

Heart Victim Is Left in Flat; Had Only \$2

A TRIBUNE reporter spent two months uncovering police payoffs, sadism, and other mistreatment of the ill and injured in Chicago's private ambulance business. This is his third report.

BY WILLIAM JONES

The two-man private ambulance crew stood over the gasping middle-age man in his north side apartment, arguing with a friend of the victim.

"That's all he's got is two bucks?" asked one of the attendants. "He's gotta have at least \$38 or we can't take him. Ain't he on welfare or medicare or something? We ain't got a chance of collecting on something like this."

The friend shook his head and pointed to the \$2 on the kitchen table.

"That two bucks is all I could find," said the friend. "But he's got a job so he'd be good for the money."

Both attendants shook their heads and shrugged. One of them called his office, Mid-America Ambulance company, 5651 Madison st., and said the crew had been ordered to leave the premises without the victim. Then they dragged the victim of an apparent heart attack to a kitchen chair where he slumped over the table.

Leave Without Victim

Before leaving the apartment, one of the attendants committed the final indignity. He pocketed the victim's last \$2.

The misery merchants were at work. They are the hustlers among the city's private ambulance companies and they have decided there is a price tag on your life.

A two-month investigation by THE TRIBUNE and Better Government association revealed widespread mistreatment and sadistic acts toward the ill and injured.

Working within the business, this reporter and William Recktenwald, a B. G. A. undercover investigator, were sickened at what we saw.

As this ambulance crew was ordered to walk out on a man who may have been fighting for his life, the company was confident that its actions would never be known to the public or the city vehicle commission which permits them to operate.

Victim Was Investigator

But this apparent victim was different from the thousands of others who are at the mercy of the misery merchants in Chicago each year. This victim was George Bliss, chief investigator for the B. G. A., and his friend was Roland Restle, another B. G. A. undercover agent.

In another room off the kitchen, behind a glass paneled door covered with a venetian blind, William Yates, a TRIBUNE photographer, and this reporter observed and photographed the bizarre event.

The first words uttered by one of the attendants to his companion were, "All he's got is two bucks."

After the ambulance crew received its instructions to desert

URGE CITY ACTION

President pro tem of city council calls for legislation to permit prosecution of ambulance firms which abuse the sick and injured in city. Story on page 2

the victim, they asked Restle if he had any way to get Bliss to a hospital by himself.

"Well, my sister has a car, but I don't know how long it will take to get it," said Restle, who had called the ambulance 10 minutes earlier.

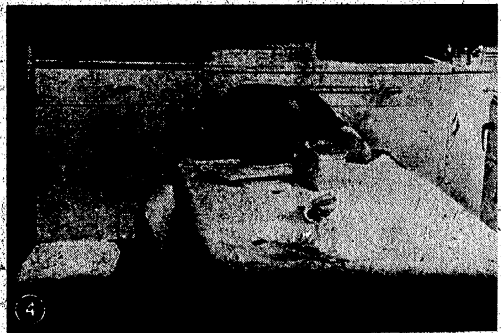
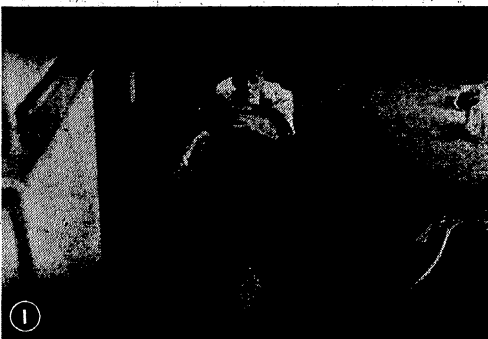
Meant a Cash Call

"We got 1010 call on this and that means it's a cash call," said an attendant. "We could call him some kind of wagon or hold him here in the chair until you get a car."

"This grotesque incident is what is known among Mid-America crews as "no bread, no bed." It means, as one driver explained to me when I worked for the company, that if the victims don't have the money or a welfare card, the crew is supposed to leave immediately.

This policy is not unique to Mid-America. At Alert Ambulance company, 3109 N. Cicero av., which also operates Berz and Aero ambulance companies, the code for a cash call is GTM. Recktenwald, my partner in the undercover investigation, explains the code in this report:

"We received a code 3 [lights
[Continued on page 2, col. 5]



Ambulance Crew's Treatment

No. 1—George Bliss, B. G. A. chief investigator, lies on floor as victim of apparent heart attack. No. 2—Mid-America Ambulance company crew [white shirts] learn from Roland Restle [left] and B. G. A. investigator that "victim" has only the two dollars on table. Crew insists on \$38. No. 3—Crew will not transport Bliss, but helps him into chair. No. 4—Crew leaves and Bliss is "collapsed" on table, the money missing. Photos were taken thru opening in venetian blind.

TRIBUNE Staff photos by William Yates

HEART VICTIM LEFT IN FLAT; HE HAD ONLY \$2

[Continued from first page]

and siren] call. We found a white male about 75 years old named Joseph, who was blind, doubled up in a chair and screaming about the pains in his left side. We immediately transferred him to Mother Cabrini hospital.

Tells About Payoff

"When we arrived at the hospital, we received payment for the call from the man's daughter-in-law. As we left the hospital [the driver] remarked to me: 'Can you imagine that s.o.b. [his employer] wanted me to GTM.' I inquired as what GTM stood for and he replied: 'Get the money before you put the patient in the ambulance, Can you imagine me asking for the money with the old man screaming the way he was.'"

Recktenwald said such attendants run the risk of having the ambulance fee deducted from their salaries if the victim fails to pay.

Recktenwald also reported this incident of fee gouging while working for Mid-America:

Responding to a call involving an old man in a west side public housing project for the elderly, the ambulance driver first ordered the victim to get up and move himself onto the stretcher. After watching a Chicago policeman accepting a payoff for referring the call to Mid-America, the man was taken to a hospital.

Takes Last \$2

"Upon arrival, an old lady, in her eighties, who had come along with us to pay the bill, was asked for the money," said Recktenwald. "She was told the cost was \$35. She was quite elderly and her hands shook as she paid the money to us. She was confused and only gave us \$31, but thought it was \$36.

"The driver counted the money and said 'I need 5 more dollars.' The lady became very nervous and opened her purse again. You could see she only had \$2 left. The driver said he could reduce the fee to \$33 because of the short distance and the woman responded: 'If I give you these two dollars I won't have any money at all, not even car fare to get back home.'

"The driver grabbed the \$2 and told the woman: 'Your house is only about a mile and a half away. You could almost walk it. I'm sure they'll help you out here at the hospital.'"

Drags Cancer Patient

At Scully-Walton Ambulance company, 15 N. Laramie av., an ambulance crew refused to take a cancer patient to the hospital until they were assured that a relative was waiting there with the cash. The patient, whose body was so wracked with the disease that he pleaded to be handled gently, was asked if he could

walk from his bed to the stretcher:

"I'm sorry, I don't think I can," he said.

"Well then we're just going to have to move you," said the ambulance driver, who claims to be the south side manager for Scully-Walton. He grabbed the patient under the arms and dragged him to the stretcher where the man was dropped. As the victim's face contorted in pain, the driver said to Recktenwald:

"Next time the guy will walk to the stretcher. We didn't use a sheet on this patient either. I wasn't sure if that nigger was going to pay."

TOMORROW: The misery merchants pay off Chicago police.