

Mentone's firefighters dedicated to their job

by Renee Norlander

Volunteer organizations have always played an important basic role in the structure of a small town and Mentone is no exception. One of the very finest volunteer organizations I have ever seen is the Mentone Volunteer Fire Department.

A total of twenty-two men keep Mentone protected against fires, and last year they answered forty-two calls to serve. According to Chief Joe Good, no men were injured at any of these fires, but we all know the risks these men take each time they answer a call. Last week, I met with several of the men to discuss the operation of volunteer department. Present were Chief Joe Good, Assistant Chief Roger Montel, Captain and Vice-President of the Kosciusko County Firemen's Association - Butch Warren, and Lieutenant - Ellis Shepherd. These men were chosen by all of the volunteers, and the position of Chief was approved by the Mentone Tri-township Fire Control Board. One other officer, Lieutenant Chet Smith, was also elected at last January's election.

The men explained to me that anyone can become a fireman in Mentone, but when they join, they are on a six month probation which time they are taught to do all of the fire fighting equipment, and are tested for their skills. They are also observed for good moral conduct, and enthusiasm being a fire fighter.



SIX volunteers of the Mentone Fire Department met Sunday for this picture. Pictured from left to right are Chief Joe Good, Assistant Chief Roger Montel, Lieutenant Ellis Shepherd, Captain Butch Warren, Bob Heckman, and Earl Beattie, Mentone Marshall. Heckman is also a volunteer reserve officer on the Mentone Police Department.

A recent law passed by the State of Indiana, also requires that each new fireman must acquire eighty hours of instruction from a certified instructor to become a fireman. The "grandfather clause" allows experienced firemen to work without this certified instruction. After a new man reaches the rank of "fireman", he may progress to

2nd class, 1st class, and then "Master firefighter". According to Butch Warren, a master firefighter has received about 240 hours of instruction to acquire this rank. Fifteen of the volunteers in Mentone are "certified" firemen.

There are also two EMT's on the department - Kenny Bush and Gene Hughes - who are capable of taking care of persons injured in a fire. Many of the other men also have first aid training, and equipment for smoke inhalation is carried to every fire. Six of the men are also State Certified Radiological Monitors, which qualifies

them to check for radiation in a case where nuclear radiation may be involved.

The men in the department are very proud of the equipment they have; apparently they are far better equipped than most volunteer departments. Besides two 750 gallon pumpers, they have a 1500 gallon portable tank, a grass fire truck with front sprayers, an emergency truck, and a water tanker. They are also proud of the original firetruck, a 1929 Dodge, that they show in parades.

Much of the equipment the department has, has been purchased

through the volunteer's own efforts. The large pumpers were purchased by the Control Board, but the volunteers have raised enough money through fish fries and parking cars at TVHS athletic games to purchase radios, uniforms, the grass truck, and \$800 worth of apparatus for the water truck. They also give out candy on Christmas Eve, gave watermelons for the Youth League Picnic last summer and sponsored a child in the Special Olympics.

The 1978 budget for the fire department was set at \$11,000, with about one third coming from Mentone, one third from Harrison Township, and one third from Newcastle and Franklin Townships. The three townships, along with Mentone, make up the Mentone Tri-township Fire Control Board. Serving on the Board are Frank Hardesty, Catherine Whetstone, Chester Clampitt Jr., Don Smalley, and Wendell Grass. The Board was formed in 1966, for the purpose of borrowing money to build the new fire station, and new members are elected each year.

The volunteers are allowed a \$50 clothing allowance each year, and are given \$10 for gas they use in their cars coming to and from town. At the end of the year, they all receive a check for their services depending on how many fires they fought, how many meetings they attended, and so on. This year's allowance averaged out to \$1.50 per fire! So it's obvious that they're not doing it for the money!

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