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Victim's brother a witness

Train-truck collide in Pickering

MAXINE SHARE-STROM
Staff Reporter

A 30-year-old Claremont man driving a pick-up truck along Sideline 12 Friday afternoon saw his teenage brother hurled

through the air when a CP Rail train smashed into a tractor-trailer the boy was a passenger in.

Seconds later, Merle Timbers Jr. ran through the twisted

wreckage of freight cars and truck metal to find 14-year-old Desi Timbers lying in a ditch.

"Merle Jr. thought his brother was going to die in his arms," their mother, Mary Timbers, said in an interview Tuesday. She

said her older son lifted the boy up then saw his eyes roll back in his head. "When Desi said 'Don't leave me,' Merle knew his brother was going to be okay."

Miraculously, Desi suffered only minor cuts and bruises in the

accident that derailed four freight cars and all four engines pulling the train westbound at the Sideline 12 level crossing near Claremont.

Desi recalls little of the accident: "All I remember is being hit and that's when Merle Jr.'s nightmare began."
 Tractor-trailer driver Bill Hubers, 30, also survived the crash after spending a harrowing one-and-a-half-hours trapped inside the mangled wreckage of his cab.

He was treated for minor back injuries, cuts and bruises at Ajax-Pickering Hospital and released the same day after firefighters rescued him with the jaws of life.

Mr. Hubers, a Cannington father of two, said he had slowed down as he approached the train tracks.

He said he looked up the tracks to his left "then all of a sudden I saw a set of headlights. In a split-second, I knew I couldn't stop or I'd have no hope (of avoiding an accident)."

He said he sped up "hoping I could get (the truck) across."
 It didn't work.

But although the vehicle was struck between the back axle of the truck and the front of the trailer, Desi credits Mr. Huber's quick thinking with saving their lives.

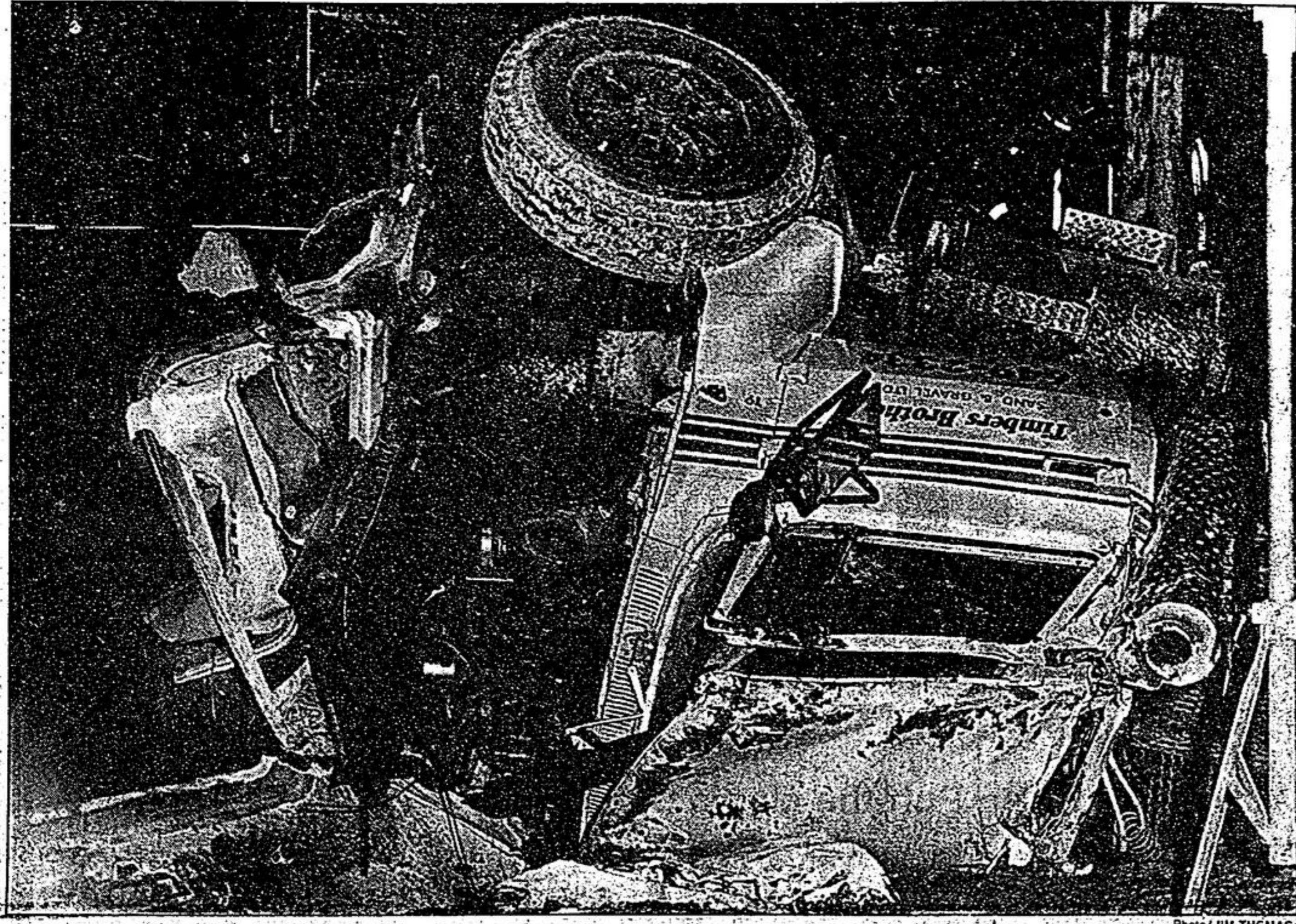
"If he didn't (speed up) we would have been hit dead on," Desi said Tuesday, still feeling "pretty sore and achey" following the ordeal.

The train's engineer was also taken to hospital with a minor back injury.

Mr. Hubers was driving a truck belonging to the Timbers Brothers Sand and Gravel Ltd, a company owned by Desi's family.

Mr. Hubers said his brush with death made the holiday season special: "Just seeing my two kids open all their presents and enjoying themselves, well, I know how lucky I am to be alive," he said.

Officials said there were no hazardous materials on board the freight cars. CP Rail has routed a line of track around the scene to permit rail traffic until the derailed cars are uprighted.



Photo/JIM THOMAS

The cab of the Timbers Brothers Sand and Gravel Ltd. truck was a twisted mass of metal following a grinding collision with a CP Rail freight train on Friday. Although three people suffered minor cuts and bruises, there were no serious injuries in the mishap.

Funds roll in for Kennedy family

STOUFFVILLE — More than \$15,000 has been collected in a benevolent fund set up for Stouffville accident victim Ernie Kennedy, say officials from two local banks.

Friends and colleagues have rallied around Mr. Kennedy, who had both arms torn off in an industrial accident Dec. 13 while he was working on a gravel-separating machine at Lee Sand and Gravel Ltd. in Stouffville.

Surgeons reattached Mr. Kennedy's severed limbs in a marathon 18-hour procedure following the accident, but both arms had to be amputated only days later after doctor's deemed the surgery unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, truck drivers at the firm Mr. Kennedy works for, as well as drivers at neighboring companies, have donated thousands of dollars by carrying loads on behalf of the family.

Frank Busato, who is organizing Mr. Kennedy's trust fund said "donations have been going like dynamite." Mr. Busato estimates approximately \$15,000 in donations have been collected to date.

Donations at two Stouffville Main Street banks continue to roll in, according to banking officials.

"We're collecting money from all over the place and putting it in the bank for them," said Connie Hess, an employee at Lee Sand and Gravel Ltd. "I'm exceedingly happy. I know that at one point

there was over \$10,000 in the account."

And Carol Watson, a Main Street Scotiabank accounts clerk, says donations continue to arrive at the branch.

"Things are going very well," said Mrs. Watson. "It's really nice of people to be so generous, especially at this time of year."

Individual donations can be made at either of the Main Street CIBC or Scotiabank branches on behalf of the Kennedy family.

Mr. Kennedy is still in hospital in Toronto and is listed in fair condition.

Lighting spectacle

CLAREMONT — Ray and Darlene Uzzell and family have done their place and their community proud.

Their house, located on Station Road, Claremont, is winner of The Best Decorated Home Contest, a project sponsored by the Lions and Lioness Clubs.

For their effort, Mr. and Mrs. Uzzell will receive a well-deserved Christmas gift of \$50.

Second prize, and \$30, goes to Wesley and Lynn Blanchard and family, Wellington Street, Claremont.

Perennial winners, Al and Carole Redshaw, Franklin Street, Claremont, placed third. They'll receive \$20.

Trip of a lifetime

Search is on for mongoose

By KATE GILDERDALE
 While most people have been immersed in holiday celebrations, Stouffville resident Eldon Smith has been preparing himself for the trip of a lifetime, which will take him to a remote corner of Liberia, on the west coast of Africa.

The 14-year employee of the

Metro Toronto Zoo is visiting the area as part of a team whose task is to find and observe an extremely rare mammal called the Liberian Mongoose.

The existence of the animal only became known to Western scientists in 1957, and it was not fully described until 1974.

"Only twenty-five specimens

have been collected to date," he notes. "I presume they're only skeletons. They haven't been able to get a skin. We only know what the animal looks like from the descriptions of the natives."

The Liberian Mongoose is believed to be concentrated mainly in the rain forests of Eastern Liberia. "We're going over to look at the status and possible conservation of an endangered species."

Mr. Smith describes the Liberian Mongoose as "very similar to but a little bigger than a mink-like animal, weighing about two kilos."

Early in 1988, another team, consisting of a mongoose specialist from the Royal Ontario Museum, the curator of mammals at the zoo and an assistant from the department of mammalogy at the Museum, spent six

weeks at Sapo National Park in southern Liberia.

During their survey, the group studied the flora and fauna at the park, and set up traps in an attempt to catch a live specimen of the Liberian Mongoose.

Although they were unsuccessful, one team member, mongoose specialist Dr. Mark Taylor, stayed on and visited the forests in the eastern part of Liberia to do further research on the animal.

He found that while a lot of villagers knew of its existence, they hadn't seen one for many years. His search led him to the Gibi Forest, where the people told him they knew the animal well and had been hunting some that day.

"The only specimen he was able to obtain was one of about 15

(Continued Page A-5)

Debra set for return to school

A New Year's resolution for Stouffville's Debra Surman is to return to Stouffville District Secondary School as a regular student.

It will be a big step for the resilient 17-year-old, who is still recovering from multiple injuries received in a single vehicle crash Oct. 16 near Newmarket.

She spent 41 days in the hospital with a broken pelvis, collapsed lung, damaged liver and ruptured spleen.

Debra captured the heart of Stouffville residents who followed her long and painful recovery, and she was welcomed back by the entire town when she returned home from hospital at the end of November.

Now, she wants to get on with her life — the life of a happy and normal teenager.

"She's already been back for a

couple of classes, but our aim is January to get her back full-time," said Debra's mother, Terri, who has been at her daughter's side since the accident.

Debra was permitted by doctors to begin a fitness program to regain her strength, and, thanks to the generosity of a Markham fitness club which offered her a three-month membership, she plans to take advantage of the opportunity.

And, barring any setbacks, it will be full steam ahead for the remainder of her recovery.

Despite the accident and long healing process, appearances of the old Debra are resurfacing more and more.

Like most 17-year-old girls during the festive season, "she's been Christmas shopping and spending time with her friends."

Armenia-bound aid from Stouffville

STOUFFVILLE — Survivors of Soviet Armenia's recent earthquake are receiving medical relief from Stouffville's McNeil Pharmaceutical (Canada) Ltd. Officials at the drug firm confirmed Thursday that relief workers in the stricken region, which was hit by a mammoth earthquake two weeks ago killing 65,000, have received distress packages originating from McNeil.

The firm donated 1,000 cartons containing boxes of Tylenol tablets for survivors of the quake.

The donation is valued at approximately \$4,000.

Co-ordinated by marketing department employee Ray Mew, the relief work involved co-operation among several divisions in the McNeil workplace, says employee Diane Szymanowski.

The relief donation forwarded by McNeil was brought about by requests from a group seeking relief assistance from various agencies, Ms. Szymanowski said.

"It was done in record time and that's something we're proud of," she noted.

Firefighters baffled by silo blaze

LEMONVILLE — Stouffville firefighters are somewhat baffled this week after fire broke out in a storage silo which hasn't been in use for three years.

Stouffville Deputy Fire Chief Murray Emmerson said Thursday its likely the fire spontaneously ignited among material left behind in the abandoned silo on McCowan Road just north of Stouffville Road.

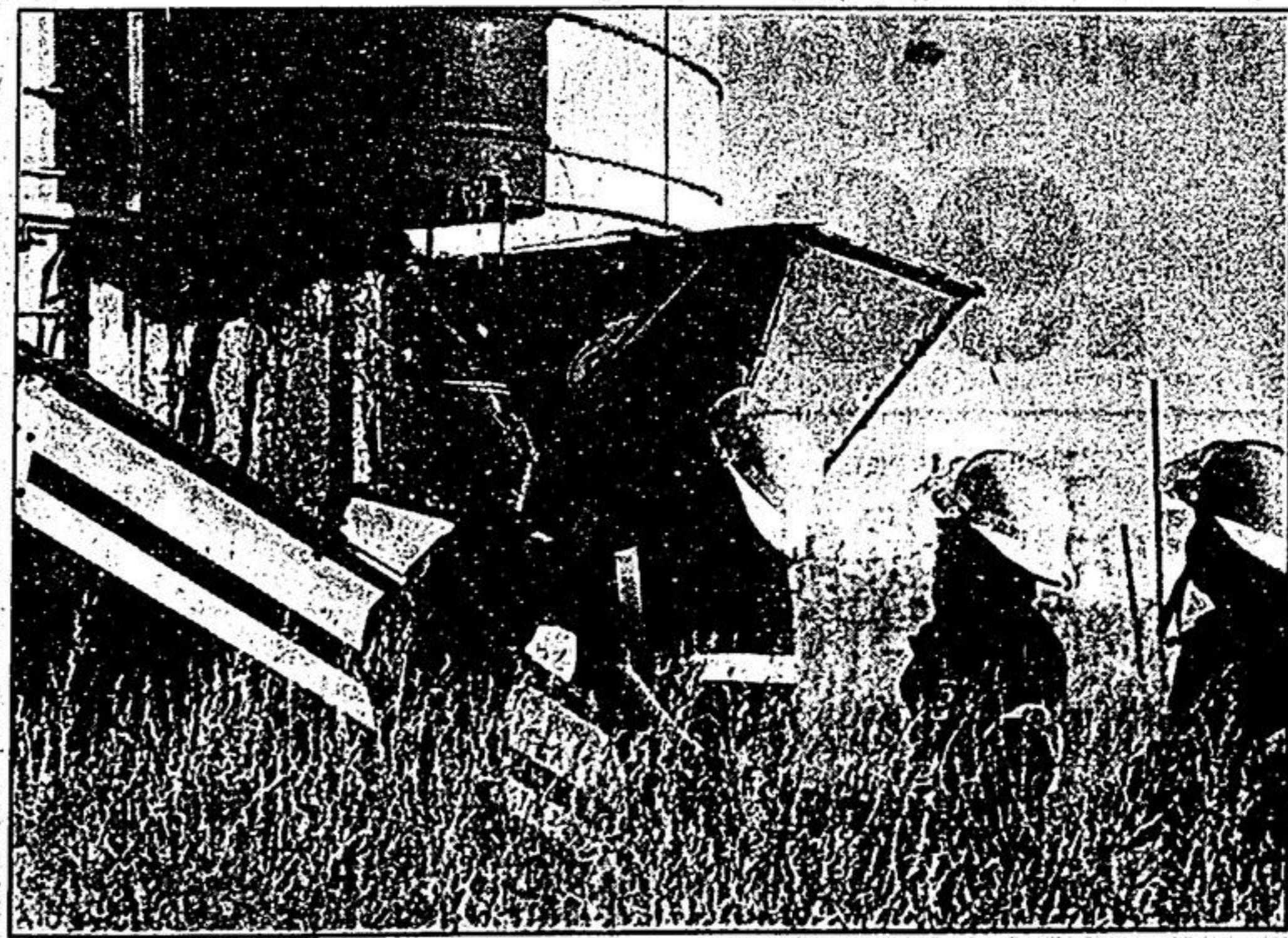
He said the single silo hasn't been in operation in recent years. It stands beside J.B. Truck Repair.

Initial investigation attributes the fire to spontaneous combustion, Deputy Chief Emmerson said.

"That's the only thing we can put it down to," he said in an interview. "It's a little bit of a mystery."

Firefighters quickly controlled the blaze by hosing down the interior of the tower, but didn't continue spraying to prevent freezing, which could damage it, said the deputy chief.

There is no estimate of damages in the incident. No injuries were reported.



Stouffville firefighters quickly extinguished a blaze in a silo Thursday. Although the cause is a mystery, fire officials believe it started by spontaneous combustion in the unused storage structure.