

The EMS Experience

Saluting those with 20 years or more in EMS

Vance L. Riley, LP



Vance L. Riley, LP, is chief of the Victoria Fire Department and is a member of GETAC.

What was your first day on the job in EMS?

Late in January 1980, after I had completed a Red Cross Advanced First Aid Class, I went on an ambulance call with Texas A&M University Emergency Care Team (TAMECT).

Which services have you worked for over the years?

I've worked with TAMECT, Brazos County Precinct 4 Volunteer Fire Department, Friendswood Volunteer Fire Department, Southeast Harris County Volunteer Fire Department, Clive Fire Department (Iowa), and, currently, Victoria Fire Department.

Why did you get into EMS?

I was flunking out of my accounting major at Texas A&M and needed something else to

do. Seriously, my uncle Weldon McKinney was a volunteer firefighter in Canyon, Texas, when I was a little boy. I used to watch him and the department practice when we visited during the summers. Fire/EMS got in my blood then and stayed there, I guess, even though it wasn't my first career choice. When I was at A&M, a classmate asked me to come hang out with TAMECT and I was hooked. Helping others in distress was much more satisfying than crunching numbers, for me, at least.

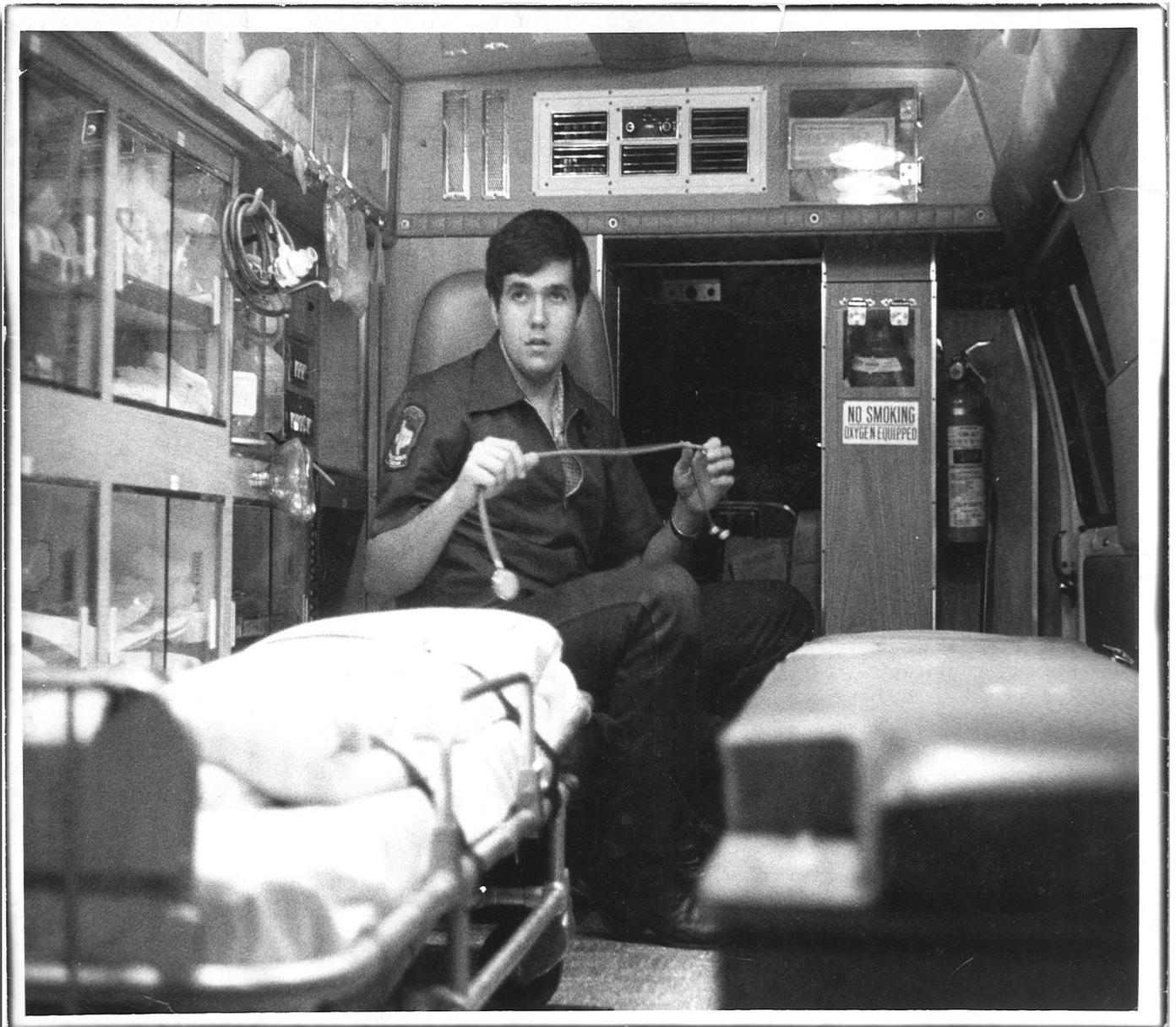
How has the field changed since you've been in it?

Wow! How hasn't it? I can remember high-fiving with my crew members after delivering a CPR patient to the emergency department and seeing the arterial blood gases

reading come back with oxygen of 500+. Only to find out 25 years later that all we probably did was guarantee the patient wasn't coming back. Or how about setting up two large bore IVs wide open (the bigger the gauge needles, the better) for trauma patients? Later we were told to stop doing that—we were just making Kool-Aid out of the patient's blood, and it wouldn't clot or deliver oxygen. CPR thumpers came and went and have come back—not to mention all the changes in CPR itself. Traction splints are much less barbaric than when I tested with the state in the early 1980s and had to use triangular bandages to hold the leg to the splint. Back then, we never could have imagined sitting next to a patient in his or her favorite recliner at home and sending a 12-lead EKG with a complete set of vitals to the hospital via cell phone card. And, that information is also being sent to portable laptop computers for us to "write" our patient reports. Equipment and protocols have really changed over the years, and ultimately for the better for the patient, in my opinion.

Is there a particular moment or call that stands out?

There are many interesting calls that stand out, and most of them are multi-casualty incidents (MCI). Out of all of them, the one that will never leave my mind was the illegal immigrant smuggling deaths in Victoria County in May 2003. I had been to many MCIs in my career, but most of them involved only one or two deaths and lots of injuries. Seeing 17 (later 19) men, women and children piled up on top of each other in the back of that 18-wheeler, all dead, and



Vance Riley started his EMS career while in college at Texas A&M University.

not being able to do anything about it, really stands out to me. It looked like a picture from Auschwitz; an absolute horror. Those who responded that day assuage ourselves somewhat by remembering we were able to save or care for 40 or so other patients at that incident.

What has been your favorite part of your career in EMS?

Most definitely the people I have had the privilege to work with and learn from is my favorite part of being in EMS. There is quite a lengthy list of folks who have helped me give

better patient care along the way in this journey. All of my peers may have different ideas about how to deliver the best patient care possible, but we are all still one big family of caregivers with the same mission. They have coached, counseled, mentored, taught, treated (as a real patient on occasion) and pushed me to give the best patient care possible. All of these great people have, and continue to, remind me of the basic principle that more than having good technical skills, sincerely caring for a patient by holding a patient's hand can

be the most powerful medicine of all. I am truly a blessed man to have been able to work with EMS caregivers for all of my adult life. I cherish the 30 years of memories and look forward to making more with my fellow Texas EMS caregivers.

Do you have 20 years or more in EMS? Do you answer to dino-medic? We're looking for a profile of you! If you are interested, please write Kelly Harrell at kelly.harrell@dshs.state.tx.us.