

# THE GOLD CROSS

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## **BIRTH OF A FIRST AID SQUAD**

Tension heightened in the volunteers of the Weehawken First Aid Squad as they neared the hospital. It was the maiden mission of the newly formed unit and the three young novices worried about the old 1962 ambulance breaking down. The thought crossed their minds that their first patient could lose his hand and maybe his life because of an un-necessary delay. Maybe the mission was premature, they thought. And then the anxiety slowly left them when they realized every mission would be premature until they could call themselves professionals.

The Weehawken Volunteer First Aid Squad not only made it safely from Hasbrouck Heights Hospital to Flower Fifth Avenue Hospital in New York City that day in mid-June, it made it in Weehawken. The maiden mission left an indelible first impression on the people of Weehawken. Word rapidly circulated that the squad had helped save the hand of Al Bua, a prominent citizen and popular member of the Weehawken Elk's Lodge. Bua was being treated for an injury to his right hand at Hasbrouck Heights Hospital when gangrene was discovered. A painting contractor, he had been infected with lead poisoning in an accident while working. Special surgery and facilities at Flower Fifth Avenue Hospital were needed to save his hand.

The Weehawken squad began with a phone call in early May. The newly elected Mayor, Stanley D. Iacono, had contacted Jack Poole, the squad's past captain, and asked him to form a unit for the township. The 35-year-old mayor informed Poole that he had purchased an ambulance and he would like to see it staffed by volunteers.

Poole said he had received the call because the mayor was aware that "I had a brother-in-law on the Maywood First Aid Squad."

Within two weeks, Poole mustered a nucleus of 30 volunteers. And it was only a short time thereafter that all members were taking the standard First Aid Course from the local Red Cross Chapter. In between other organizational activities, the volunteers went about re-building an ambulance that was really a candidate for the local junk-yard. It was a 1962 Buick that had been purchased from a Jersey City hospital.

Looking back, past president Ron Walsh jokes that the ambulance "had more cardiac arrests than some of our patients." Before the maiden mission, the ambulance had failed in trial runs. It continually lost compression and stalled. The squad knew it couldn't operate effectively with it.

"We returned it to the rightful owner," Walsh said. "And I don't think they wanted it either."

So with the help of the Township Committee and especially the parishioners and pastor of St. Lawrence Roman Catholic Church, a new ambulance was purchased. Rev. John Kelly, the pastor, had donated on behalf of his parishioners \$7,500 so the squad could buy its 1965 Cadillac air-conditioned ambulance. It is maintained and kept in top running condition by squad members themselves.

To make sure the squad functioned as smoothly as its new found vehicle, volunteers visited other First Aid Squads to collect additional information. Poole said "the Maywood squad bent over backwards to help us. And we also received assistance from other Third District Squads."

In addition to the backing of local residents, the squad had the support and cooperation of the Township fa-

thers, and both the police and fire departments.

After the ambulance a stair-chair was donated by the Weehawken Lodge of Elks. And within a month's time the squad was outfitted with every new convenience a first aid squad might need. All volunteers were fitted out with jumpsuits as well as fall and winter jackets. According to Walsh, the inventory of supplies is sufficient for at least a year. Additionally, there is a paneled squad room beneath police headquarters equipped with a television, refrigerator, and two showers for the benefit of the volunteers.

The first fund drive was completed only in December and must be considered a huge success in light of the fact that over \$5,000 was raised.

Since that 16th day of June, the squad has responded to over 250 calls. It has been lauded several times by the Board of Directors of North

Hudson Hospital in Weehawken and has been credited with saving four lives.

Right now the squad wants to expand to a day time operation. It is looking for new members who work nights and would be available for squad calls during the early morning and afternoon hours. It now operates on a 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. basis on weekdays and around the clock on weekends.

Mayor Iacono summed up a good deal of community feeling about the new squad when he recently remarked, "the people of Weehawken can be truly thankful to these dedicated men. Before them, there were twenty perilous minutes, but now there are seven or even less."

The front cover photo shows some of the Squad members and their ambulance with a Weehawken City background.