

Search and Rescue coordinated for NANA Region

KOTZEBUE—In what is believed to be the first meeting of its kind, local, state and federal organizations met in Kotzebue recently to develop a coordinated search and rescue for that region of the state.

It was believed that the work begun there will serve as a model for similar regional multi-agency search and rescue programs throughout the rest of the state.

As explained by Warren Thompson of the Civil Air Patrol Squadron in Kotzebue, "Search and rescue is the number one public safety concern of the people of this area." He described it as literally being a matter of life and death.

These operations are often successful; but nevertheless, they are frequently hampered by the lack of coordination and cooperation between the various agencies that may be involved. These are problems which arise in part because of the differing capabilities, requirements and lines of authority and areas of responsibility of the various organizations.

Describing this at the Kotzebue meeting, Sgt. John Rowland, U.S. Army advisor to the Third Scout Battalion of the Alaska National Guard, said, "A search and rescue mission is like a ponderous elephant that is very slow in getting to its feet."

To solve these problems, and to

develop a single coordinated effort for the Kotzebue area, John Schaeffer, president of the Nana Regional Corporation, on Oct. 15 brought together representatives of the federal, state and local agencies that have been active in search and rescue efforts in that region.

This was described by Lt. Terry McConnaughey, state search and rescue coordinator for the Alaska State Troopers, as the first time all of the federal, state and local search and rescue agencies have ever gotten together to develop a coordinated regional search and rescue program. He expressed the belief that what was being done in Kotzebue would become the model for similar regional programs throughout the rest of the state.

In the preliminary agreement developed in Kotzebue, Trooper Dan Weatherly was designated search and rescue coordinator for the region. Serving with him as directors of the regional search and rescue program was Warren Thompson of the Kotzebue Civil Air Patrol Squadron, Capt. Milton Cross of the Third Scout Battalion of the Alaska National Guard, and Sgt. Maj. Wilford Lane of the Third Scout Battalion and director of the Nana Region Search and Rescue Council.

It was also agreed that all requests for search and rescue missions in the region were to be di-

rected to the Kotzebue police dispatcher and that the Kotzebue Fire Department would serve as headquarters for regional search and rescue operations, a role it has served in the past.