

Female firefighter makes grade with Birtle Dept.

by MARCIE HARRISON

There is more to being a volunteer firefighter than answering emergency calls. It also involves training and exams like the one held on May 31 for the Level 1 Firefighting Course. A total of 11 firefighters took the exam, among them Birtle's first female firefighter, Roberta Hickman.

Mrs. Hickman, an elementary school teacher and mother of three, is someone who enjoys a challenge. And that is how she thinks of firefighting.

"It wasn't done for Women's Lib, it was done for personal knowledge," Mrs. Hickman explained when asked why she became a volunteer firefighter.

One day her husband Brian, a volunteer firefighter, was away with the Birtle Fire Department attending to a fire in St. Lazare when a second call came in for a grass fire near Birtle. There was no one to drive the second truck, so Mrs. Hickman, who had a rudimentary knowledge of the equipment, volunteered to go. A firefighter from Russell came to assist, however, the fire had been extinguished before they arrived.

As a result, this incident prompted Mrs. Hickman to join the Birtle Fire Department on a stand-by basis. Now, one and a half years later she has successfully completed the Level 1 Firefighting Course.

Her basic knowledge of the

equipment has increased during this time and Mrs. Hickman can now operate the pumps on both trucks as well as the auxiliary pump.

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**Roberta Hickman
Level 1
Firefighter**

When asked if she had encountered any special problems, Mrs. Hickman replied that physical strength is a necessity and that generally, men are stronger than women, and that the men had a better understanding of the mechanics of the equipment. However, Mrs. Hickman didn't have any problem passing the exam.

Training

The Birtle Fire Department and two members of the Foxwarren Fire Department have been meeting several times every month to train and prepare for the exam which included firefighting procedures and techniques as well as rescue duties. Two members

of the Birtle Fire Department, Gerald Cooley and Kevin Hickman, who had already passed the exam, provided the group of 11 with guidance and instruction.

The exam was held on property belonging to Dean Ashcroft who had requested the fire department to burn an abandoned house located about 12 miles southwest of Birtle. Fires were started inside the house and the 11 firefighters went inside in teams to attack the flames. They were also required to rescue a dummy from the smoke filled attic. When the exam was completed the house was set ablaze and continued to burn under the supervision of the fire department.

Not surprisingly, Dick Wright from the Fire Commission Office in Brandon gave all 11 a passing grade. The nine firefighters from Birtle were Dennis Jahns, Andy Brydon, Glen Hodgson, Brian Salmon, Rick Salmon, Moe Salmon, Graham McConnell, Roberta Hickman and Orville Dandridge. The two members of the Foxwarren Fire Department were Tom Cottingham and Neil Falloon.

When Fire Chief Gerald Birch was asked what the firefighters will do now that they have completed Level 1, he said they will continue to meet every month to train and review. Perhaps some will even take the Level II course, although he added it is a very intensive course.