



Ray Downey's The Rescue Company

Recruiting and Manning

Recruiting

When one of the oldest rescue companies in New York City was being formed, the department had to recruit for volunteers for assignment. Requirements included that those applying have some experience in a trade and, most importantly, be capable of passing a rigid, special examination. The expected exposure to hazardous chemicals required that they be in the best of health (those were pre-mask days).

More than 200 firefighters answered the call. The commanding officer of the first rescue unit had the luxury of choosing the elite of the elite. Present-day circumstances probably wouldn't allow the same luxury, but the "specialness" attached to the forerunners of rescue companies has carried through to today. Membership in a rescue company is a special assignment; that in itself is enough to draw those

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with a desire to be extraordinary.

How does a commanding officer choose from a number of applicants? The answer lies in establishing a policy that fits the unit's needs. If his unit responds to hazardous materials incidents in addition to its regular assignments, he would need firefighters with some haz-mat background; units that are responsible for water rescue operations would certainly require that members be qualified divers.

The following are some suggested guidelines for the selection process of rescue unit members.

The commanding officer, upon receiving a request from a firefighter for assignment, should set up an interview with the firefighter. The face-to-face interview should be in private and provide a relaxed atmosphere for the applicant. Most interviews give the commanding officer the opportunity to determine if the firefighter's interest in assignment is based on sincere motivation, rather than on being a "front piece collector." The interview also gives the firefighter the opportunity to ask questions. Any misconceptions by either party can be clarified at this time. It's the ideal time for the commanding officer to explain the unit's functions, company policies, and expectations of its members.

The firefighter should be required to

fill out a special company form. (See sample form, page 14.) The form should request information concerning:

date of appointment, which gives the commanding officer an idea of the firefighter's seniority as compared to the overall department;

date assigned to present unit, which gives an idea of his experience in that type of unit;

previous companies and dates assigned, which is a background and experience checklist; and

prior experience on the job or off that would be beneficial to this unit, that is, any special training or skill that would provide an "expertise." On-the-job expertise would include prior experience in truck company with power tools, extrication equipment, saws, etc; haz-mat training (if required); SCUBA training (if required), special department courses attended; EMT, AMT or paramedic training. Off-the-job expertise would include construction-related trades, i.e., construction, electricians, sandhogs, riggers, welders, etc.

The form can be designed to provide any information required for any special unit's needs.

Everyone would like to list his qualifications as a "Rambo" or "James Bond" type, the multitalented firefighter with nine lives. Granted, there

are some out there who believe they fall into this category. The special application form in conjunction with the interview should uncover a more objective picture.

Another consideration could be the firefighter's position on a promotional list. Depending on the amount of varied tools and equipment on the unit's apparatus, it may take months or years of training to become familiar and capable of operating all of it. Training a short-timer only adds to the company's work load, while depriving another applicant of a chance for assignment. Consideration should be given to those that have special skills to offer and who will be with the unit for an extended period of time. If the field is limited, then adjustments must be made that are consistent with your unit's needs.

The completed form is filed in a "Waiting List Book," which is used to select the next detail. I use the word *detail* for a very important reason. Not everyone will enjoy the rescue firefighter's duties. Detailing into the rescue unit for one to three months gives a firefighter the opportunity to see if this is what he wants, and it affords the commanding officer time to see if the firefighter can perform to expectations. Rescue detail certainly isn't everybody's cup of tea.

I remember as a young firefighter hearing the story of a fellow firefighter who had the respect of all of his peers for his dedication, motivation, and firefighting skills. Given the opportunity, he was detailed to a rescue company, during which time he responded to a major air crash and a disastrous fire aboard an aircraft carrier that was under renovation. At these two incidents, he witnessed terrible devastation and loss of life. He finished his detail and chose to return to his unit of assignment, receiving the respect and acceptance he deserved. After getting to know him, it was easy to see that these two incidents had left a great impression on him.

Detailing, as opposed to an immediate transfer into a rescue unit, will provide the time frame necessary to sort out any possible "kinks." If a department doesn't have these provisions for detailing, then the firefighter should be provided with the opportunity to return to his prior unit upon his request.

At times, recommendations of "outstanding" firefighters are given to commanding officers by other officers within the department. This can at

Interview Form

Rescue Company _____ Date _____

Name _____ Tel. # _____

Address _____

Company _____

Date appointed to department _____

Date assigned to present unit _____

List all previous units and dates served:

Unit	Dates

List all special qualifications: (trades-construction, special courses: EMT, AMT, paramedic, etc.)

On-the-job	Off-the-job
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Any special licenses, trades, other:

Are you on a promotional list?

List _____ List number _____

Comments:

Interviewing Officer

times be very helpful, but what is most important to remember is that the firefighter must be the one who desires the assignment.

Manning

What started as a quiet, summer morning tour for firefighters in New York City ended as a day that severely tested their ability to handle a serious building collapse.

A five-story tenement built in the late 1800s was being renovated to accommodate the influx of young professionals seeking reasonably priced living space. It marked the resurgence of an area that only a few years before had been unofficially declared dead.

The building had been completely gutted, and the new construction was to include poured concrete over a Q decking. The problems presented by

this type of formwork for concrete were the underlying factors that caused the collapse. (See "Wooden Structures High in the Sky" by Francis L. Brannigan, *Fire Engineering*, Apr. 1987; see also pages 280-282 of *Building Construction for the Fire Service*, Second Edition, by Francis L. Brannigan, published by the NFPA.)

Workers were nearly finished pouring concrete on an upper floor when suddenly that floor collapsed. The resulting collapse of lower floors sent workers scurrying in all directions. Fire

department members arriving at the scene were met by a number of injured and disoriented construction workers who, in the confusion following the collapse, had problems remembering where they were, how many workers had been at the job site, what floor they had been on prior to the collapse, who, if anyone, was unaccounted for, and what actually happened.

Fortunately, the first arriving chief calmly gathered and pieced together all the information available and was able to institute a plan of action. He

had ascertained that while concrete was being poured on the 3rd floor in an irregularly shaped area of the building, the floor suddenly started to vibrate. It quickly collapsed. A number of workers on that floor actually rode the collapsing floor down and, although injured to some degree, were thrown clear of the rubble.

One worker was not so lucky. He had been working on the outer edge of the 3rd floor and was at the lead end of the collapsing floor. Remaining portions of the 2nd and 3rd floors had fallen in a lean-to position, trapping him against a bearing wall. The chief, realizing the seriousness of the situation, requested that a second rescue company respond.

The first rescue officer arriving at the scene conferred with the incident commander. After assessing the collapse conditions, he set an operational plan into action. His years of rescue experience told him that he was in for an extended operation. Would the five rescue firefighters and himself—the department's manning level requirement—be enough?

The victim was trapped not only against a wall with portions of two floors pinning him, but with his leg trapped in an area separating the lower portions of the collapse and cellar ceilings. Members would be engaged in long, arduous periods of time spent working in areas that still had the potential for further collapse. Relief and rotation would be a priority during these operations. Members would be required to work in front of, alongside, below, and above the trapped victim.

With the arrival of the second rescue company, the rescue officer in charge was able to set up five two-man teams. Two of the teams worked with air bags and hydraulic spreading devices alongside the victim, while another team was busy shoring up the floor from below. The fourth team's operations involved trying to free the victim's severely injured leg, and the fifth team was securing the victim to a lifeline so he wouldn't slip any further down into the collapse rubble as rescuers slowly freed him.

A delicate operation such as this required precise coordination and teamwork from all involved. The expertise and personnel of a third rescue company would have been welcomed.

Would your department have been able to handle this type operation with its present manning levels and number of available special units such as rescue companies? What's the recommended

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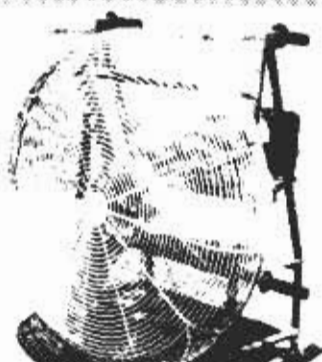
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manning for such a unit? The Municipal Fire Administration recommendation for "Required Strength of Fire Companies" does not include manning for rescue companies. The American Insurance Association's bulletin #319 recommends six firefighters for all companies. It states, "Progressive fire chiefs are of the opinion that companies should never be allowed to respond with less than five members." Most nationally recognized fire organizations are of the same opinion. Some departments may vary their levels of manning in certain companies, depending on the nature of the fire district or the nature of the responses.

Today's fire service leaders are faced with numerous problems, and manning is one of the main concerns. Many of these leaders must deal with the "think tanks" of city administrations. The fire department is usually the first agency to sustain cutbacks during times of fiscal woes. A loss of one human life due to this type of fiscal insanity can never be fully understood or morally justified.

Ideally, six firefighters *in addition* to an officer should be the required manning for all rescue companies. Unfortunately, economic hardships (the cry of most cities in the United States), or union contractual obligations drop the level down to five and even four firefighters per unit.

In the incident previously described, ten firefighters and two officers worked for more than two hours to free the victim. Fortunately, that department was able to provide the necessary personnel to ensure a successful operation.

In February of 1988, another large city was involved in a similar collapse, but this time the trapped victims were firefighters. The problems were compounded when the members who were trapped turned out to be those of a special unit responsible for the rescue of trapped victims—the only such unit in the department. Although the story had a happy ending, the department is taking steps to train another unit in this type of specialized work.

From the first day a firefighter enters the department, he's taught that teamwork is the essential ingredient required for successful firefighting. Whether it be raising ladders, stretching hose, or forcible entry, teamwork is the key. At most rescue operations, the expertise of rescue firefighters is employed due to specialized

manning and equipment needs. It's a special operation, and the teamwork required of rescue firefighters means an even greater coordination of skills.

The "eyes and ears" of a two-man rescue team often are the factors that make an operation safe and successful. Consider the guide man as compared to the tool operator: he can see, anticipate and direct (often-times by hand signals) the tool man, whose hearing and sight is often obstructed by high noise level, size and weight of a tool, or nature of the working space.

In the collapse described at the beginning of this section, five two-man teams were required to free a trapped worker. One member of each team was designated as the "eyes and ears." For example, the tool operator of the air bags gently inflated the bags as directed by the guide man, who could see the result of each movement of the bag. The tool operator of the hydraulic spreading device was directed in the same manner. This enabled the rescue officer to supervise the overall operation by moving from team to team and noting the degree of progress.

An important advantage of having six-man manning in a rescue company is that there are three highly trained and experienced two-man teams that can provide an enormous amount of expertise in any given rescue operation. Their previous training and experience gives them not only the knowledge but the confidence to operate independently with the required team coordination.

Realistically, we face many of our rescue operations with less than the ideal level of personnel. Working with five rescue firefighters and an officer often produces the same results. As in fire operations, every rescue operation will in some way be different than others. In a five-man operation, the officer can set up two two-man teams and either work with the fifth man as the third team or assign him a less demanding position. Using the fifth man as relief for the other two teams is another consideration.

Supervisors should be capable of coordinating the rescue operation and, if necessary, be able to engage physically in the operation. Let's make it clear: That shouldn't be the "golden rule." Rescue operations are unique and the officers directing them should have the expertise and capabilities to provide effective coordination and communications to ensure success.

In many cases, a rescue operation

will be in a limited-access area. Often, only one two-man team can be used to approach the victim. The other teams may be used to survey other possible approaches, working in other areas (for example, shoring from below or providing stability from above), or act as the backup to the first team.

Utilization of rescue firefighters is only limited by the lack of imagination of the rescue officer.

A four-man response team can also be effectively employed by the rescue officer. After sizing up and evaluating the conditions, the officer can set in motion an operational plan using either two two-man teams or one three-man team (with the fourth firefighter used for relief or special assignments). This allows the officer to supervise the operation and still be able to relay information and progress to the incident commander.

If the response is restricted to a three-man rescue unit, the officer can set up, as conditions warrant, the type of operational plan that best accommodates a three-man response. He could, for example, use one three-man team, himself supervising and acting as the fourth, or limit it to one two-man team, using the third man for relief or special assignment.

The rescue officer has the leverage to adapt his operational plan based on the manpower available, the conditions being faced, and, most importantly, the expertise of the rescue team. The plan of operations and deployment of firefighter expertise is affected by "detailing."

The rescue officer must be conscious of detailing of members not trained in rescue to his company and adapt his plan accordingly. For example: A rescue company is being provided with a fourth man who has two years of experience in a fairly inactive engine company. How does the rescue officer utilize the detail? More often than not, he'll have to keep the fourth man (detail) with him and use him in the nonrescue phase of the operation. Using him to transport and provide the tools and equipment as requested by the rescue team would be another effective alternative.

One of the most important resources of a fire department is its specially trained, multitalented, and highly motivated firefighters of its rescue companies. If exceptions have to be made for manning, a department should give its rescue companies the utmost priority. Diluting a fine mixture leaves a bad taste in everyone's mouth. ■



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