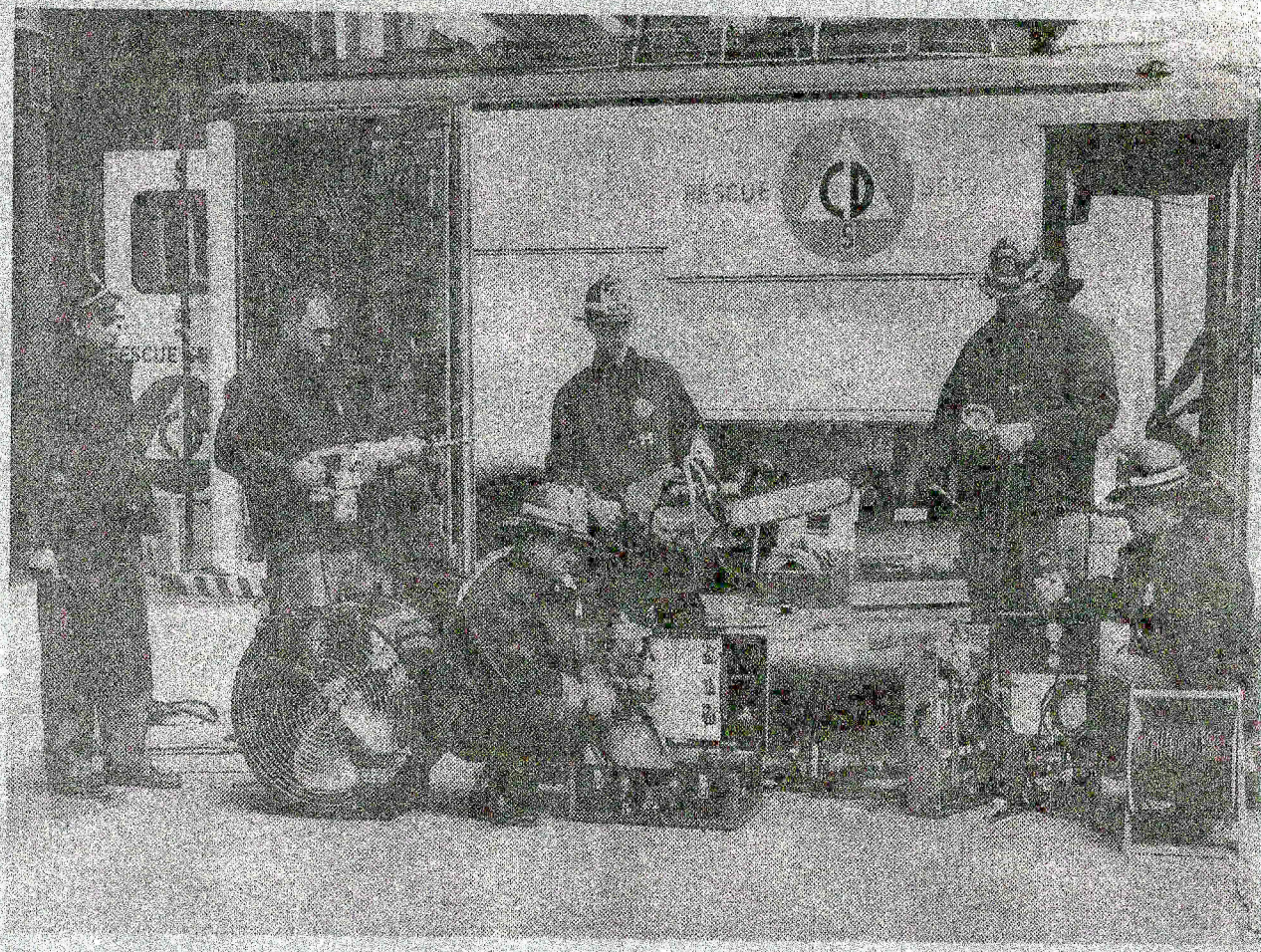
Others, such as Acting Chief Robert Benker and Howard Leibovitz, who operate Able Fire & Safety Equipment, Inc., at 5115 N. Clark st., get a call, padlock their store, stick a sign in the window that reads, "Back in 15 Minutes," then hurry to the scene of the emergency.

The trucks of the volunteers carry more than 400 types of equipment to be used in rescue work — roto-hammers, drills and saws to cut thru walls; electric generators to allow the lighting up of entire buildings; gas masks, acetylene torches, cement cutters and so on.

When the men are not busy at rescue work, they work to keep their equipment in shape, or help in the training program for volunteers.

Their work is invaluable, according to Fire Commissioner Robert J. Quinn, and there is a need for more volunteers.

He is asking for more recruits from the ages of 18 years upward.



VOLUNTEER RESCUERS of the Chicago civil defense corps display some of the equipment carried in the truck. Kneeling are Lt. Carl Fox [left] and Leroy Norlund. Standing, from left, are Acting Chief Robert Benker, William Henneman, Lt. John Hopkins, and Howard Leibovitz. In foreground are spotlight, oxygen outfit, phone unit. [CHICAGO'S AMERICAN, Photo]