

Alcoholic As 'Tank Judge'

Reporter 'Does Time' at Bakersfield, Again Finds Bad Food, Overcrowding

The second jail in which a Chronicle staff reporter "did time" was Kern county jail in Bakersfield. In some ways it was like Stockton's jail—overcrowded, brutalizing. But it was different, too, and today "Peter Emil Flick" tells you what it was like.

By PIERRE SALINGER (alias PETER EMIL FLICK)
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Duggan, "The Duke," a tall, thin, dark-haired alcoholic met me as I walked into block "Left Three" of the Kern County Jail at Bakersfield on a sunny Friday morning, two weeks ago. He was the assistant Tank Judge.

The Tank Judge was snoring peacefully in a nearby

lower bunk. That made Duggan chairman of the "welcoming committee" for me and two other prisoners who were being put in that block.

"Read the rules," he said coldly, pointing to a list of ten regulations written in an unlettered hand and posted on the wall of the cell block.

Rule Number One was very specific:

"All men entering this tank must take an immediate shower."

There were no exceptions. I later learned the prisoners feared new men would bring lice, bed bugs, and other vermin into the tank. It was a well-founded precaution.

I took Duggan aside: "I just had a shower this morning," I told him. What's about skipping this?"

"Everybody takes a shower," he said. "How do I know you are telling the truth?"

"What if you don't have a towel?" I asked.

"Well, I used my shorts when I came in," was his matter-of-fact answer.

That was the end of the conversation. From my experience in the Stockton Jail I knew that when the Tank Judge said something, you did it . . . or else.

I started down the long block to the shower. One of my new cellmates handed me a torn part of a towel. It looked as if it had been used a half-dozen times.

I piled my clean grey suit and my other clothes on a long table, and took my shower, dressing quickly. The block was cold. A number of open windows poured cold air into the cells.

The Kern County Jail, built in 1925, is in the middle of a tidy park in the heart of Bakersfield.

As we were driven up to the entrance Kemp, one of the other two prisoners in the car, commented: "Well, there's the 'Casa Blanca.'" (The White House.)

The front entrance was buttressed with heavy boards, a reminder of the recent earthquake, which cracked the old jail in several places.

I was booked for speeding. A deputy sheriff told me to empty my pockets.

"Lift your arms," he said. And he frisked me carefully, feeling every inch of my grey suit.

At the San Joaquin City Jail in Stockton, all they had left me was a comb and 32 cents.

But at Bakersfield, I was returned all my money, about \$6, my watch, my comb, and an inhaler for my cold. Only my wallet was taken away.

(Later I found myself sorry I
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Year's Worst Fog Closes Bay Airports

The year's worst fog socked in San Francisco and Oakland Airports virtually all day yesterday, slowed surface-traffic to a crawl and caused numerous accidents.

More is due this morning, the Weather Bureau said.

Except for partial clearing about midday, the fog stayed all day and into the night, completely blocking landings and takeoffs.

There is one consolation for today—after a dense morning fog, fair weather and blue skies are expected, the district forecaster said.

(Picture on Page 18)



Pierre Salinger



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PROGRAM
CALIFORNIA
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COME

FRIDAY
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11:15 P.M.
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7



County Jail at Bakersfield Is A Bleak, Overcrowded 'Jungle'

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 had that much money with me. It's in great demand in jail, even more than "on the outside." I had to keep a firm grip on my six dollars or I wouldn't have had it for long.)
 I was taken up to block "Left Three" and greeted by "The Duke."

The block was radically different from the cells I had been held in for four days at Stockton. The block was long and thin, bars on three sides, a wall on the fourth.

CROWDED CELLS
 Along one side of the block were nine small cells. Each cell contained a double bunk and an open toilet. These small cells were for the most part very crowded.

My arrival with the other two men brought the block population to 21, three more than the number of bunks.

I was told this wasn't bad at all. One day several weeks before, there were 41 men in the same block.

"It was no use even getting out of bed. You'd just step in someone's face," a cellmate told me.

Along the left side of the block were three long tables that could be folded down.

At the far end of the block was a brick shower. The shower curtain was heavily stained a dingy brown.

NARROW AISLE

The center aisle of the block, which was actually the only area you could walk in, was about two yards wide.

This tank contained a mixture of humanity . . . a mixture that is typical of our county jail.

The "Tank Judge," the con boss of our cell block, was 21-year-old Don Batten, doing six months for passing bad checks. Fifty-one

other U. S. cities want him for the same offense when he gets out of Kern, he said. Batten was a big, rough, tough kid.

Duggan, the assistant tank judge, looked a lot like the late Slim Summerville, the movie actor. He was doing a hitch for drunkenness. He had been out only six days before he was jailed again.

Duggan could be "quick tempered." And he could be "understanding." Only the morning before I got there, the other prisoners told me, he knocked down one of the other inmates who had shouldered up too fast to grab his morning coffee. The man's head was still bloody from a gash over his eye.

The man who lent me the Malt Jowl was a five-time loser, Jack Allen, the oldest man in the tank, doing six months for drunk driving.

He knew the law, and would quote it. He said he once had "sprung himself" from a penitentiary with a home-made writ of habeas corpus.

Alvin Gardner was doing time for stealing furs. He has spent 11 of his 28 years behind bars.

He was crippled by a serious automobile accident last year, he says ruefully, he would not be in jail today if somebody had bothered to help him out when he first got into trouble.

Don Davis, 18 and blonde, was a good-looking youth. He was a graduate of the Preston School of Industry. He liked to remember



In Kern county jail, you can't walk without stepping on a cellmate

how he came out of Preston with \$300 gained by illegal sales of sandwiches to other inmates at a dollar a sandwich.

Then there was Bill, a clean-cut youth arrested while he was work-

ing in an expensive Reno hotel. He had been sentenced because of a mixup over property connected with his divorce proceedings. It was his first hitch. The Judge had said "a hundred dollars or jail." Bill didn't have the hundred dollars (he'd been ill and unable to work steadily) so there he was—in the tank.

TWO-TIME LOSER

And Phil Contreras, a tough-talking two-time loser, who was also a fine amateur artist. His paintings of pretty girls helped to decorate the otherwise dreary-looking cell block. He was in for six months for failing to register in Bakersfield as an ex-convict.

Those were some of the inmates of "Left Three."

There was more tension here than at Stockton. Some of the prisoners cautioned me to be careful of my clothes and my watch.

Things had been known to disappear in the cell. It worked this way: a man stole the article he wanted. He had a trusty outside the block as a confederate. And the thief would slip him the stolen article through the bars.

That way, if the victim complained, a search of the cell would not turn up his property.

I was a late arrival, so I didn't have a bunk the first night in the Kern County Jail. I was issued a mattress, a mattress cover and a blanket.

Batten, the Tank Judge, told me to sleep on one of the long tables.

At Kern, they "fed" three times a day. Breakfast was at 8:30 a. m., lunch at 11 a. m. and dinner at 4:30 p. m.

BREAD AND SOUP

Dinner consisted of one bowl of thick, highly-seasoned soup and some bread. I was able to finish about half my soup and tried to give the rest away. Nobody wanted it.

Duggan, assistant Tank Judge, sidied up. "Hungry?" he asked. I told him I was.

"Give me a quarter and I'll get a sandwich."

I gave him the money and he slipped it through the bars to a trusty, who, a few moments later, returned with a salami and onion sandwich.

At Kern, they held church services three times a week, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. A group of women showed up outside our cell about 3 o'clock. One of them played the violin. They sang songs for us.

Then, an elderly woman appeared and preached to the men for about a half hour. Only one or two paid any attention to her message.

LIGHTS ALWAYS ON

The lights never went out in our cell block. Most of the men stayed up past midnight, reading.


talking or playing cards. About midnight, I set up my mattress on top of one of the long tables and took off my suit coat and my shoes.

I hung my coat in Jack Allen's cell. He said he'd watch it for me.

I put my shoes under my blanket, I was told it would be safer that way.

"That's a mighty fine pair of shoes you have there, man," one prisoner had commented earlier in the day.

Continued Tomorrow



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