

WILL PHILLIPS tossed restlessly on his cell bunk in the Illinois State Penitentiary in Joliet last winter. Unable to sleep, he fitted earphones over his blond, wavy hair and turned on the prison radio. He caught the last strains of some music and a prison "commercial."

"Inmates interested in participating in a medical experiment in hepatitis report to the blood-donor bank tomorrow."

Phillips didn't know what hepatitis was. He didn't know that it is one of the few infectious diseases on the rise in this country; that more than 41,000 cases were reported last year; that an estimated 60,000 will be reported this year; that while the vast majority recover from the inflammation of the liver, some die and others suffer permanent damage to the body's most important chemical factory; that until recently it was difficult to diagnose because nobody was quite sure what viruses cause hepatitis.

"Hear that announcement?" Phillips asked his cell mate. "I'm going over there tomorrow just to see what they got to say."

His cell mate gave the 22-year-old the sour look of an older, wiser man. "Better ask the prison barber about it, too. He shaved the guys that volunteered for the first tests. Says they were a mess—yellow and always sick."

At first Phillips was only curious. Inmate George Sanders' motive for attending the morning briefing session on the experiment was more positive. "I have two kids on the outside," he said. "One got real sick, and the doctors thought it was hepatitis. Instead, it was polio. So I figure if the doctors get to know more about hepatitis, they won't make this mistake and maybe, like polio, they'll even find something to keep kids from getting it."

No Special Promises to Volunteers

About 50 inmates showed up in the oppressive, hand-hewn brownstone hospital the next morning. Like most, laconic Charlie Yeagley and intense Benny Cotter were interested because "human guinea pigs" allegedly got a "good word" with the parole board. Dr. Joseph Boggs, director of laboratories at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago and chief of the experiment, set the record straight:

"I will write a letter to your parole board saying you cooperated in a potentially dangerous medical experiment. The letter will say nothing else. It may help you; it may not. You'll get a nominal sum of money, too—\$30—nothing to compare with the danger and illness you'll face. So now's the time to get out if you expect anything more."

Most stayed—including Phillips, Sanders, Yeagley, and Cotter. Then Dr. Boggs, a sandy-haired 41-year-old pathologist who talks softly but quickly, told the inmates what they could expect.

Five years earlier, he said, researchers Wilton Rightsell and I. W. MacLean had isolated virus-like agents from the blood of hepatitis victims. They could only guess that the agents themselves carried hepatitis. If they did, however, could these agents be weakened by growth in tissue culture to provide a vaccination making humans immune to the disease?

The answers couldn't be learned from tests on animals because they do not contract the disease. Only humans could act as "guinea pigs"—and inmates of a model state prison, because of the excellent controls and observation possible, would make ideal volunteers.

Dr. Boggs proposed to inoculate some of the vol-

unteers with distilled water (a control group) and others with virus strains of varying strengths. If theory was correct, those receiving heavy doses would be hospitalized within 30 days, providing added proof that the virus was of hepatitis nature. Those with weakened strains would develop protective antibodies in their blood without suffering the illness. And if all these "ifs" proved correct, Dr. Boggs and his associates would be well on the way to a hepatitis-preventing vaccine. The doctor pulled no punches about another "if"—if something unexpected turned up in the tests, the volunteers might suffer prolonged aftereffects. He reminded them, too, that hepatitis sometimes proves fatal.

"You'll have a week to think this over," Dr. Boggs concluded. "Then, if you volunteer, you'll sign a contract releasing us and the state from any liability. But," he added, "I can guarantee you the

"I'm bored," the other replied frankly. "Anything to break the monotony."

A priest and notary public witnessed their signatures. Next, the volunteers would be taken into the doctor's office and injected. "I don't know myself who's getting what," Doctor Boggs told them, "so don't keep asking me."

One by one, the inmates filed into the office. Doctors took a half-pint of blood, then gave the volunteers a hypodermic injection. "I hardly felt it," Phillips said later. "After all the build-up, it was kinda disappointing."

Next came the wait. Who had the distilled water, who the virus? Doctor Boggs had said that the strains he had injected should take effect within 30 days or less. Phillips had the feeling other inmates were staring at him, looking for the telltale signs of yellowing skin and eyes. Secretly, he

"We Were Human Guinea Pigs"

A young doctor was on the threshold of a vaccine for hepatitis, one of our fastest-spreading diseases, but only these convicts could prove his experiment —at danger to themselves

By JACK RYAN

best medical care possible. Nobody will leave the hospital until he's completely well."

The following weekend, Will Phillips' girl friend and guardian visited him. In the half-joking, half-serious manner that characterizes him, Phillips explained his "big news." The girl and guardian exchanged worried glances. "It doesn't seem wise to me," the guardian said. "Don't let anybody fool you about a parole. This is a dangerous thing, and it could affect you for a long time."

Phillips shrugged and his voice took on a boyish quality. "Well, what about helping somebody? They said it might help people, kids especially." He looked at his girl friend. "You know about me. Wouldn't you want me to do something that was good like this?"

She didn't answer directly. "I want you free some day—free and healthy and without worrying about some disease coming back."

Nevertheless, a few days later Phillips and about two dozen other inmates waited in the hospital to sign contracts for the experiment. "I'm bull-headed," Phillips explained to a fellow volunteer.

pressed his side to feel for inflammation of the liver. Nothing.

But after three weeks, the first cases began appearing. Benny Cotter felt the flush of fever while in his cell one night. He reacted as did most of the volunteers who were to fall victim to the disease: he tried to talk himself out of it. "No," he said, "this must be a hangover from the cold I had."

George Sanders, the most matter-of-fact of the group, also tried to ignore the preliminary symptoms, passing them off as "something I ate."

The young hospital barber, who had witnessed and vividly described the illnesses of initial volunteers, had ironically volunteered himself. "I figured I'd been around hospitals so long, I was hardened," he said. "Then I came down with the darn thing, and the idea of going to a hospital was worse than the first sickness. I lazed around three days, thinking I'd shake it. Finally, I knew I had to go on sick call."

In Charlie Yeagley's case, doctors already had discovered hepatitis in his weekly blood sample before he admitted being sick.