

Tight handcuffs leave their mark on bitter victims

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IT WAS A beautiful morning last June 7, and 70-year-old Otto Saxinger and his wife took advantage of it with a drive over to Lincoln Park in their beloved 1936 Dodge.

Before the day really got started, Saxinger was sitting in a police station, charged with assault and battery, resisting arrest, and failure to signal a turn.

His wrists were cut and bleeding because the arresting officer, Patrolman Michael Rivera, had jammed his handcuffs on Saxinger so tightly that they had cut thru the flesh.

Saxinger, a retired janitor, had encountered the most common physical abuse that some policemen use against citizens—the use of handcuffs.

During its five-month investigation of police brutality, The Tribune discovered more complaints about handcuffs than about any other means of police abuse. Dozens of persons told about policemen using handcuffs as an instrument of torture, leaving wrists bleeding, swollen, and scarred.

For their own safety and the safety of those around them, policemen are instructed to handcuff anyone they fear might present a danger during an arrest. It should be a routine and insignificant matter. During a five-month investigation of police brutality, however, reporters found some Chicago policemen have used the handcuffs to torment and injure people needlessly. The Tribune talked to hundreds of alleged victims and their witnesses, examined thousands of documents, and arranged dozens of polygraph tests. This is the seventh in a series of reports compiled by the

REPORTERS TALKED to hundreds of alleged police brutality victims and their witnesses. To substantiate such stories, they examined thousands of documents and arranged polygraph tests wherever possible.

Some of the bitterest victims were



POLICE BRUTALITY

Pulitzer Prize-winning team of chief investigator George Bliss, Pamela Zekman, and William Mullen, and reporter Emmett George.

painfully reminded of their experience each time they looked at or moved wrists injured by handcuffs applied too tightly.

Handcuffs are as indispensable to a policeman as his gun, nightstick, or any of the equipment he uses in the course of his duties.

In theory and common practice, they are a piece of safety equipment that can save lives and prevent injury to a policeman and those around him. They are a simple restraining device to keep a person who has been arrested from flailing out at policemen or pulling a weapon.

Simply by tightening the metal bracelets, however, a policeman can turn them from a restraining device into an instrument of torment that cuts circulation, draws blood, and paralyzes nerves.

Police officials say their men are carefully instructed to make sure handcuffs are applied loosely enough to keep them from pinching the wrists. If they are too tight, policemen are supposed to fit them properly.

SAXINGER, AN immigrant from Germany who came to Chicago and reared two sons who became scientists, still bears the scars on his wrists from his encounter last June with Patrolman Rivera.

Saxinger and his wife, Mary, were riding home from Lincoln Park in his

1936 Dodge, a car he bought new and has maintained reverently ever since.

The couple live in a Chicago Housing Authority high rise at 1414 N. Damen Av. and rent a garage nearby in an alley behind the 1500 block of North Milwaukee Avenue to protect the car from the weather.

Saxinger said he had pulled the car into the alley to put the car in the garage when Rivera pulled in behind him.

"The first thing he [Rivera] said, real smart-like," Saxinger said, "is that I didn't have any brake lights."

Saxinger said he gave Rivera his license and then showed him that the brake lights were working.

"He acted so smart-alecky," Saxinger said. "He acted like he was confused and mad, like he didn't know what to do. There was no comment to me after this at all."

RIVERA WENT to the squad car, he said, and started to write out a ticket for making an improper turn. Saxinger

said he went over to Rivera and asked for his driver's license back, but Rivera wouldn't say anything.

"He was very arrogant," Saxinger said. "I was so mad at him and his attitude."

So mad, he said, that he told Rivera, "Buddy, someday somebody is going to take you by the legs and wrap you around a post."

He said he had turned and started to walk back to his car when Rivera came up behind him and grabbed his arm, tearing off his wristwatch.

"I turned around to look for my

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watch on the ground," Saxinger said. "The guy pulled out a gun and held it on me."

Rivera told Saxinger to put his hands on the car. He searched him and then slapped the handcuffs on him behind his back.

"He put them on so tight they cut my wrists," Saxinger said. "They were bleeding like hell. The guy was a madman. I told him they were hurting me, but he wouldn't listen to me.

RIVERA PUSHED him face-first into the squad car, he said.

"I fell on my face to the seat," he said, "and I moaned in pain to 'Take these handcuffs off.'"

"Sit up!" he said Rivera ordered him, but when Saxinger moaned again, Rivera saw Saxinger's wrists were bleeding and beginning to swell; so he took the cuffs off, he said.

Saxinger was taken to the Wood Station and charged with assault and battery, resisting arrest, and failure to signal a turn. He was let out on \$1,000 bond and is now waiting a Dec. 14 trial.

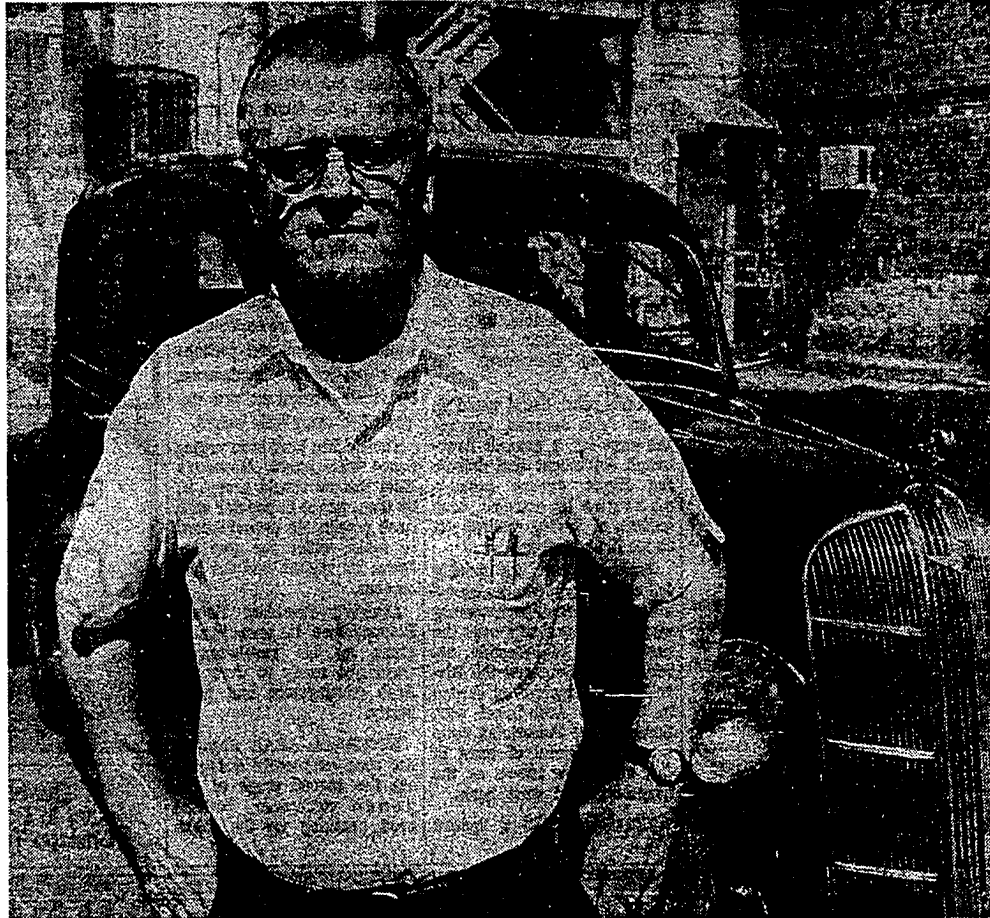
Rivera would not talk to The Tribune about the incident, but allowed his commander, Capt. Edward McDermott, to read the case report on the arrest.

It said Rivera had watched Saxinger make the turn without signaling, and when he motioned for Saxinger to curb his car, Saxinger failed to respond. It said he followed Saxinger into the alley, and when he stopped, Saxinger refused at first to give him his license.

When he got the license, Rivera said, Saxinger became abusive, refused to tell him if he wanted to post bond or the license, then snatched the license from Rivera's hand.

RIVERA SAID HE was forced to arrest Saxinger because Saxinger continued to be uncooperative. The arrest report, according to Capt. McDermott, had no explanation of the assault and battery charges.

Saxinger filed a complaint of brutal-



Tribune Photo

Otto Saxinger . . . his wrists were bleeding and began to swell.

ty with the Police Department's Internal Affairs Division, but he said he has never heard what happened with its investigation. The IAD told reporters it disposed of the case as unfounded. Saxinger volunteered to take a lie test for

The Tribune, but his high blood pressure interfered with the readings.

Saxinger still experiences soreness from the handcuffs, he said, but he is even more worried about his pending court case.

"When they bother a guy like me, who is 70 years old without a record, that ain't funny," he said. "They fingerprinted me and photographed me. Now I'll have this record around for all my life."