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Boch

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*One word tells
all: outrageous*



SEPT. 9, 1966: Lucius Wright, a soldier in Vietnam for nine months, is on another combat patrol. His foot comes down on a hidden mine. The blast flings him like a rag doll. He is unconscious for 10 days while the doctors piece him together. The worst damage is to his head. When he opens his eyes, he can't talk, and understands little.

JAN. 20, 1970: Lucius Wright, 25, went into the L station at Bryn Mawr Av., and stood by the radiator. It was a cold day.

He had just finished his daily visit to a vocational training center on the North Side. They are trying to teach him to work with duplicating machines.

Now he was waiting for his girl, who works in a North Side factory. They sometimes meet at the station and ride back to the South Side together.

She was late, having missed a bus, and Wright stood in the station about 20 minutes, while people came and went.

SUDDENLY SEVERAL POLICEMEN walked in. They surrounded Wright.

"What are you doing way up here on the North Side?" one of them asked Wright, who is black.

Wright hesitated before answering. Then he spoke very slowly. He always speaks slowly because he has aphasia, the result of the brain damage in Vietnam. He sometimes has trouble grasping the words of others, and getting his own thoughts out. After Vietnam, it had taken six months of therapy in Walter Reed Hospital before he was able to return to civilian life and a \$400-a-month veteran's disability check.

"I'm waiting for my girl," Wright finally said.

The policemen turned him around and had him put his hands on the wall, in the classic "frisk" stance. They went through his pockets. One of them withdrew a vial of pills.

"Do you sell these?" Wright said they asked.

"I take them," he answered.

Once a week, Wright goes to the Veterans Administration Hospital on the West Side for treatment and medication. He is given three kinds of pills: a sedative, a tranquilizer and a pill that wards off paralytic seizures.

THE POLICE PUT WRIGHT'S HANDS BEHIND his back,

snapped on the cuffs, put him in a car and took him to the Foster Av. police station.

On the way, he says, a policeman asked:

"Where do you get your pills?"

"Veterans Hospital. I was wounded in Vietnam. I need them for my seizures."

Wright says the policeman answered: "You don't get seizures from being wounded."

At the station he showed them his plastic VA patient's card and asked them to call his doctors or his VA counselor. It was a few minutes after 4 p.m., and if they called before 4:30, somebody would explain that he was a disabled vet and needed his pills.

They told Wright to keep quiet while they made out his arrest papers.

They put him in a room and a detective questioned him about the pills. Wright tried to explain about the mine and his head. Then, he says, he noticed something strange about the pill vial.

The VA hospital always puts a label on. The label shows where the pills come from and how often they should be taken. The label was there, he says, when they arrested him. Now, while he was being questioned, it was gone.

Wright was taken from the room. "Can I go now?" he asked a policeman. "No, you're going in a cell."

THEY BOOKED HIM FOR ILLEGAL possession of dangerous drugs, a serious charge for which a man can be imprisoned.

They let Wright make a phone call and several hours later his sister raised bond money and went to the far North Side to get him out. He was very nervous when she took him home. He says he had cried in his cell, partly out of confusion, partly out of anger.

He began crying, in fact, when he told me his story. Then he stopped crying and his mind seemed to drift, and he shook his head as if confused by it all.

"Maybe somebody saw me in the L station and thought something was wrong with me waiting there, and called the police. I don't know. But I showed them my card. They could have called the VA, couldn't they? They'd have told how I had to have those pills."

An official at the Veterans Administration, who is familiar with Wright's military and medical history, was furious.

"There's nothing we can do, but it is an outrage. If they had any questions about those pills, a simple phone call to us could have cleared it up. Don't they try to determine the facts? We have many men walking around with metal plates in their heads and other problems. My God, it is conceivable that somebody could die in a cell without his medication."

A SIMPLE PHONE CALL COULD HAVE told them a lot about Wright besides his injury, Purple Heart and other military citations. They would have learned that he is a high school graduate, worked for a mail order house until drafted, has never been in trouble and is trying hard to overcome the war injury he suffered.

The police would not discuss the arrest.

Wright goes to Narcotics Court on Feb. 11. Presumably, the police will discuss there and then why it is illegal for a black handicapped veteran to carry drugs prescribed by a Veterans Hospital. That appears to be the mystery in this case.