

Haz-mat specialists — an emerging field

By MARIANE MEUSE

BURLINGTON — His business card describes him as a "hazardous substance specialist" but Philip McArdle of the Fire Department of New York City will be the first to tell you he's not an expert.

"There are no experts in the field," said McArdle, who serves on the Big Apple's Hazardous Materials Company 1, a unit which does nothing but hazardous materials work.

McArdle was in town recently to help train firefighters from Burlington and Billerica on Burlington's new hazardous materials response truck. A two-week training session culminated in a day of simulated exercises on Thursday.

The specialized field of dealing with hazardous materials (haz-mat for short) incidents is a relatively new one but promises to grow in the coming years as more knowledge is gained, according to McArdle.

"This is only in its infancy. As big as the New York company is, we still have a lot to learn. I have a lot to learn as a teacher. I still go to school," he said.

The training for people manning haz-mat trucks is an ongoing process and McArdle's visit to Burlington is part of the local process, according to Assistant Fire Chief Leo Pouliot.

"He's bringing them up to speed about what's going on nationally," said Pouliot, who added that there are precious few

Fire Academy to ensure training for each of the 18 Burlington firefighters who work on the haz-mat unit.

Pouliot concurs with McArdle on the absence of true experts in the field, saying that "if you call yourself an expert, you're in trouble."

New federal regulations require that, as of March 1990, all first responders to incidents involving hazardous materials must have received a certain level of training, according to McArdle. First responders, according to McArdle, include not only firefighters but also police officers and emergency services personnel.

The New York company for which McArdle works is one of the oldest in the country, having been formed in 1982. McArdle said it is also "probably the most involved" unit in the country.

"We probably do more haz-mat incidents than anyone else in the country. The bulk of the haz-mat units around the country only started to surface in the last 5 or ten years," he said.

McArdle attributes the increased interest in haz-mat to an increased awareness on the part of the public of the dangers of incidents involving hazardous materials. He points to such incidents as Chernobyl and Bhopal as examples. Incidents in the U.S. have also led to deaths, such as the Waverly, Virginia propane explosion that killed 22.

dealing with dangerous materials have changed over the years as people have learned more, according to McArdle.

"Although hazardous materials have been around for a long time, people are starting to handle them differently," he said.

The term hazardous materials encompasses a wide range of items, including explosives, radioactive products, flammable items, acids and corrosives, and PCBs, according to McArdle.

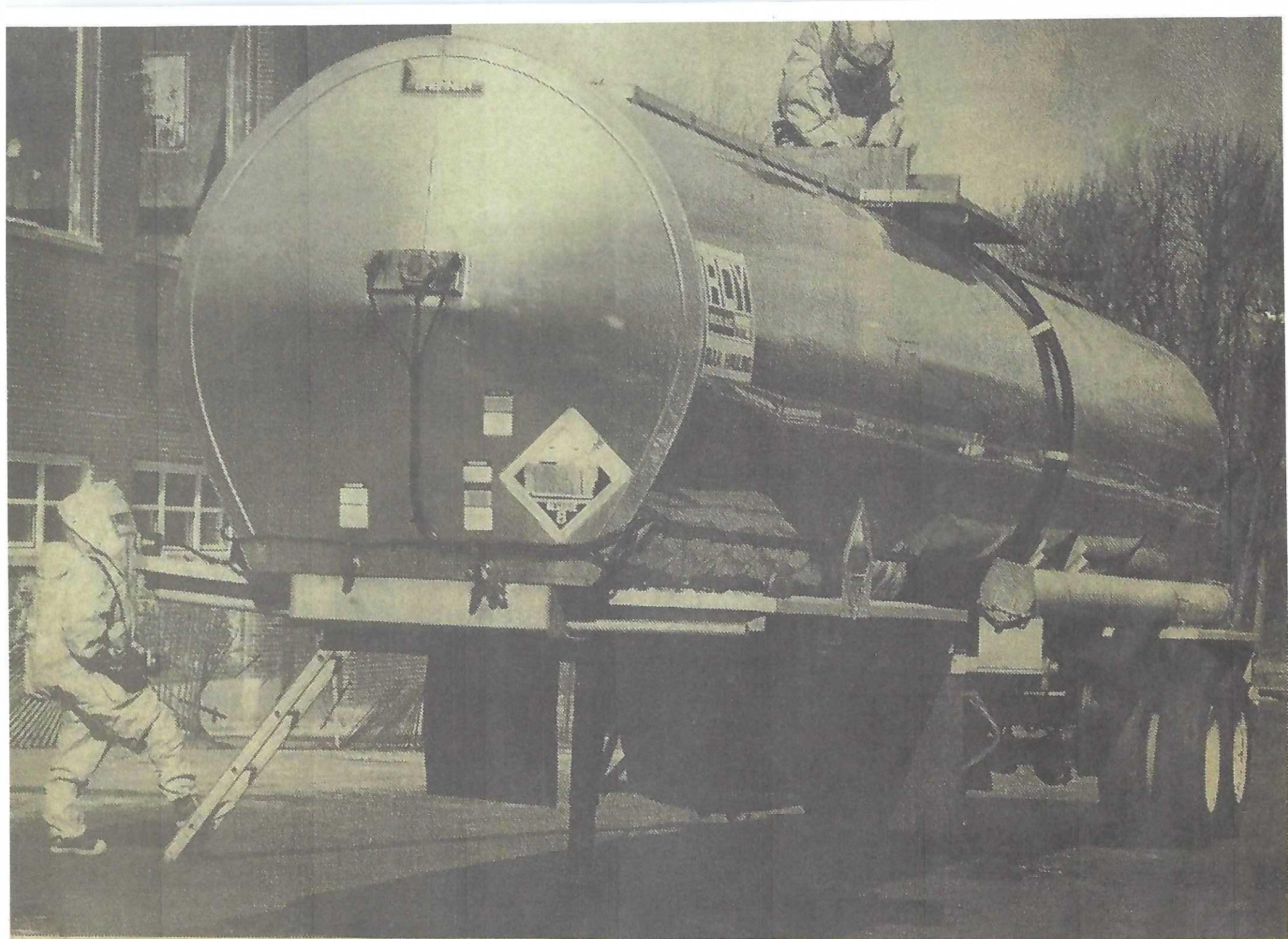
And the field of haz-mat response itself encompasses a wide range of sub-areas, any of which could keep a student busy for a long time. And that is one reason why people in the field say there are no experts.

As McArdle put it, "There are so many areas, we can't cover them all."

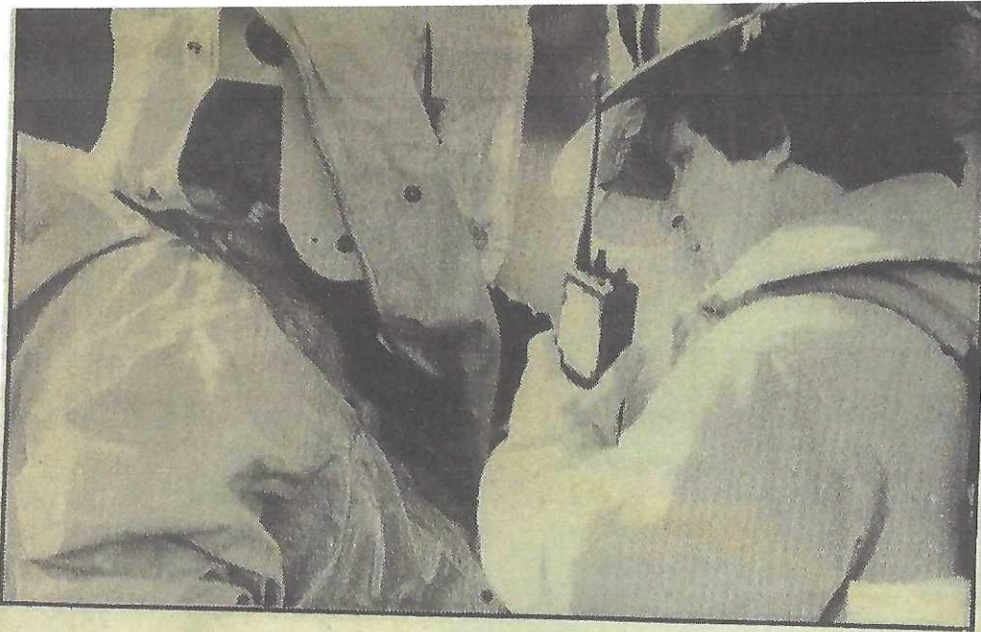
He said examples of sub-areas include protective clothing. People who specialize in that area must know enough about a hazardous material's properties to understand how it might permeate clothing and how to prevent that from happening.

Even the effective use of detection equipment is dependent upon a thorough knowledge of hazardous materials, according to McArdle. For instance, haz-mat responders must know the vapor density of the substance being dealt with in order to determine where to hold the detection equipment.

If a substance is light and



THE FIRST ENTRY TEAM comprising Burlington firefighters Jerry Hanafin (bottom) and Jerry Letendre prepares to seal a “leaking tank” during the hazard



Fire Department Lt. Charles White checks radio while helping Gerry Letendre get into his hazardous materials protective suit during drills last week.

Burlington firefighters take part in HazMat drills

DRILL-FROM PAGE 1

the exercise, which was made to simulate a chemical spill on a highway, the team identified the chemical by reading a placard on the truck through a pair of binoculars. Once the chemical was known, the team called the fire station, which in turn contacted Chemtrek, a nationwide information resource sponsored by chemical manufacturers. The HazMat team, fully outfitted in protective suits, then "mitigated" the situation, said Pouliot, who helped develop the drill.

The response was videotaped and after it was over, the firefighters returned to the station and watched the tape, Pouliot said.

Later in the afternoon, the team responded to a simulated industrial spill at the Center School involving a 55-gallon drum of dichloropentane.

In addition, the drill included the rescue of a man in the building who had been overcome by

sponse "the field of the future for the fire service," Pouliot noted HazMat teams must be continually updated. Each team member has received at least 40 hours training, and all firefighters must have at least 24 hours of instruction.

Burlington's HazMat vehicle, which arrived in spring of 1988, was called out about 70 times last year, Pouliot said, including a couple times when the firefighters had to don the full suits. Some of the incidents occurred in surrounding towns.

Fuel spills, which occur relatively often, call the vehicle into action if the incident involves more than 25 gallons, Pouliot explained.

While the state has 15 HazMat vehicle staged in strategic locations throughout Massachusetts, Burlington, Woburn and Boston are the only municipalities that have their own, Pouliot said.

Members of the Burlington HazMat team are Lt. Kevin Browne, Timothy Brown, William

Disney Studios

animation director for the motion picture unit. During his 26 years at Mitre, he worked on a vast array of film, graphic and video projects and won a number of awards.

In addition to his work at Mitre, he maintained a studio in Somerville. Especially prolific during the last five years, he held a one-man show of his drawings and paintings in 1986. Another showing is planned for the near future.

He was the husband of the late Virginia (Nelson); father of Buron C. of Boston, Danford H. of Florida, Neville G. of New York City, and Ronald O. of Boston. He was also the brother of Mary East of Colorado and Jacob of New York City. He also leaves three grandsons.

A memorial service was held last Saturday at the Douglass Funeral Home in Lexington.

Donations in his memory may be made to the American Lung Association of Middlesex County, 5 Mountain Road, Burlington, Mass. 01803.

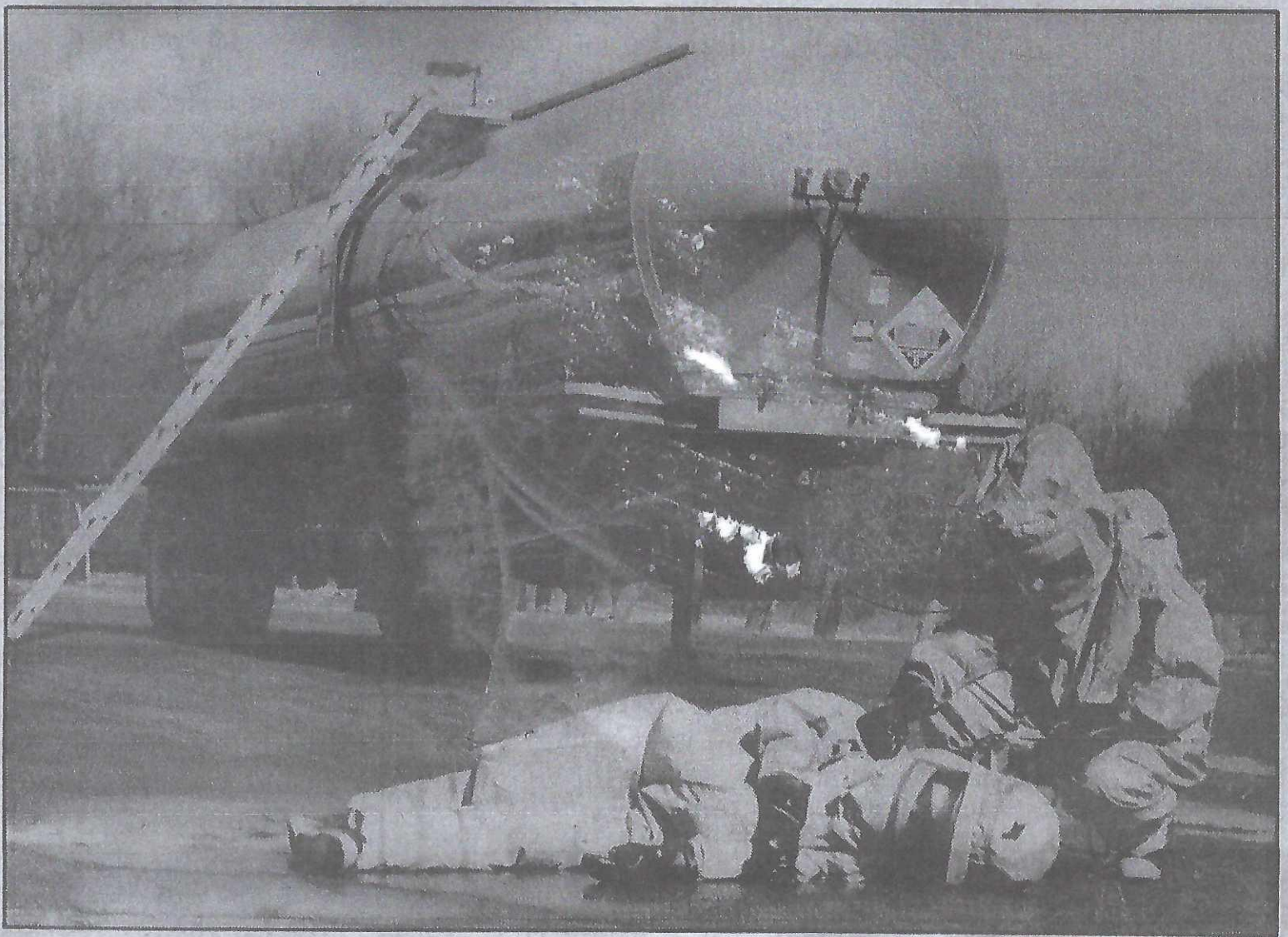
retired engineer, all and basketball

He was the husband of Margaret R. (Mowatt) Ouelett; father of Paul and Stephen, both of Georgia, John of Michigan, and Lisa of Burlington. He was also the son of Alfreda (Lawson) Ouelette of Burlington and the late Amos J. Ouelett. He also leaves four grandchildren.

A funeral was held from St. Margaret's Church Feb. 22 followed by burial in St. Paul's Cemetery in Arlington. Arrangements were made by the Lynch-Cantillon Funeral Home in Woburn.

Memorial donations in his name may be made to St. Margaret's Church, 109 Winn St., Burlington, Mass. 01803.





Staff photo by **Jim Paiva**

Firefighter Gerry Letendre waits for aid with Jerry Hanafin, who is simulating he has run out of oxygen.

HazMat team to the rescue

Squad ends training with disaster drills at Center School

By **Michael Sperr**
Times-Union Assistant Editor

The situations were fictional, but the responses were real as firefighters reacted to a simulated acid leak and chemical spill at the Center School last week.

Thursday's drill, which involved simulated cases of fuming sulfuric acid leaking from a tanker truck and dichloropentane spilled from a drum, ended a two-week, 80-hour course taught to the fire department's hazardous materials (HazMat) response team

by a lead instructor from the National Fire Academy.

"They performed very well," said Assistant Fire Chief Leo Poultot, who heads Burlington's 18-man team. "The town is fortunate to have men who volunteer for this squad and put their life at risk."

In the morning drill, the HazMat team, along with some Billerica firefighters who took part in the course, were sent to the Center School where a chemical hauling truck had sprung a leak. During

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1990



... who is instructing Burl-