

Georgetown Volunteer Ambulance Service: 18 year years of good service



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By Andy Fenton
GVAS Member

Late in 1956 the firm of funeral directors which had operated the ambulance service in Georgetown for some years informed the town council that since the operation was unprofitable it was being discontinued. This of course, meant that the community would be without coverage for ambulance emergencies and gave rise to a serious problem. What arrangement could be made to ensure continued coverage?

At this time a small number of citizens met and suggested that the service be continued by means of a voluntary company of drivers and assistants. This was something of an experiment since very few communities had tried this system, and none of them in this area.

A general meeting was called in January, 1957 at which elections were held and the necessary offices filled. Volunteers were enlisted and from among them a roster was compiled so that there would be two people on duty at all times.

The concept was presented to the town council for approval. There now remained the question of an ambulance, quarters for it and a station for receiving calls. After considerable discussions in council a motion was approved to purchase for \$900.00 the 1951 Chevrolet Ambulance which belonged to the H.C. McClure Funeral Home. It was to be kept in a garage on Cross Street near the former town hall and all calls for ambulance service were to be made to the fire hall where a current roster of duty men would be posted.

The service started with a complement of 41 volunteers under Ralph Hawes as Chief. Later in the year Ed Hall took over as Chief, with Fred Hue and Jim Emmerson as Captains.

The first call on March 8, 1957 was to a highway vehicle accident at Silver Creek. The experiment worked well. In 1957 the fledgling service responded to 118 calls and a newspaper headline proclaimed "Town Ambulance Service Outstanding Success."

The addition of a fully equipped new International Travel-all ambulance in June, 1958 provided a standby vehicle which greatly improved the service capabilities of the G.V.A.S.

Social activities were not forgotten. The first annual dance was held at the Georgetown Legion in December, 1959, to be followed two years later by the first annual picnic for members and their families. These events have continued and are highlights of the year among GVAS social activities.

A long sought and much needed town-financed insurance coverage for members went into effect in June 1961 thereby providing all men while on duty with full accident and sick benefit insurance. (In over 18 years of operation no serious injury to any member has occurred while on duty.)

After much serious study, a constitution was adopted in 1961, providing a guide to all matters of policy and discipline within GVAS.

Harold Gilmore was elected Chief in 1962 and in the same year the hopes of many members were fulfilled with the erection of a new, combination, ambulance garage and administrative building. These headquarters, situated on James Street went into operational use in July. September 29, 1962 was officially declared "Ambulance Day" in Georgetown and the building was officially presented to GVAS on that date. This was one of the busiest days in the history of the service. None of the distinguished guests present at the ceremonies saw an ambulance as both vehicles were handling calls from 6.30 in the morning until well past 9 at night.

Space was now available for vehicles and for business meetings, training sessions and so on, giving GVAS its first official home.

1962 also saw a lapel badge designed and presented to each active GVAS member.

Following the election of Dan Scarborough as Chief in 1963, members of the service travelled to Alliston, Ontario to advise some members of the community there on setting up a volunteer ambulance organization similar to GVAS. Later visits were exchanged with Bolton for the same purpose.

One significant development in 1963 was the installation of two-way radios exclusively for ambulance use, and the voice of the late Mrs. Oliver, the long-time dispatcher for the police and fire service at the time became familiar to the ambulance crews over the air waves.

In these days only the police had authority to call out an ambulance to a vehicle accident. Usually the police would respond to the scene of an accident, determine that there were injuries and only then was the ambulance summoned as no one else had the authority to do so. GVAS responded to 200 calls in 1963.

GVAS received some recognition in 1964 when Dr. Harry C. Harley, M.P. for Halton, described in the House of Commons the service as providing "A 24-hour, efficient, trained ambulance service."

The original 1951 Chevrolet ambulance purchased at the inception of the service was replaced by a Cadillac vehicle purchased during war surplus in 1965 followed in 1967 by the purchase of a second Cadillac ambulance to

replace the International vehicle. The tenth anniversary of the service was celebrated in 1967.

A change in top personnel occurred in 1968 when Ken Thomson took over as Chief from Dan Scarborough, who, in the same year, received from the St. John Ambulance Association a "Priory Vote of Thanks", presented by the Governor-General.

The next Chief, elected in 1969 was Tom Massena. A new vehicle was added to the service in 1970 when a ministry of health Ford ambulance replaced the Cadillac purchased in 1965. The Ford ambulance was provided to GVAS as part of a ministry program to standardize ambulance vehicles and equipment throughout the province.

In 1972 the St. John Ambulance Association presented a "Special Provincial Certificate" to GVAS in recognition of service to the community, to be followed in November, 1973 by the investiture of Chief Tom Massena as "Serving Brother" of the Order of St. John, for his contribution to ambulance work.

The town of Georgetown ceased to exist on December 31, 1973 with the onset of regional government. Mayor Bill Smith attended the GVAS dinner-dance in December 1973 and presented certificates of thanks from the town of Georgetown to all members. Georgetown Volunteer Ambulance Service continues of course and retains its name under regional government as part of the town of Halton Hills.

A team from GVAS triumphed over the many full-time ambulance services participating when they took first place in the First-Aid Competition run by the Ontario Ambulance Operators Association at Hamilton, Ontario in July, 1973. The team then proceeded to Omaha, Nebraska and participated in the International Rescue and First-Aid Association first-aid competition for teams from all over North America. Although the GVAS representatives did well, they did not place among the winners.

From the inception of GVAS the volunteers had responded to ambulance calls wearing their own clothing which frequently became damaged or soiled in the course of duty. In 1974 uniforms were issued to members, resulting in a more professional appearance for the ambulance crews.

To improve response time electronic alerting devices were supplied to each member. These replaced the time consuming method of individual telephone calls to the duty crew from the dispatcher after he had recorded all the necessary information from the individual calling the ambulance. Now the dispatcher alerts the ambulance crews while he is still talking on the telephone to the caller and then relays the information to the crew at the ambulance garage through the "Red Phone", a special direct line from the dispatch office to the garage.

With the hope of further reducing response time, distinctive automobile visor cards reading "Ambulance Crew on Emergency" were issued to members for use when travelling to the ambulance garage in response to a call. The visor cards are simply a request to police and other members of the public that the members car not be obstructed. GVAS members must still adhere to the Highway Traffic Act.

In June, 1974 the federal ministry of transport ran a course to officially qualify GVAS members for the "Restricted Radio Operators" certificate to ensure the proper use of radio procedures while on the air.

A highly significant development among many in 1974 was the beginning of the course in "Emergency Casualty Care." This is the same training course which is mandatory for professional ambulance crews in the province who attend Camp Borden full-time for a month to qualify. GVAS members attended weekly classes in the evening with weekend practical work also required. Course topics included anatomy and physiology; respiration and resuscitation; soft tissue injuries; injuries to the skull, brain, neck and spine; medical and environmental emergencies; emergency childbirth and the operation of ambulance vehicles and emergency care equipment.

The course was co-ordinating and taught by Paul Stoner of the ministry of health, ambulance services branch, assisted by guest lecturers from the medical profession.

In addition to the above training GVAS members attended the first of a series of lectures on specialized medical topics related to ambulance work at Peel Memorial Hospital, Brampton.

Another first rounded off 1974; a Children's Christmas Party for members' families proved to be a resounding success with over 100 children present. Before attending the party Santa Claus visited Georgetown Hospital and distributed gifts to the children there. It is anticipated that this party will become an annual event.

The fast pace continued in 1975. Bob Simpson was elected Chief at the annual general meeting in February. A major revision to the constitution was approved by the membership at that meeting.

Early in 1975 the finance committee of the Town of Halton Hills approved in principle an addition to the headquarters building and garage on James Street. GVAS hopes to gain final approval to construct another vehicle bay and a second floor to permit better vehicle maintenance and cleaning facilities and improved kitchen, classroom and training capabilities. At the time of writing these plans are subject to engineering studies and the final approval of full council.

The men behind the service

Keeping the Georgetown Volunteer Ambulance Service operating smoothly from one day to the next is a demanding job which keeps the service's executive active at all times.

This year's executive is headed by Chief Bob Simpson and Deputy Chief, Frank Kirk. Handling the money end of the operation is treasurer Gerard Wilcox. Ross Rennick is the service's secretary.

The service is split into two groups. Group One is headed by Captain Andy Fenton. Lieutenants for Group One include Ken Brown, Garnet Cameron, Bill Campbell and Len Hunsinger.

Mark Brassard heads the operation of Group Two with assistance from Lieutenants John Bonia, Vic Dunleavy, Bill Maxwell and Ed Savage.

Members of the GVAS assigned to Group One include:

Jim Bennett, Bob Bradley, Larry Cook, George Cozens, Bob Crawford, George Duncan, George Finnie, Doug Magwood, John Lightowler, Les King, Bill Moore, Al Roxborough, Bob Simonsen.

Angus, Eric, Harry and Bill Stone, Lloyd Sweezie and Trevor Williams.

In Group Two are: Ace Bailey, Paul Bennett, Wally Davis, Ed Hall, Mike Harley, Doug Herrington, Jim Jenkins, Joe Johnston, Frank Kirk, Bill Lane, Tom Massena, Early Merrill, Dave Rawson, Ross Rennick, Jim Smyth, Doug Tucker, Frank Tyrrell, Gord Van Horne, and Gerard Wilcox.

But a lot of the men do double duty with the ambulance service taking on extra responsibilities to ensure the service's success.

Al Roxborough, for instance, heads up the social activities of the service. Ed Hall is the membership chairman. To keep the public posted on the GVAS activities Andy Fenton handles the public relations end of the operations.

An important contribution is offered by Jim Bennett who sets up the training programs for the group. Medical supply is looked after by Frank Kirk while Mark Brassard is in charge of vehicle maintenance.



RECEIVING INSTRUCTION in cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, or heart massage as it is commonly known, are GVAS members Eric Stone (left) and Len Hunsinger. In the centre is Paul Stoner of the ministry of health, ambulance services branch.

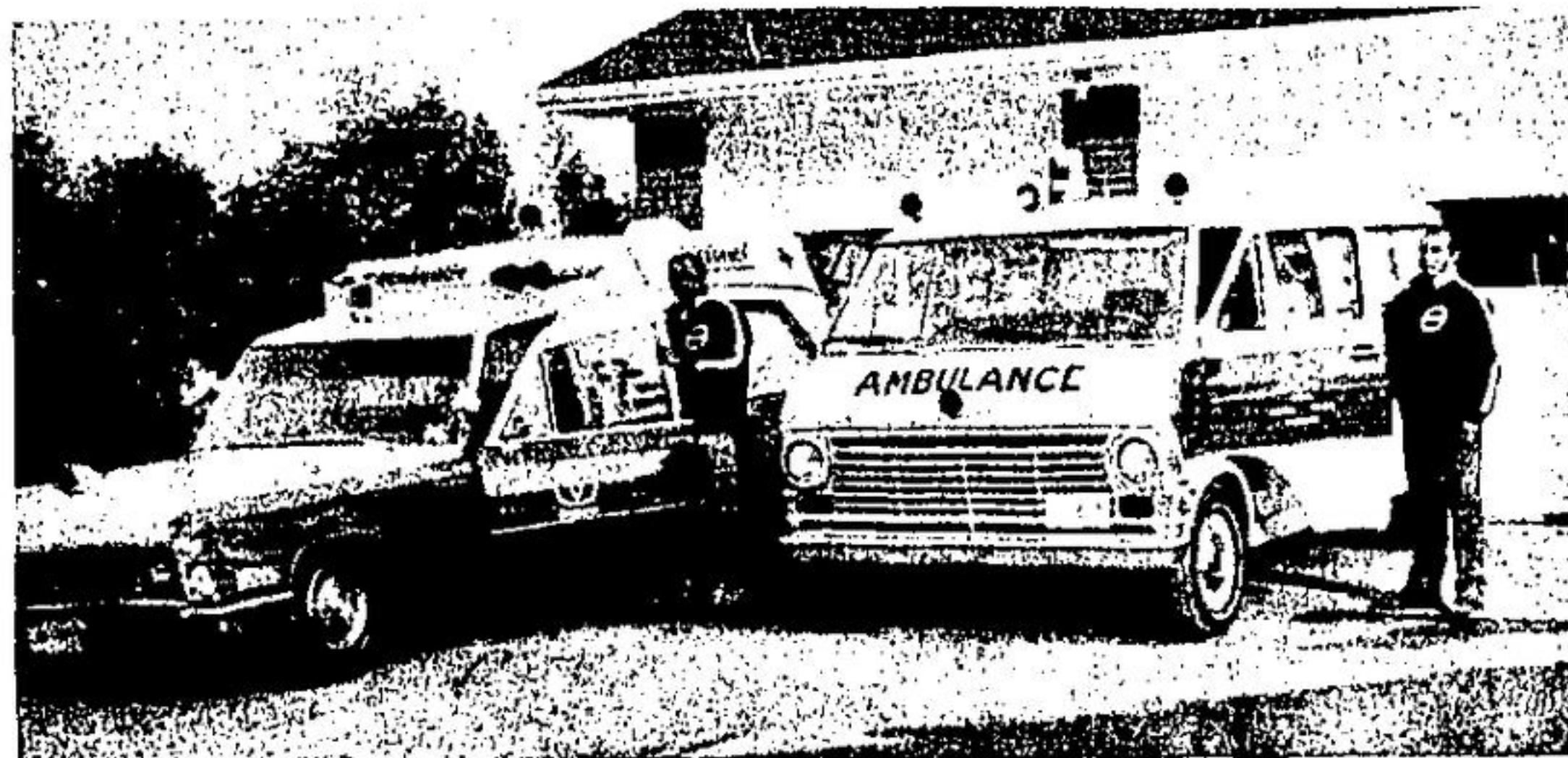


HOW'S YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE? Gary Rolfe stopped at the Georgetown Volunteer Ambulance Service display over the weekend not realizing he would be used in one of the many demonstrations that were scheduled for the event.

Still serving

After 18 years and more emergencies than they probably care to recall there are still four members from the original crew who formed the Georgetown Volunteer Ambulance Service still ac-

tively serving. Ace Bailey, Ed Hall, Doug Herrington and Gerard Wilcox were all on hand back in 1957 when GVAS began operation in an old garage on Cross Street.



AND GVAS NOW...1975 sees the GVAS crews responding to calls in either one of these two vehicles. Lieutenant Garnet Cameron (at left) stands beside the Cadillac ambulance and Lieutenant Len Hunsinger is seen beside the Ford. Notice also in the two pictures the change in locations from the GVAS's original headquarters on Cross Street to the new building on James Street.



GVAS THEN...This is the first ambulance owned by the Georgetown Volunteer Ambulance Service. Purchased for \$900 in 1957 the 1951 Chevrolet vehicle was used for eight years.



INSPECTING the Cadillac that serves on the force with the Georgetown Volunteer Ambulance Service were (left to right) Keith

Johnston, Gary Maclean and Johnny Penny with secretary Ross Rennick.