



Emergency!

The victim's heart has stopped and she is no longer breathing (top photo). Donald Simmons, left, one of the shift managers for the new Lexington County Ambulance Service, shows emergency medical technician trainees Robert Bernard, center, and Niels Hensen the way to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and external heart massage. The victim is a lifelike dummy used in the state-approved training program for ambulance attendants.

Below, one of the brightly painted new ambulances for the Lexington County Ambulance Service is shown. The vehicles are similar in design to those operated by Carolina Ambulance Service, with white bodies and black letters. The stripe around the ambulance is bright orange. The vehicles will begin work in the new service on Jan. 1. (Staff Photos by Doug Gilmore)

Lexington's Ambulance System Almost Ready

By MIKE BOWEN
Metro Staff Writer

It's a quiet Sunday afternoon and your elderly parents stopped by for lunch after church. You had a big meal and you are all sitting down to talk and give the dinner a chance to settle.

Your mother has been uncomfortable all day with chest pains but she laughs it off. Just a touch of indigestion. Something didn't agree with me, I guess."

Suddenly she clutches her chest. She is gasping for air. Then she passes out. What can you do?

Or your husband and son have gone out into the woods behind the house to see if they can't scare up a rabbit or squirrel. You hear a shot, but think nothing of it.

All at once the boy bursts through the door, breathless.

"Dad's been shot. We were climbing over a fence when he dropped his rifle and it went off. He's hurt. What can we do?"

Or your hear a scream in the back yard. It's your little girl. You rush out and find her lying on the ground beside her swings.

"It hurts, Mommie. My leg hurts. I fell off the swing."

You look down and see that her foot is bent back at an impossible angle. You know immediately her ankle is broken.

What do you do?

OTHER FELLOW

Most people have the feeling that emergencies only happen to the other fellow. But what happens when you are that proverbial other fellow?

In that case, one of the most comforting sounds in the world is the high-pitched wail of an ambulance's siren, and John S. Driggers Jr. and his associates are working hard to make sure that everyone in Lexington County will hear that wail if an emergency occurs.

Little did Driggers know, as he lay wounded in Vietnam, that in just a few years he would be setting up an ambulance service for the county of Lexington — a service designed to handle in peacetime the types of emergencies he was so well trained to handle in the heat of jungle warfare.

A softspoken young man, his unruly hair and neatly trimmed moustache interwoven with strands of gray, Driggers eyes light up when he talks of the plans for the county-wide ambulance service which is to go into effect in weeks.

"Basically we will be offering just first aid at the scene," he said. "We will not be able to administer drugs without some further training for the men."

Treatment by the new Lexington County Ambulance Service, which is scheduled to begin operation January 1, will include the use of splints, bandages, and dressings for wounds both at the scene and on the way to the hospital.

The 16 crewmen, who will be divided into two shifts daily with a shift supervisor and two dispatchers added for each shift, will operate five ambulances at first, with more to be added later.

Presently under extensive training in a state approved course to prepare the men as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT's), the driver-crewmen will also be able to introduce airways into the mouth to aid breathing and will be able to operate the cardiopulmonary resuscitators included as standard equipment on each ambulance.

Even with the mechanical resuscitators, the men have been well versed in administering external heart massage for cardiac patients.

The four primary ambulances will be stationed around the county, at Irmo, Swansea, Batesburg and at the airport near South Congaree, with the fifth located at the service's headquarters trailer across from the sheriff's office in Lexington.

As Driggers explains it, "We will use a swing system, using the backup unit here (in Lexington) on standby when another is in service. If an ambulance from one of the substa-



John S. Driggers, Jr.
Ambulance Service Director

tions is called for an emergency, we can swing this one halfway to handle both areas until the first one returns."

We will also be aided by the Pelion Rescue Squad. They will cover the area between Swansea and Batesburg, filling that very big gap there that would be difficult to handle with just the four main units."

The county has three other ambulances ordered, which will bring the number to eight, but they will not be available by the first of the year, Driggers said.

In addition, the energy crisis is hitting the infant service through a holdup in equipment orders.

"But it won't affect us much at the beginning," he added. Each of the units is equipped with essential emergency gear — the foupup in shipping is just delaying some extra supplies, he explained.

DISPATCH SYSTEM

The service will be tied in with the county's newly approved central dispatch system to be operated from the sheriff's office. The ambulances, along with the sheriff's deputies and the Office of Public Safety, will all be reached by calling one number. That number will be published as soon as the system is completed, hopefully before Dec. 31, Driggers said.

That will mean that by dialing one number, Lexington County citizens can automatically be put in touch with the necessary agency in seconds.

"Two minutes, Two minutes or less. That is the time limit we are shooting for from receipt of the call to departure of the ambulance," he said. "The unit should be on the highway in no more than two minutes."

Though it will be very different from his experiences as a medic in Vietnam, Driggers says much of what he learned in the war will be of assistance in the new system, particularly the well-organized evacuation systems for the wounded.

And he should know, because he was a medic some four-and-a-half months into his tour of duty when his mishap came. Even that wound did not stop him from picking up a Purple Heart, a Silver Star, two Bronze Stars, one with the "V" for valor, and an assortment of other medals for his service.

When he returned to country, he went to work with Carolina Ambulance Service in Columbia "where I got my first exposure to ambulance services stateside. It was a lot different, but much of my experience was extremely helpful."

After almost two years with Carolina, he went to Aiken County, where he assisted in setting up the county ambulance service, Paramedical Services of South Carolina.

He came to Lexington County Nov. 5 to begin work with Public Service Director Major Tom Boltz on the new service.

Though nobody will be shooting at the Georgetown native in his new job, his task will still be much the same — to get the sick and wounded the best medical attention in the least amount of time and it is a job he and his men are well equipped to handle.