

CIVIL DEFENCE ORGANISATION

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

CIVIL DEFENCE RESCUE:- FIVE STAGES OF RESCUE AND RECONNAISSANCE

OBJECT

The object of this Precis is to outline methods of the Five Stages of Rescue and Reconnaissance.

RECONNAISSANCE

Good reconnaissance ('recce') is one of the secrets of success in all rescue work, either at small or large incidents. Time spent in this way is seldom wasted and invariably results in a great economy in the amount of work required to extricate and give first-aid attention to trapped casualties. A careful recce will also result in a proper priority of treatment for these casualties who are not buried or trapped.

Rescue recce is in effect an attempt to arrive at an accurate assessment of the number and whereabouts of trapped casualties, with a view to deciding the best method to adopt for their release. This is done by piecing together all available information and reports given through the Warden and combining them with data which can be obtained by direct observation, such as listening for any sounds which might be made by casualties, carefully observing the way in which a building has collapsed and whether special use can be made of any particular debris formation, such as voids, etc.

There are thus two distinct parts or sides to the job making a recce: (a) Information (b) Observation

INFORMATION

Normally, most of the necessary information concerning reports as to the whereabouts of casualties will be collected and supplied to the Rescue Leader by the Warden, but even where this is done there will still be many points of detail about which the Leader will want to ask questions relating both to the casualties and the layout and construction of the building. The best practice is for the Warden to try to secure reliable 'witnesses' to help the Leader, rather than do all the interrogation himself and then have to pass it on to the Leader.

In collecting information of any kind the first thing is to check the authority and reliability of the person giving information, remembering always that he or she may be in an excited or distressed state and may give entirely wrong information. A very clear line should also be drawn between what is fact and what is opinion or hearsay. It is sometimes found that what is given as absolute fact will turn out on further questioning to be no more than opinion built up on what has been heard from others. Hearsay and indefinite ideas should be so far as possible traced back through one person and another to their source, because in all probability there will be some element of fact to be found in this way. All information should be verified in as many ways as possible, and here again a careful distinction between fact and opinion should always be made. As an example, it may be reported by some witnesses that one old woman has already been removed from the building and taken to hospital. This may be confirmed by others. What they really saw, however, was a figure wrapped in bed clothes being helped over the debris. Whether this person was a man or woman may have a very important bearing upon the recce

as a whole, and the proper way to verify this kind of information is to send someone actually to see and, if possible, speak with the witnesses in question. In their efforts to be helpful, untrained persons have an unconscious habit of confusing opinion with fact, especially on matters of detail.

The assistance of Police Officers and others who have received special training in how to collect and verify information should be sought by the Rescue Leader whenever available, so as to leave himself free to carry out the observation side of recce, as job which he must do himself.

OBSERVATION

Apart from having a general look over the whole site which should be the Leader's first task, a great deal of very useful information can usually be obtained from a careful observation of how a building has collapsed. This should be done in the light of any information, available concerning probable casualties. First, some attempt should be made to locate and identify the parts of the building, the main entrance, staircase, kitchen, etc., and especially those parts of the building mentioned in the word picture given by the Warden. This will enable a rough idea to be obtained as to where casualties might be found in relation to the various parts of the damaged structure at the time of the occurrence. This process of translating information with reference to the undamaged building into terms of the damaged building is the most difficult and certainly one of the most important parts of technical rescue recce, for it is only from this that any kind of effective plan of action can be built up.

The art of rescue lies in being able to identify and exploit to the maximum all debris formations, such as voids, etc., which can be used to facilitate access to the casualty, once the whereabouts of the casualty has been fixed by information and inference. To be able to do this successfully will depend to a great extent upon careful observation on the part of the Leader.

The secret of efficient working is that every man should do the job for which he is best suited and that he should work to his full capacity. This is possible only if all Leaders fully appreciate the capabilities of their men and co-operate fully to use each man to the best possible advantage.

FIVE STAGES OF RESCUE

The rescue problem at the scene of an incident is always approached by stages, of which there are five, known as the Five Stages of Rescue. These stages do not, in all cases, have to be strictly adhered to, but any deviation made is due only to unusual circumstances in the particular incident concerned.

Stage 1: Reconnaissance and Dealing with Surface Casualties

It will be appreciated that in every plan of action reconnaissance (i.e. Information and Observation) is an essential preliminary to any stage of rescue. There must be a general survey to ensure that surface casualties have been dealt with by Wardens or others who have been trained in basic rescue and first aid, and who may be working in teams. If this have been done, the party must make a recce, working from the perimeter and giving priority to those in immediate danger. Some of these surface casualties may be only slightly injured, or dazed and suffering from shock. At the same time the Leader makes a quick but thorough examination of the site, assessing complicated factors such as coal gas, war gases, radioactivity, flooding, dangers from overhanging walls, etc. and obtains and records all possible information on the believed whereabouts of other casualties.

Stage 2: Searching Slightly Damaged Buildings and Immediate Rescue

Slightly damaged buildings must be searched to ensure that all casualties have been dealt with by Wardens or others, and also to recover those who are lightly trapped. Contact should be maintained with those who can be seen or heard or whose whereabouts can be definitely ascertained.

In carrying out this stage, a speedy but careful examination of the damaged structures and debris is needed, in order to determine the best and safest approach.

Stage 3: Exploration of likely Survival Points

All places must be searched where persons could be trapped or injured and remain alive. Strong or sheltered parts of buildings which are likely to have withstood damage (e.g. shelters, staircase cupboards, basements) should not be overlooked, even though there is no definite information that anyone is trapped there.

Stage 4: Further Exploration and Selected Debris Removal

If persons are still missing, and places where they may be buried have been explored, the search should be continued even if the chance of their remaining alive is remote or non-existent. This will involve removing debris from selected places where casualties are presumed to be, having regard to the information available at the site coupled with a careful study of the way in which buildings have collapsed.

In cases where the Party Leader is confronted with a heap of rubble, bricks and debris, it may be possible to determine the whereabouts of conscious casualties by introducing a "Silence Period" of calling and listening for replies or tappings, indicating their positions. Where casualties may be unconscious, or unable to make themselves heard, their position may be ascertained by the use of dogs trained in rescue work.

Stage 5: General Debris Clearance.

Where it is still impossible to account for all missing persons, it may be necessary to strip the site of debris methodically by cutting lanes into the rubble, or by piecemeal removal of debris, until missing bodies, or parts of bodies are recovered. During this operation the various types of debris must be segregated.

Whether or not information as to the whereabouts of casualties is available from Wardens, Police or members of the general public, the first four stages as set out above should always be completed. Where persons are still missing, Stage 5 must also be carried out before the rescue operations are finally discontinued.

Where operations are prolonged relief parties will be called and the incoming Party Leader must be given a report by the outgoing Party Leader of progress. A normal time for a party to work continuously before relief is about four hours.

CONCLUSION

The value of reconnaissance can never be stressed sufficiently. It has been the means of saving countless lives in rescue work and will continue to be so, no matter the type of rescue problem involved. Similarly, experience has shown the need for a systematic approach to the problem based on the five stages outlined.