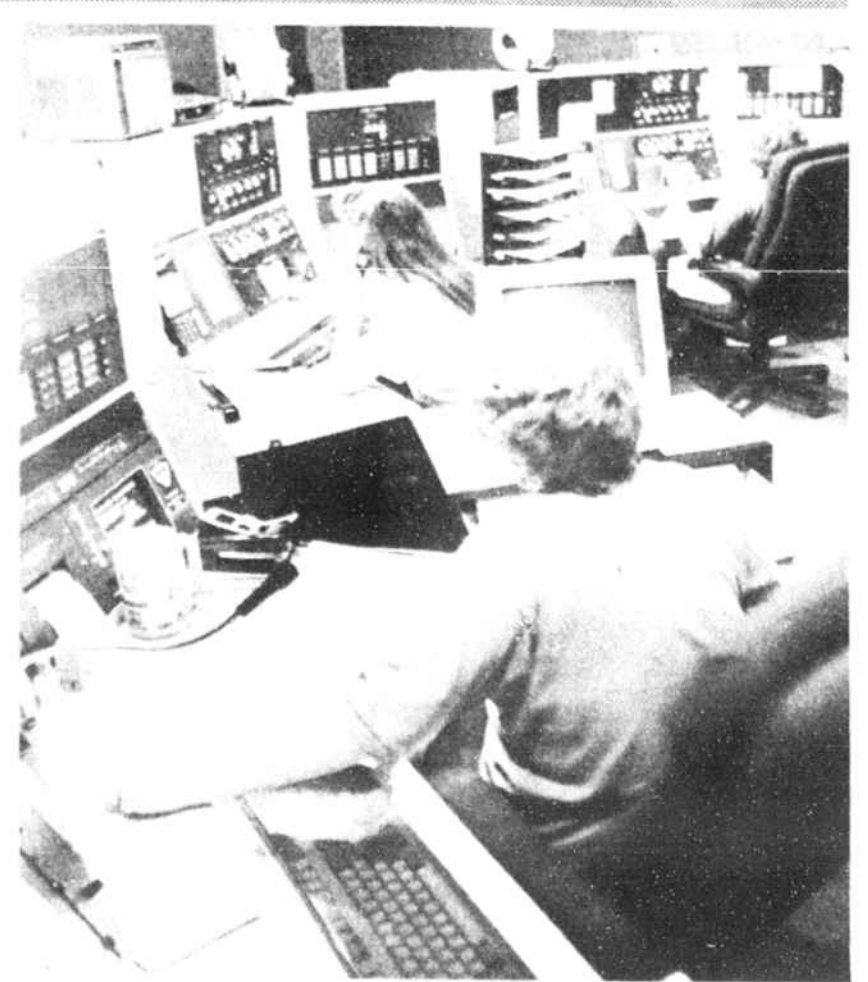
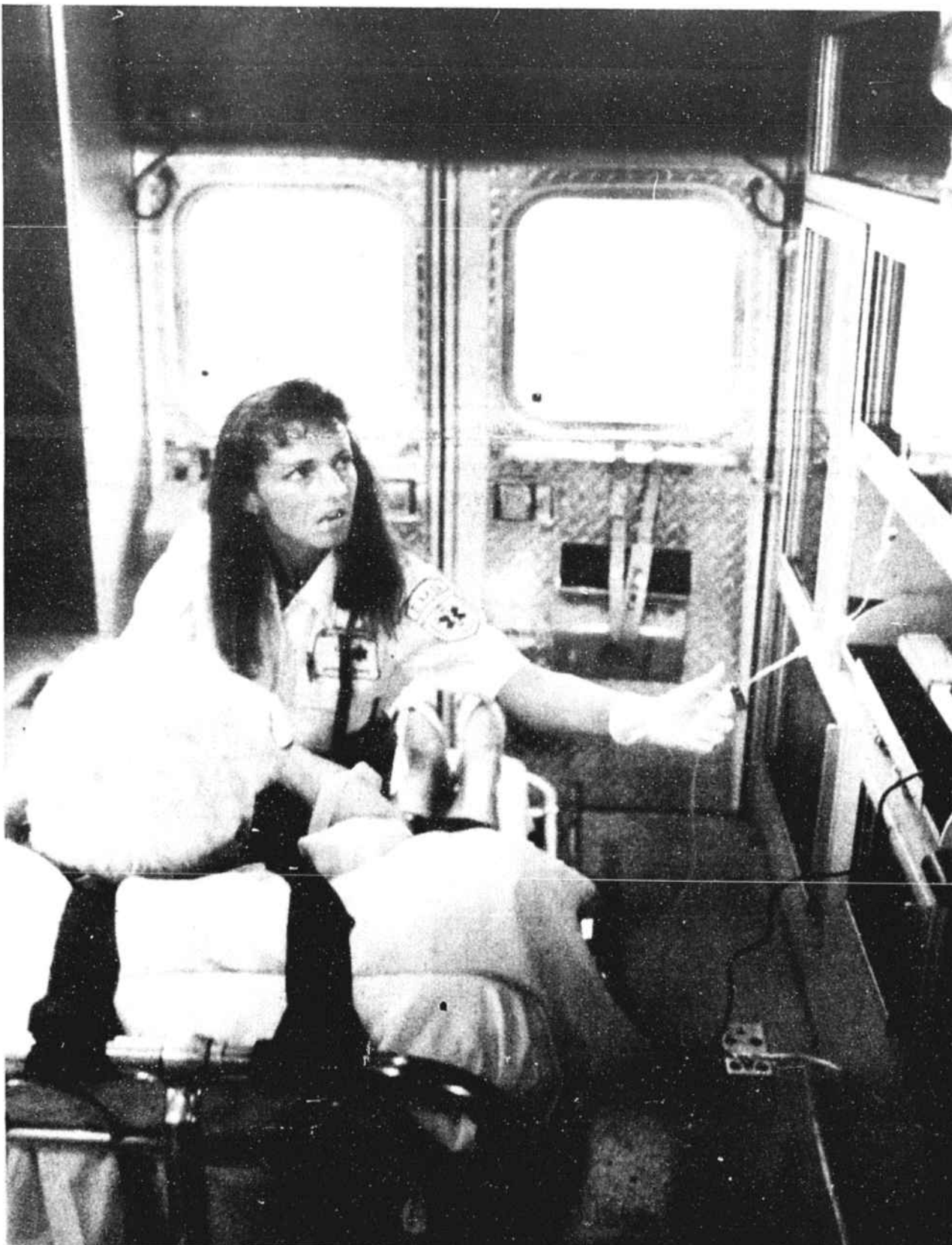


AMBULANCE driver and EMT Gayther Simmons maintains radio contact as he races across the Ocean Isle Beach bridge in response to an elderly heart patient with chest pains.



A BANK of lights, buttons, telephones, keyboards, microphones, log books and video screens commands the constant attention of 911 telecommunicators.



MEDICAL TECHNICIAN Terri Davis checks the flow of intravenous fluids into the patient on the way to the emergency room.

## It's All In A Day's Work...

### On The Hotseat With Brunswick 911

TEXT AND PHOTOS  
BY ERIC CARLSON

**B**runswick County 911...Do you have an emergency?" Hour after hour, day after day, night after night, those words echo through the twinkling half-darkness of the Emergency Communications Services (911) nerve center.

In a scene reminiscent of the *Starship Enterprise*, crew members in high-backed swivel chairs move purposefully along a crescent-shaped wall of video screens, keyboards, microphones, tiny red and green diodes and hundreds upon hundreds of color-coded switches.

Outside, beyond the cool twilight of central communications (C-Com), an insistent morning sun burns through the haze and into the bays where emergency medical vehicles stand ready, their doors left open to vent the heat.

It is the third day of a July 4th weekend that has brought a record number of calls for Brunswick County's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel. Today they expect more of the same—temperatures near 100 degrees, crowds of sun-baked visitors taking to the highways, too much celebrating, not enough caution.

In C-Com, the previous night's shift supervisor, Debra Somerset, leans across the top of a telecommunicator's work station sipping a soft drink, watching the new crew at work, finally beginning to unwind.

"This is a job you have to want to do," she says. "If you're in it for glory, you're in it for the wrong reason. Most telecommunicators have a background as emergency medical technicians (EMTs) or with rescue squads, so we know what it's like to be out there."

Somerset is a volunteer EMT for Calabash Emergency Medical Service. She worked with the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department for three years before coming to the 911 center.

Her replacement on this shift, supervisor Wayne Covington, is a former sheriff's deputy and Burlington police officer who served as a military air traffic controller on Guam during the Vietnam War.

The fire and rescue dispatcher is Anna Katherine Hill, another emergency volunteer who joined the 911 staff after working as an auxiliary police officer for the town of Sunset Beach.

Susan Allen is the daughter of a deputy and the wife of an Ocean Isle Beach Police officer. Today she is in the "hot seat," handling the constant barrage of law en-

forcement radio traffic from sheriff's deputies and a half-dozen town police departments. In addition to answering 911 calls and dispatching police and emergency units, Allen must maintain a written record of each officer's location and activities.

After closing out her log sheets and briefing the incoming shift regarding any pending traffic or ongoing situations, Somerset is ready to go home.

"Some days this job is very stressful. And some days it's fun," she says. "But you can't bring your personal life in here and expect to stand it. You leave what happens here in here and you leave what happens at home at home."

Rrrriiiiiing!  
"Brunswick County 911...Do you have an emergency?"

Hill has received a call reporting a dead body on Morgan Road in Supply.

"How should I dispatch this?" she asks Covington, not wanting to transmit too much information over the radio. He suggests referring to the body as "an unresponsive subject."

Hill pushes the button that sets off the pagers of the appropriate emergency units. Then she radios Coastline Rescue and Brunswick County Emergency Medical Services (EMS). Allen calls the sheriff's department. Covington telephones the person who gave the report.

He learns that an elderly woman who lived alone has apparently died in her sleep. The body appears to have been lying on a bed for several days in 90-degree heat. Rescue workers may need breathing apparatus to remove it.

"Nice way to start a Monday morning," he remarks.

Allen broadcasts a deputy's request that everyone stay back until police can assess the situation. She picks up a ringing phone and takes a report of a burglary in progress. She dispatches a deputy.

Covington takes a call from a woman who says her husband is threatening to kill her. The line goes dead. He reads her address off the video screen, dispatches a deputy and attempts to call her back.

"Has he been drinking?" Covington asks. She says he has not.

"Does he have a weapon?" he asks.  
"Not yet...but I'm scared," she replies. A man's voice can be heard in the background, yelling and cursing.

(See TEAM EFFORT, Page 3-B)



TELECOMMUNICATOR Susan Allen sits in the "hot seat," dispatching law enforcement personnel throughout the county and carefully maintaining a record of each officer's activities and location.



SHIFT SUPERVISOR Wayne Covington answers a 911 call and watches the video screen that displays the caller's name, address, telephone number, fire and rescue districts and other information that might be useful in an emergency.