

Nightmare in Kansas City

On Thursday, July 16, editors at *jems* talked with EMS officials in Kansas City about an article we were preparing concerning changes and adjustments their system was experiencing as it evolved into a full-fledged public utility. The next day we heard the news along with everyone else in the country: tons of metal and concrete had fallen onto a crowded dance floor at the Kansas City Hyatt Hotel, killing and injuring hundreds. The magnitude of the disaster presented Kansas City with one of the greatest challenges yet to face a modern EMS program. We were back in touch with people in Kansas City, and they agreed to prepare the following accounts of the emergency response.

Jack L. Stout is president and senior consultant with The Fourth Party, Inc. Stout has been active in EMS developments for almost ten years. As developer, along with former partner, Alan Jarneson, of the Public Utility Model, Stout's concepts and consulting work, often the subject of controversy, are a significant force shaping the legal, financial, administrative, and operational future of the prehospital care industry. Mr. Stout was on the scene at the Hyatt disaster.

Patrick Smith is a project manager with The Fourth Party, Inc., and is currently on loan to Kansas City's Metropolitan Ambulance Services Trust (MAST) as acting assistant director. Smith has worked eight years as a field paramedic, with one and one-half years as manager of a private countryside ambulance service. Now with The Fourth Party, Smith concentrates on EMS operations, including medical protocol development, disaster protocol development, computer-aided dispatching, communications, medical audit, and operations problem-solving. At the Hyatt disaster, he provided coordination among the several areas of activity, executed a number of essential support projects throughout the night, and assisted in patient care and rescue efforts.



It's been a week now since we agreed to write this article. We finished pulling together the facts a couple of days ago, and we've been trying to get started ever since. Something's wrong.

We would like to write an objective and professional sounding article telling what happened, how our system responded, what we did right, and what we learned from the experience that will enable us to perform better in the future. And, we're going to try to do that. But before we try, we must admit something. We are not objective. We don't feel professional. We've been changed and we're not sure how.

It is important that we all learn from this event, because our learning is the only good thing that can come out of that awful and stupid tragedy. But there's more to be learned here than systems and procedures. Something very powerful has happened to us — to our entire community — and it's not over yet.

So, we'll do our best to tell what happened, what worked, and how we might improve our performance for the future. But we must warn the reader that this account, however it may sound, should be considered subjective and personal. Since that night, one of us has discovered that he is now afraid on airplanes; and our dreams are bizarre.

One final introductory note: From time to time throughout this report, we shall identify certain people by name. We thought a great deal about the problem of recognizing some individuals by name, while not recog-

*by Jack Stout
and Patrick Smith*
