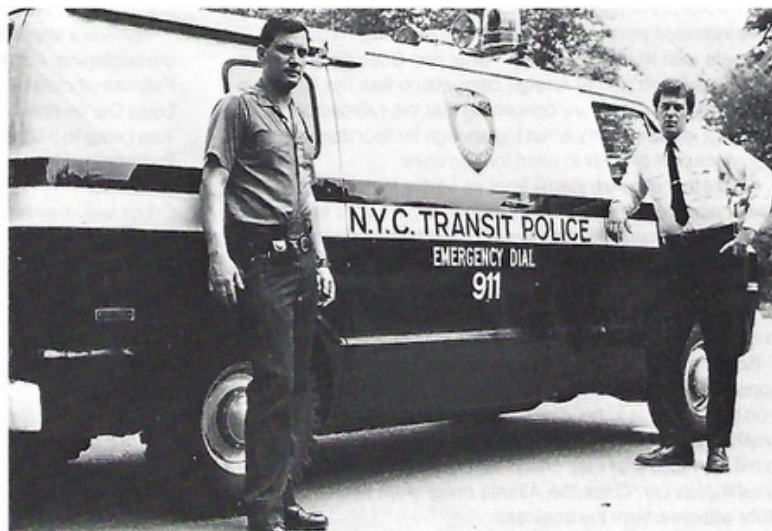


# TRANSIT EMERGENCY MEDICAL RESCUE UNIT

## TRANSIT POLICE TO THE RESCUE!



Patrolman Joseph Sede, left, and Dean Esserman with the new Emergency Rescue Van, which is used primarily for emergencies in Manhattan

by Frank Mazza

A frail teenage boy falls beneath a subway train and is pinned between the train's wheels and the platform. Bleeding from deep cuts and succumbing to shock, the youth is in critical condition.

A transit police officer leaps down to the tracks, crawls under the train while the power is still on, patches a two-inch gash on the boy's head and administers oxygen. Within minutes the officer is joined by two other patrolmen carrying emergency equipment. The youth's breathing is made easier through the insertion of a plastic airway in his throat. The victim is placed in a transit police vehicle and whisked to a nearby hospital.

Later, a doctor at the hospital credits the swift action of the transit police officers with saving the boy's life.

Sound like a make-believe TV serial? Or a fictional yarn to dramatize the sale of emergency equipment? Well, neither is the case. The story is a true one. And it took place in New York City last July.

It occurred just one month after the transit authority began a special emergency rescue training program for transit police officers. In its brief existence the program has played a major role in bringing swift aid and comfort to hundreds of passengers within the city's mass transit network.

The program was founded on June 15, 1977, and in the first three months of operation the transit rescue squad responded to 604 emergency calls. Most of the calls dealt with rendering aid to heart attack victims—administration of oxygen or cardiopulmonary resuscitation. But some of the calls strain the limits of emotions. They range from the grisly—"a jumper caught under a train"—to the absurd—"a man and his bass fiddle stuck in a high turnstile."

The life-saving program has been hailed as a great success by transit operators, civic associations, passengers and employees alike. The cost of its operation is negligible. Here is the story of how New York City came up with a program that wins the hearts of passengers and employees and costs virtually nothing. Sounds like a transit operator's dream.

Like all good ideas, the transit rescue program emerged from humble beginnings. Dean Esserman, a Brooklyn teenager keenly interested in police work, railroading and medicine saw an opportunity to spend last summer carrying out all of his pet desires and at the same time meet a public need.

Esserman approached the transit authority with a plan to have specially trained transit officers respond to emergency calls in a "rescue" van. "Many subway emergency situations," Esserman told Transit Police Chief Sanford Garelik, "are complicated by the delay of an ambulance to a scene. The proper combination of speed and initial emergency help administered by transit officers could be the difference between life and death in hundreds of situations."

Garelik agreed with the persuasive youth, but noted that perhaps the program was the right idea at the wrong time. He reminded the lad that the transit authority had been ordered by the city to trim more than \$30 million from its annual operating budget. "We're struggling to cut costs not enlarge them," the police chief sighed.

It should be noted here that New York City was in the midst of a lingering financial crisis in the spring of '77. The transit authority role in helping to prevent financial default by the city was to reduce \$30 million from its already austere operating budget. Train and bus services were reduced as well as other service cutbacks. The transit police force was slashed from 3,600 men to 2,900. In short, there just wasn't any money in the till to finance the innovative plan.

Esserman, a sophomore at Dartmouth College who is not yet sure if he desires to become a doctor like his dad or remain a philosophy major, is not a young man easily dissuaded. Assisted by Deputy Inspector Hilliard J. Valentine of the transit police, Esserman made the rounds of philanthropies to plead their case and "beg for a handout." They obviously were very persuasive.

From funds for the City of New York—a private foundation funded by the Ford Foundation—they received the money to buy a rescue van. (A second rescue van was later donated by the Brooklyn Union Gas Co.). The Sam Ruben Foundation provided a donation to buy emergency equipment. Medical supplies were contributed by various municipal hospitals. The program now had the backing, it had wheels and equipment, all that was

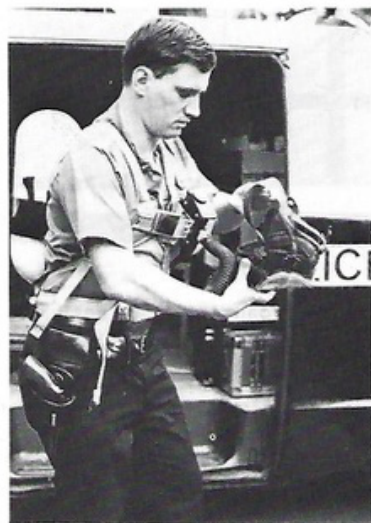
# TRANSIT EMERGENCY MEDICAL RESCUE UNIT



Esserman holds the small first aid kit previously used to handle subway emergencies, while Deputy Inspector Hillel J. Valentine views extensive new equipment now carried in the Rescue Van and 11 radio motor patrol cars



Esserman and Sede respond to one of the emergency calls relayed to them from headquarters. Transit Police 1976 records show a total of 16,223 calls requiring emergency help, rescue or medical aid



Sede dons air pack and fire fighting equipment to rescue passengers from smoke condition in a subway station

missing were the men to carry it out.

That proved to be the easiest task of all. Transit police officers were eager to volunteer for the special two-week training course in emergency medical care, advanced first aid, CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and the handling of emergency problems from third rail burns and bomb scares, to maternities and fires. Some 48 police officers were graduated from the first class.

The special training has had a positive effect on the officers. Patrolman Joseph Sede saw it as a morale booster. "In the past, the transit patrolman felt frustrated when an emergency came up and he didn't know what to do," he said. "Now, the men who haven't had the course yet are anxious to take it. It's very satisfying to help people."

Carmine Delmonico, a 12-year veteran on the transit police force, recalled his job years ago when he had a post on a lonely subway station. "I would stand around with no one to protect," he recounted, "and I used to ask myself, 'What am I doing here?'" Delmonico happily reports that conditions have changed since the rescue program. Now he rides around in a rescue van. "I'm able to give help myself and not just stand around when someone's dying," the officer said proudly.

Esserman has gone back to pursue his studies at college, but the rescue program continues in full force. A second class of 48 officers was about to begin its special training at the time this story went to press. There are plans for a third and possibly a fourth class.

Each year some 1.3 billion passengers ride on New York's subway system. Last year, a typical one, there were 16,223 calls for emergency help, not counting small fires and bomb threats. There is no sure way of knowing how many lives may have been saved due to the swift action of the new emergency service unit of the transit police. But it is enough to say that there undoubtedly are some people alive today who otherwise would not be. □

Frank Mazza covers transit for the New York News.

