

The History of Squad 1

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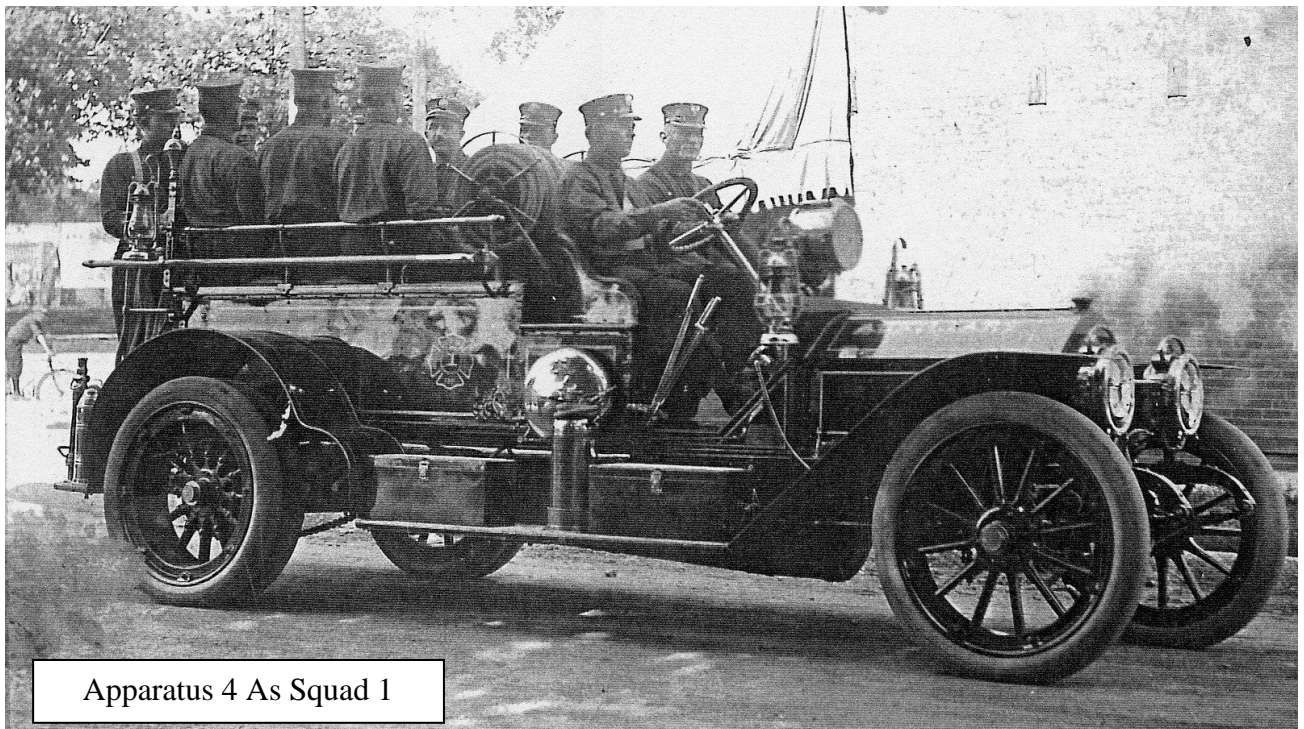
Source - Various

It is unknown what prompted Portland Fire to develop and utilize a squad as part of its emergency operations. It is clear, however, that Squads have existed for nearly a century of service. Numerous apparatus since the beginning of the motorized era show clear evidence of this emergency operations strategy.

The first Squad 1 identified in historic photos shows Apparatus 4, an American LaFrance triple combination/chemical pumper put into service on April 24, 1913. However, its initial service was as Engine 15. Records show continuing service as Engine 15 through 1923. In 1925, Apparatus 4 was decommissioned as a pumper and reconfigured as Squad 1, being stationed at 905 SW 4th Avenue.



Apparatus 4 As Engine 15



Apparatus 4 As Squad 1

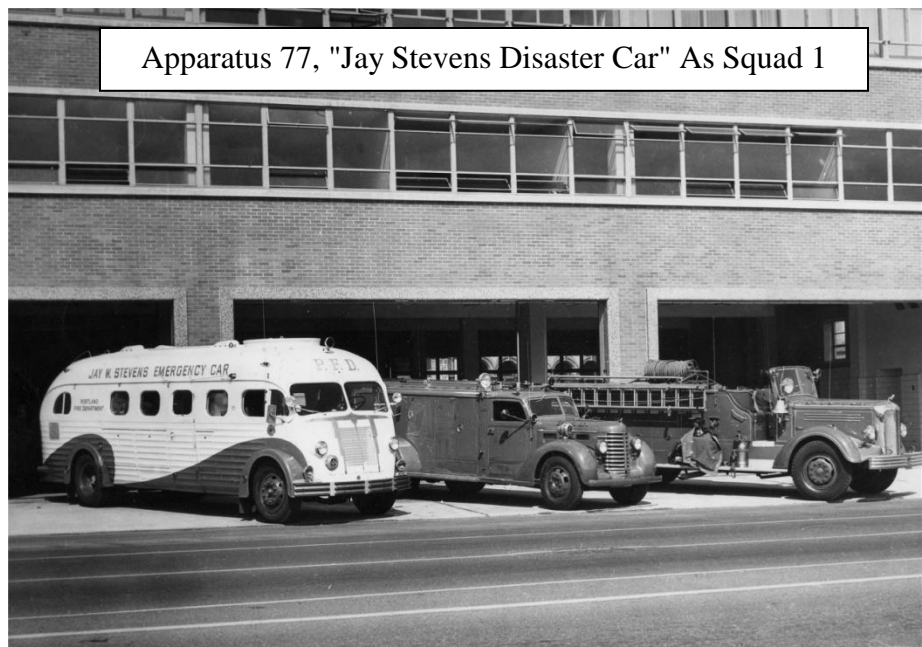


Apparatus 56 As Squad 1

In 1927, a purpose built Squad 1 would be purchased. Apparatus 56, a 1927 Studebaker truck, would become the next Squad 1. It came equipped with multiple compartments, search lights, and a variety of other rescue equipment. It carried a white paint scheme with a cross painted into the grill, likely indicating it was an early first aid vehicle as well as a multipurpose rescue vehicle. It would be staffed with one officer and five hosemen. It also seems that Squad members of the day had a unique black/white color scheme to their helmets, to distinguish their presence among other firefighters.

In 1932, the George Baker Emergency Car was created and would become the forerunner of emergency medical vehicles. It carried a great deal more in the way of medical equipment but less rescue equipment of other kinds.

By 1939, a very unique apparatus was created that combined all the aspects of a Squad as well as all the elements of a medical rescue vehicle. Apparatus 77, a 1939 Kenworth bus, was purchased, equipped, and donated to Portland Fire by retail store owner Aaron Frank, of Meier & Frank fame. His belief and support of the capabilities



Apparatus 77, "Jay Stevens Disaster Car" As Squad 1

of Portland Fire was evidenced by this gift. It was put into service in 1939 under the name "Jay Stevens Disaster Car." The Studebaker (and Baker Car) would be relegated to other duties as the Stevens Car took over the Squad 1 job. The staffing would remain the same as before.

In 1950, the new Central Fire Station opened at 55 SW Ash Street and Squad 1 would be moved to that location and respond alongside Engine 21 and Truck 1. Various other vehicles have been housed at that station over time. Other rescue vehicles were being developed and referred to as Squad, but were passenger vehicles with first aid equipment only.

In 1962, the aging Stevens Car would be replaced by Apparatus 41, a GMC Box Truck, specially made for service as a heavy rescue. The new Squad 1 was painted red, but at some point in time would be repainted in lime green, the only Portland Fire apparatus to carry this color. It was likely to distinguish it from other vehicles at the emergency scene.

The GMC would continue service until 1989 when it would be replaced by Apparatus 43, a 1989 Mack Box Truck. Looking more like a typical fire engine, Squad vehicles were becoming more mainstream in the fire service and being mass produced by fire engine manufacturers.



Apparatus 41 As Squad 1



Apparatus 43 As Squad 1

In 2006, Apparatus 44 would be purchased to replace the aging Mack. A 2006 American LaFrance heavy rescue would become the new Squad 1. It was part of an overall move in apparatus purchases to American LaFrance.



Apparatus 44 As Squad 1

In 2018, Squad 1 would be replaced by Apparatus 160, a 2018 Pierce Heavy Rescue vehicle. By this time, staffing had changed to an officer and three firefighters. However, specialty rescue services brought additional responsibilities and equipment to the vehicle. Able to be accompanied by various specialty box vehicles (e.g. dive rescue, trench rescue, urban rescue, etc.), the evolution of specialty rescue also required highly specialized training of personnel.



Apparatus 160 As Squad 1

By 2023, Squad 1's specialty rescue capabilities had reached a very high level. All members of Station 1 receive a wide range of specialty training (and premium pay) to include:

- Confined Space Rescue
- Trench Rescue
- Dive Rescue
- High Angle Rope Rescue
- Urban Search and Rescue
- Other special operations

What Squad 1 does not carry in equipment is ready for use in regular box vehicles that can be driven to the scene by a crew member. Squad 1 also has the discretion to self-dispatch to virtually any call across the entire city when they feel their training or equipment might be beneficial. This ranges from service as the Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) to assisting engine or truck companies with operations.

Squad 1 is a truly unique and capable piece of equipment with a long history of service with Portland Fire. I will be interesting to see what the next 100 years has in store for Squad 1.

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