

Disaster!

Rescuers, Hospital Use Simulated Wreck For Training...

By GARY STEWART
Editor

A group of 15 young people from a Kings Mountain church pack into a small van one day and head for a week's stay at the beach.

Their minds are occupied with what's coming up after the five-hour drive.

With all the windows on the van shut tightly, the driver can hear only the radio and the loud talk of the excited youngsters. Trusting that the signal lights at the upcoming railroad tracks are in good working order, she fails to look up and down the tracks and continues to drive at her current speed.

However, those traffic signals have malfunctioned and as the van crosses the tracks, it's hit broadside by a speeding train.

The youngsters are thrown

from the vehicle. The driver is pinned inside...dead. One of the youngsters is dead and the 14 others have serious injuries.

Such a disaster hasn't happened in Kings Mountain, and hopefully it won't.

But, to make sure they're ready to respond with quick and competent aid when and if it does, the Kings Mountain Rescue Squad and Kings Mountain Hospital staged a mock train-van wreck Friday evening at the Kings Mountain Depot.

Acting just as if it were the real thing, the rescuers hurried to the scene, checked the victims' condition, and rushed them to the hospital, where the hospital staff jammed patients into every emergency room and quickly went about the business of doctoring their wounds.

Only three Kings Mountain

rescuers and four department heads at the hospital knew the simulation was going to occur. They wanted the experience to be as real as possible for those persons who needed the training.

The process of determining the injuries, doing what had to be done to comfort them at the scene, and transporting them to the hospital, took 35 minutes...a very good time as far as rescue personnel were concerned.

For 1½ hours prior to the 6:30 p.m. "accident", KMRS Captain Johnny Hutchins, Assistant Captain Charles Martin and Lieutenant Roy Hammett used makeup kits to create the fake wounds. Youngsters and rescuers met at Foursquare Gospel Church at 5 p.m., where many wounds were created, and others were prepared on the

scene at the two old cabooses which are located in the parking area of the Depot Center.

Youngsters drew cards, on which were written the injuries they would act out. The first youngster drew a "severe stomach wound" and Hammett began to smear makeup on the lad's stomach to make it appear it had been badly cut.

The second boy drew a card which contained only the letters "DOA." "You're dead," Hammett said. "All you have to do is act that way."

Others had head wounds. Others broken limbs. Another had a metal object stuck in her throat, and still others had badly cut arms and legs.

When the county dispatcher set off the KM Rescue tones, the youngsters hurried to their positions under, on and around the railroad cars.

Only after those tones were sounded did anyone in town besides Hutchins, Hammett and Martin, the four department heads at the hospital, the youngsters, and one newspaper reporter know that this was a simulation. The county dispatcher is required to state that it is a simulation for safety reasons.

Within seconds, the first ambulance arrived. Moments later, another one was on the scene. Later, Kings Mountain firemen and a Grover Rescue Squad ambulance arrived because they had been invited by the dispatcher to use the opportunity to further their training.

While veteran rescuers and firemen knew what to do, Hutchins, Hammett and Martin used the time to show the newest members of their squad what vital life signs to check on the victims, and then how to move them quickly but safely.

The most seriously injured youngsters—the girl with the metal object in her throat and the boy with the cut stomach—were taken first...then, those with head injuries, then the ones with leg and arm injuries. The driver and the one youngster who drew the card "DOA" were left for last.

Ten of the 15 members of the rescue squad responded, including all of the new members.

"As far as we're concerned, it went real well," noted Hammett afterward. "The men said the training was great, and I think they did real well under the circumstances."

Although the rescue squad tries to do some type of training exercise at every weekly meeting, Hammett said a mock disaster gives the rescuers the type of feeling they'll experience when the "real thing" comes along.

"If it had been the real thing, it would have been handled the same way," he said. "And it

wouldn't have taken much more than 35 minutes."

The youngsters, Hammett felt, all deserved an Academy Award for their acting performance. Everything was carried out in such a "real" manner, a local doctor who happened by the scene stopped and offered assistance.

The general feeling of the public, one rescuer said, is that "nothing like this will ever happen in Kings Mountain."

However, Hammett pointed out, such a disaster did happen just four years ago. A Trailways bus and car collided on Highway 74 at the Gaston County line. Four people were killed and 26 injured.

That real disaster was handled well too, Hammett feels.

"It's my own opinion that Kings Mountain is very fortunate to have the rescue squad they've got," he said. "The squad is up-to-date on everything that comes along. Eight of our members are trained in the use

of the Hurst Power Tool (Jaws of Life) and 90 percent of our members are trained for lake dragging operations."

The hospital was also well-pleased with the way its personnel handled the emergency.

Of course, one of the main purposes of such a drill is to spot weaknesses and improve on them.

"But, seriously," Hammett said, "I don't believe we need much improvement. We handled it about as close to excellent as you can be."

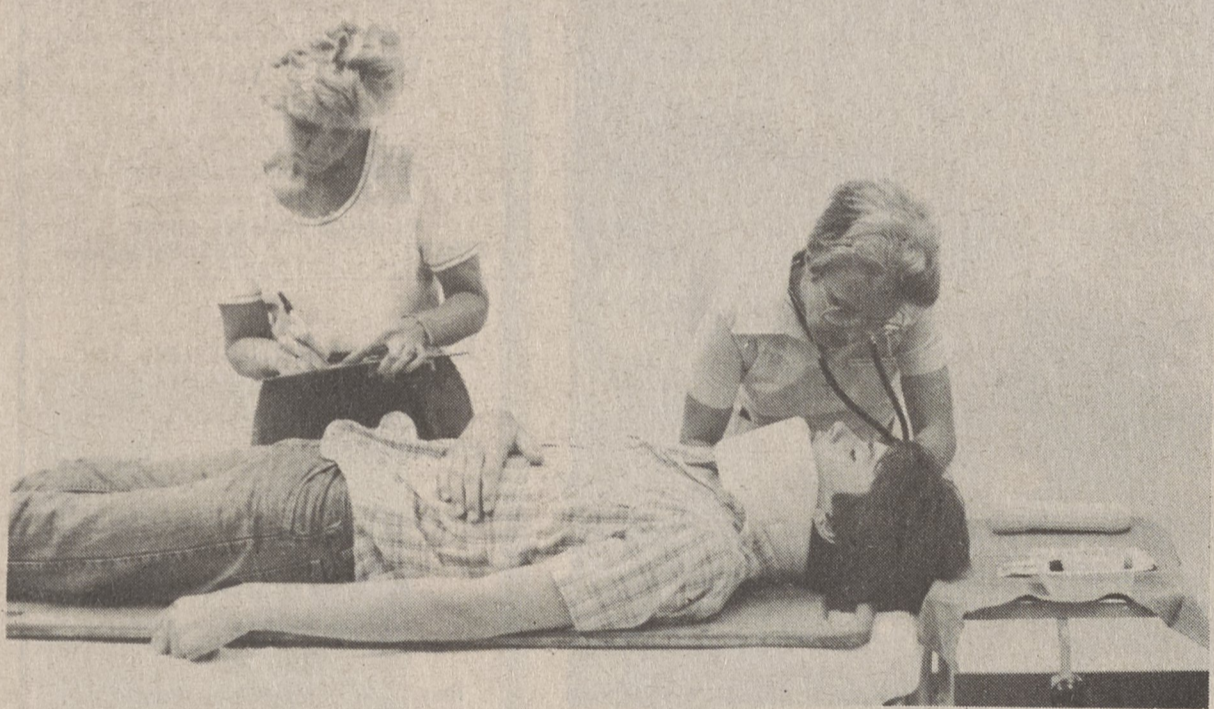
The rescuers issued a public thanks to the Rescue Squad members, Harris Funeral Home, Kings Mountain Hospital, Kings Mountain Herald, Grover Rescue Squad, Kings Mountain Fire Department, Mayor John Henry Moss and the Kings Mountain Police Department for their help in making the drill a success.

"Hopefully, nothing like this will happen," Hammett said. "But, if it does, I'm sure we'll be ready for it."

Photos By Gary Stewart



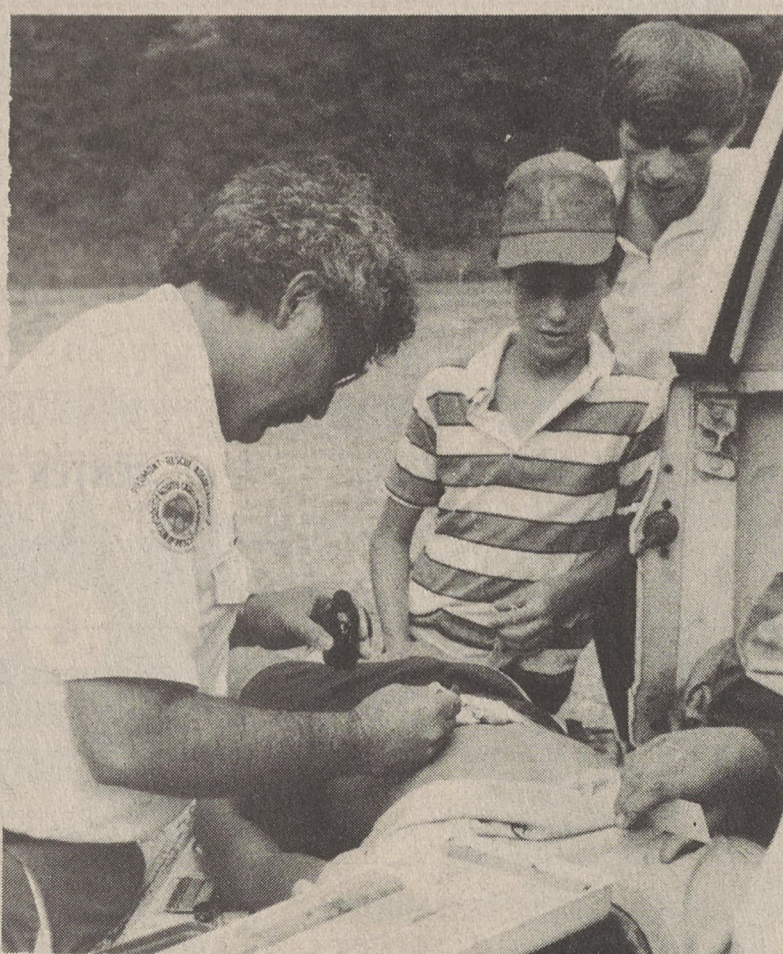
CLOSE CALL - Kenneth Paul Carpenter has his arm caught under the wheel of a railroad car during simulated car-train wreck Friday.



TREATED FOR INJURIES - Rodney Henderson is treated at the Kings Mountain Hospital emergency room for "injuries" he received in Friday's simulated car-train wreck at the Depot. The hospital ER staff and KM Rescue Squad used the event for training purposes.



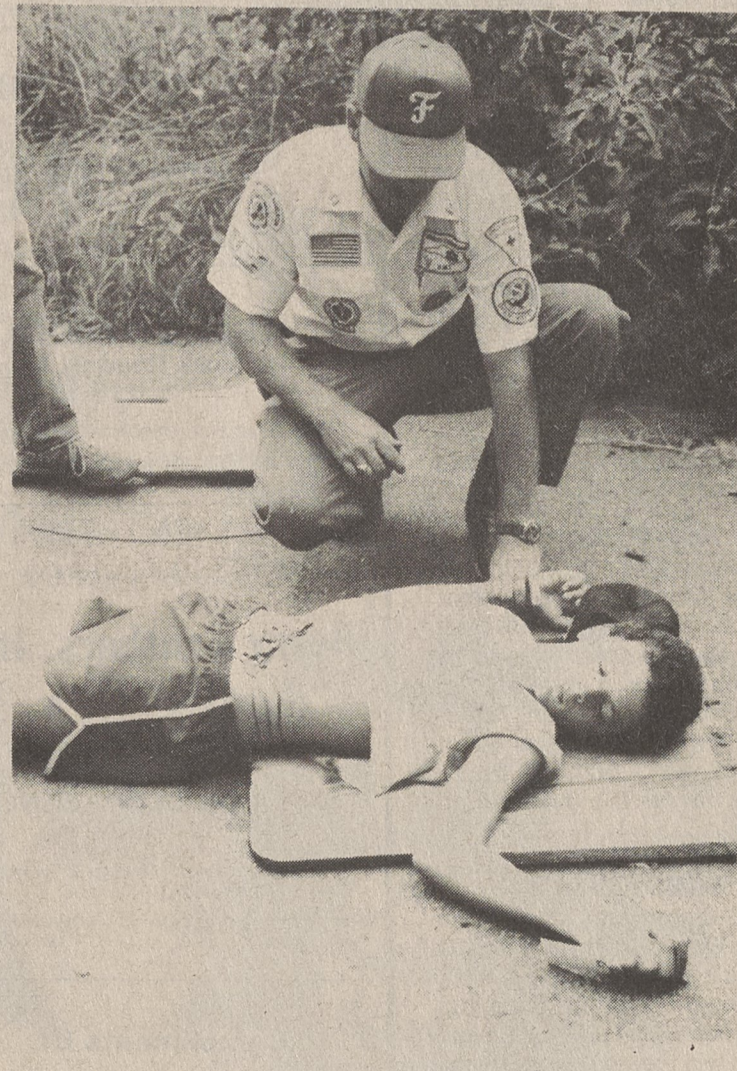
MAKING 'EM PRETTY - Kings Mountain Rescuer Roy Hammett is shown in the two photos above preparing youngsters for last week's simulated car-train wreck at the Depot. In photo at left, he sticks a metal object to the throat of Bitsy Hanna and



in photo at right, Bradley Henderson receives stomach wounds. The disaster was staged to give rescuers and hospital staff training.



THE LINEUP - "Injured" youngsters are all over the ground at the Kings Mountain Depot, where rescuers staged a simulated car-train wreck Friday. The youngsters' injuries ranged from broken limbs to cut stomachs and heads, to death.



CHECKING PULSE - Johnny Hutchins, captain of the Kings Mountain Rescue Squad, checks the pulse of Bradley Henderson during Friday's mock train wreck at the Depot. Henderson, who had severe stomach wounds, wins an Academy Award for his acting performance.