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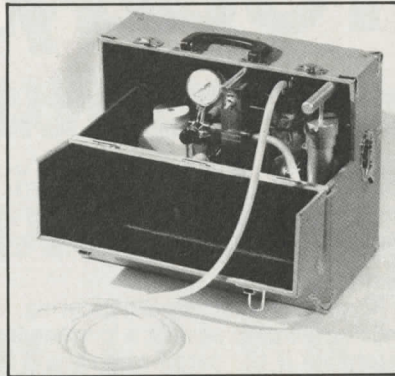
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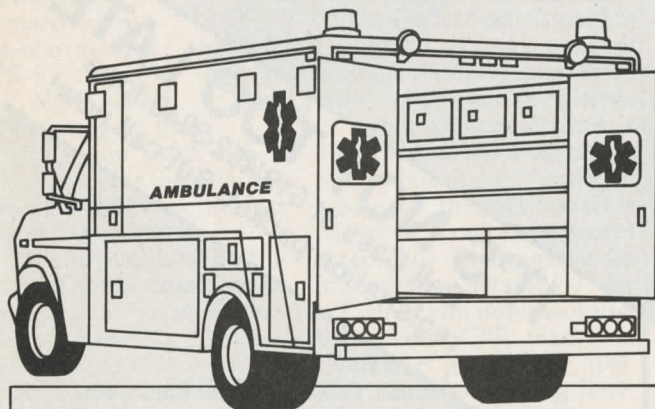


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*Dana Jarvis*

## AROUND THE NATION

### Santa Ana Update: Privates Out

"Interface" columnist, Jack Stout, reports a clearcut victory by Santa Ana firefighters in a recent battle against privatizing the city's paramedic program. According to Stout, the Santa Ana Firemen's Benevolent Assn., with backing from neighboring firefighter organizations and the International Association of Firefighters, conducted a well-organized and effective campaign to convert local support for the paramedics themselves into political opposition to privatized paramedic services.

Local labor leaders told Stout that non-paramedic firefighters feared privatization of paramedic services might be the first step of a long-range plan to implement the "public safety officer" concept in Santa Ana. Firefighter/paramedics in neighboring communities joined the fight, fearing successful privatization in Santa Ana might spread to other Orange County communities. At present, there are no private paramedic providers licensed in Orange County.

After "receiving and filing" the city manager's recommendation to privatize, the City Council directed that a plan be developed to upgrade the present system and to improve its productivity by instituting many of the rejected plan's features within a newly organized paramedic division of the fire department. Paramedics told Stout they may oppose those changes as well, objecting to peak load staffing, being required to transport all patients, and being required to perform nonemergency transfer work to help finance expanded paramedic production capacity.

Stout predicts there may also be opposition to using all civilian paramedics in the new division. Presently, about half of Santa Ana's paramedics are civilians. Current annual firefighter/paramedic wages and benefits total more than \$48,000, while Santa Ana's civilian medics average about \$33,000 in combined wages and benefits. The plan for reorganization is due for completion by late November.

### Dispatchers In the News

Three unrelated dispatch incidents from around the nation have made headlines in recent months. In Maryland, a hysterical family member called for medical assistance. The address he gave was unclear on the audio tape of the call, and the dispatcher "heard" the wrong address. The dispatcher repeated what he had heard in an attempt to clarify the address, and the caller replied, "that's correct." Medical units were dispatched to an address where no assistance was required. After a while, the dispatcher received a second call for medical aid; this time the correct address was obtained. The patient died, but no charges were filed. Investigations into the records of the conversation clearly indicate that the relative's cry for help was not understandable until the second call.

In Minnesota, a typographical error resulted in dispatching an ambulance to the wrong address. The 9-1-1 operator correctly repeated the address to the caller, but made a typing error in the street address and passed the wrong information along to the dispatcher.