

ered over the scene. Finally, more than one hour after the accident, one privately owned ambulance appeared.

I don't know when the last victim was removed, but many seriously injured passengers still lay in the field more than two hours after the crash. And we were not in some isolated wilderness, but only twenty minutes from our nation's capital. The final toll: eight dead and more than 20 seriously injured.

IN mid-winter of 1970, Arnold Deacon and his 20-year-old daughter, Monica, heard a loud boom. Monica looked out the window of the kitchen in her Waterville, Que., home near the Quebec-Vermont border. A bus had crashed off a nearby bridge. After spotting the mangled wreckage of the bus and people strewn in the snow on the river bed, the Deacons called the police, then immediately took several blankets to comfort the injured while awaiting the ambulances. Arnold Deacon later said that he and his daughter called the police three times before ambulances arrived on the scene. The police told him they couldn't help because it wasn't in their area of coverage. Arnold Deacon added, "The cops seem to play dipsydoodle in a case like this, and take no serious thought that lives need immediate medical attention. Believe me, this sort of thing has happened here before. It's not the first time and certainly won't be the last." Twenty-two of the passengers had been injured, seven critically. When help finally arrived, it was too late for 17-year-old Carol Dupuis of Beebe, Que. She was already dead.

In the rural area of Quebec, a traffic victim lay in the snow in mid-winter. The investigating police officer wasn't certain in which ambulance region the accident had taken place, so he called two ambulances to make sure—one from each adjacent area. Forty minutes later, one ambulance arrived, but before the operator could load the victim aboard, the second ambulance was at the scene. The police officer soon had to rule over the ugly argument which arose between the operators, both of whom claimed a right to the victim.

The vast majority of North America's community ambulance services are hit-and-miss affairs, based on a "haul for hire" operation. Both in our urban and rural areas, funeral directors often

run the local ambulance service. Reports indicate that the majority of them would like to get out of the ambulance business simply because they lose money in it. Many continue the work reluctantly, only because there would be a howl of public indignation if they pulled out of this much-needed community emergency service. It is also true that, in certain instances, private ambulance operators have refused to transport accident victims or the seriously ill until payment has been guaranteed. Some justify this

MONTREAL provides one of the most imaginative ambulance services in the world, probably because not too long ago it had one of the worst. Media and public indignation became so vociferous that city hall was shamed into action.

I remember witnessing a car hit a tree in mid-town Montreal when I was in high school. Three people received severe multiple injuries. They writhed in agony before my eyes. It took over 45 minutes for a private ambulance to arrive. The emergency ward of one of the city's largest hospitals, the Royal Victoria, was no more than a five-minute walk away from the accident. I remember the anger and despair I felt at that scene.

Today, a fleet of more than 30 police ambulances gives the city round-the-clock coverage seven days a week. The service takes care of people who are sick or injured on the street or in public places. Exceptions are made for extreme home cases or for the urgent need of oxygen. The police ambulance service has station wagon-type vehicles which are completely equipped. Constables assigned to ambulances receive special advanced first-aid training, and while cruising throughout the city in these station wagon ambulances, they also attend to their police duties.

In 1963, a statistical and efficiency review of the Montreal service was established. Findings showed that the average time for an ambulance to reach an accident scene after a call was received at the police emergency communications centre amounted to 2.4 minutes, as compared to an average 9.6 minutes for private ambulances.