

The Davenport Volunteers

'Somebody Has To Help Out'

By BILL NEUBAUER
Sentinel Staff Writer

So far this year, eight persons have been rescued from pain or possible death by a small group of men who turn out in fair weather or foul, day or night, to lend a helping hand—in the lonely coastal reaches of northern Santa Cruz County.

Most recent rescue was last Monday, when these men put their hearts and know-how to work to aid a 17-year-old boy who had sustained broken ribs and other injuries after a 40-foot fall from a cliff trail to a Davenport beach.

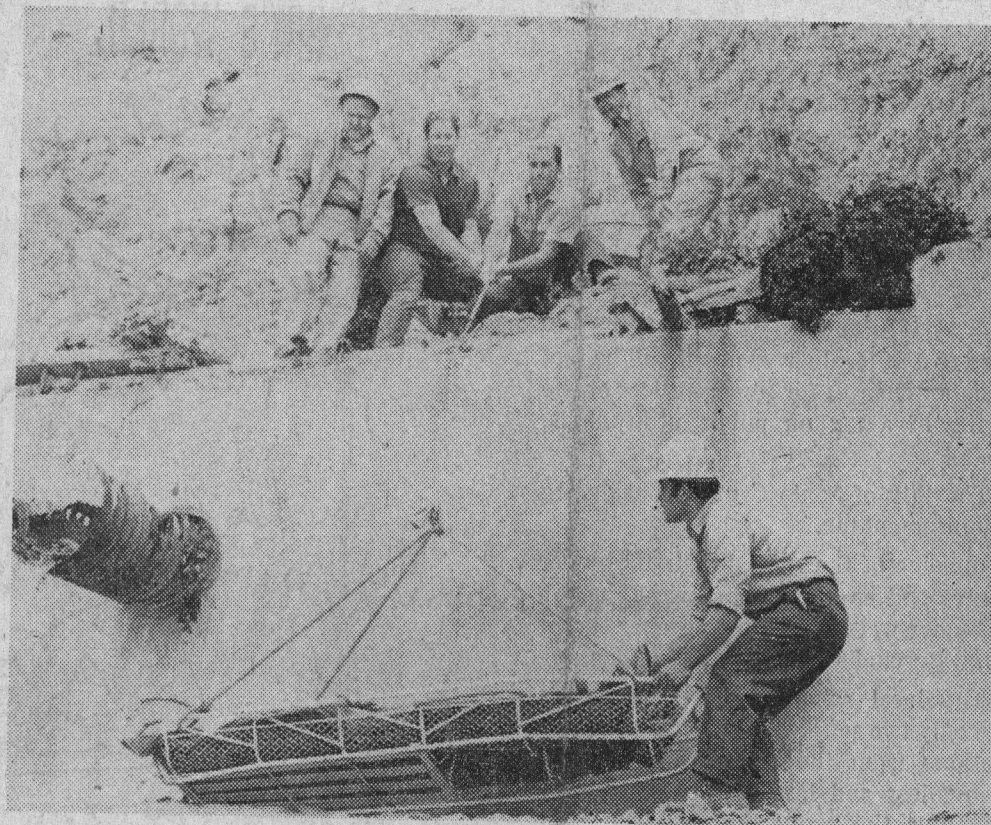
Most dramatic rescue was last week, when helicopters were called in to simplify an almost impossible job of aiding another youth.

The men who compose the rescue group are members of the Davenport Volunteer Fire Department. They respond to fire or rescue calls not for pay but because, as one man expressed it, "somebody has to help out."

In that coastal region, tragedy and near tragedy can happen almost anywhere, always unexpectedly, usually fast.

A fisherman walks the beach to a likely looking place, perhaps even jumping joyously from rock to rock to get closer to the ocean and to the fish. The tide comes in, traps him either on the rocks or in a cove from which there is no escape without help.

Or a fellow and a girl go for a stroll among the headlands and then get that adventurous feeling that leads them



Members of Davenport's Volunteer Fire Department

and rescue squad are shown above at work Monday in the rescue of Ron Fromberg.

to try to follow a steep trail down to the beach. The headlands are chalk rock and break down easily. Bones are broken in the fall. Help is wanted fast.

The call for help is usually transmitted to the rescue team by the Sheriff's Department. The team members, who are

old hands at the work now, usually have a clear idea of what the problem is and what they will have to do.

"Most of our calls involve people who are either trapped on a beach by the rising tide or who slip and fall while climbing cliff trails," Fire Captain Fran-

cis Gregory said. "Most of the victims are tourists who don't seem to realize that ocean tides rise or that human beings aren't mountain sheep."

In most of these cases the problem is essentially the same: how to get a victim out of a difficult position.

The rescue team has all sorts of gear for hauling people from almost inaccessible coves, rocks and beaches. There are ropes 200 feet long, there is a litter basket, there are safety belts and there are chain ladders. In a pinch, they can call a Coast Guard helicopter from Monterey via the Civil Defense communications system.

The helicopters were called last week, Gregory said, because it seemed the only way to effect the rescue of a youth who lay injured on a beach for six hours after a 100-foot fall.

"Undersheriff Paul Tara was down there," Gregory said. "We had to forget using the steep trail because it was shale and you could fall down yourself at any time, it was so steep, so dangerous."

Other times the men do go down either to assist the victim up a chain ladder or to get him into a harness so he can be hauled up to safety. In other cases, unconscious victims must be attended to on the spot before being placed into a litter basket for careful hauling topside.

"In some of these places," Gregory said, "you have to cover the victim's face to protect it from being struck by rocks as they pull him up."

Gregory said that about 50 per cent of the rescue calls involve injury cases, and that all 10 members of the fire department have had first aid training by Sheriff's Deputy Larry Ralston to make certain they can cope with the injuries until the victim has been taken by ambulance to the hospital. The men took the training on their own time.

Other rescues, less routine, leave lasting memories.

"Back in 1952," said Gregory, who was once the department's chief and the youngest fire chief in the state, "we got a call that a yacht, a big sailboat

participating in a race, had smashed on a rock just above Davenport Landing. The three men aboard got onto some rocks but couldn't get up to safety. We had a hard time locating them in the fog. They would have died sure if their call for help hadn't been heard by a farmer who was out checking his gopher traps.

"Well, we got to them and pulled them up. The captain was so grateful that he later sent \$200 to the department for use in our rescue work. I was the fire chief then, and I'll never forget how those men looked when they were safe on land. The yacht was a complete loss."

The rescue team takes pride in doing the apparently impossible, Elio Orlando, present fire chief, says. On more than one occasion for example, Emilio Olimpio Jr., who can't swim, has tied a rope around his waist and gone down a cliff face and waded and splashed his way through hard-driving surf to a remote cove where some human stood trapped.

Olimpio said with a laugh at the firemen's 40th reunion barbecue last spring that he didn't like getting wet but that he would rather get wet than see another person drown.

Ironically, this volunteer rescue work that can make the difference between life and death for an average of 10 persons each year, is supported primarily by the firemen themselves, and their auxiliary.

This financial handicap can create problems.

Rescue equipment is skimpy to begin with, and is made more scarce by losses and damage during rescue work. But the firemen and their ladies are often unable to raise money even for replacement gear, let alone additional equipment they think would be helpful.

Just now the department needs resuscitators and belts. But these will have to wait because radio equipment bought recently for the trucks has wiped out all the money the fire group raised through its annual dinner-dance and bake sales this year. They need another first aid kit for a truck, and so on.

The irony of this equipment shortage is that much money can be expended on a helicopter rescue that could well be made meaningless if a resuscitator is not available to aid the accident victim during the wait on the beach.

Another irony, according to Gregory, is that so many of the tragedies are so easily avoided.

"If visitors to the area would just remember that ocean tides rise and that cliff trails are risky, we'd have far fewer emergencies each year. Up here, we all wish there was a way to make people understand that they can be trapped by the tides and that the chalk rock of these cliffs can crumble. Signs don't help. They just wander onto private property or wherever they wish. Then they get into trouble."

But when the trouble comes, regardless of the stupidity that caused it, Gregory stressed, the 10 men of the fire department will go to the rescue.

"After all," Gregory said, "Somebody has to help out."

In addition to Gregory, team members are Elio Orlando, Emilio Olimpio Jr., Elzie Prior, Julius Giovannoni, Reynaldo Perez, Jimmie Smith, Donald Patheal and James Leshner.

Watsonville Winners At Monterey Fair

America
James,

ndless,
Staple-

America
Gerry

—Beth

rn. Alice

Craig;
Hudson.

h, 200
field

Pearl
yn Ra-

Butler,
t Jen-

atricia

n and
John

Randy

rmin-

ralyn

Ful-

bow,
athie-

mela