

Sordid Life in County Jails Exposed

A Reporter's Inside Story

Youths Cooped Up With Older, Hardened Crooks

Last year more than 600,000 Californians were locked up in city or county jails. That means just about one out of every 18 men, women and children in the State were behind bars for some time.

A Chronicle staff writer, under an assumed name and unknown to his jailers as a reporter, did time in two of these jails. Yesterday, he told of his first night in the San Joaquin County Jail at Stockton—in a dimly lit tank cell with 17 other men. He reported the degradation and filth in that cell. Today he continues his experiences in the same jail, but after he was transferred to another cell.

☆ ☆ ☆

By PIERRE SALINGER

Copyright, 1953, by The Chronicle Publishing Co.

After my first night "on the boards" in the San Joaquin County Jail at Stockton, it was with great relief that I learned I would get a bed to sleep in over the week end.

I had made a routine appearance in court on the "drunk charge" and the judge had ordered me held over the week end for trial on Monday.

As I was taken back to the jail, I was transferred out of Tank 8.

"Give him a bed," the officer told the trusty at the jail. "He's a first-timer. He looks clean."

The chief trusty, Johnny Mendoza, led me upstairs to Tank A, opened the door with his big key, and I walked inside.

I looked around and saw ten double-decker bunks. Most of the men were lying on their bunks, sleeping or eating. Three of them sat around a table in the middle of the large

cell playing poker.

William Adams, a tall, curly-haired check-passer, shoved a nickel in the pot and turned to me.

"Want a bunk?" he asked. I nodded.

"Got any money, kid?" he asked. I pulled 2 cents out of my pocket. It was all I had. They had let me keep 32 cents when I was booked Thursday night, and I had spent 30 cents on illegal tobacco.

"Got any on the books?" Adams persisted.

"I've got \$2 downstairs they took away from me when I came in," I replied.

"Well, give me a buck on Sunday. Your bunk is over there."

It later turned out he had been feeling me out. He never asked for the dollar. But at another jail where I spent time I would have had to pay a dollar to sleep in a bunk.

An hour later, 3:30 p. m., it was dinner time. We filed out of the cell and downstairs to the kitchen.

There we were handed a pan about a foot long, four inches wide and four inches deep. All our food was piled in there, one "course" on top of the other.

First they ladled in some macaroni. Then some cooked celery was heaped on top of the macaroni. On top of this was placed a fried fish. The topper was four slices of white bread. And a cup of black coffee.

I followed the line of men back to Tank A, where we ate. You don't talk in line. If a trusty or guard catches you talking, they take away your food and you wait hungry for the next meal.

"Dinner wasn't very popular that night. Men started calling out: "Anybody want my macaroni?" "Anybody want my celery?"

I fell into the pattern: "Anybody want my fish?" I asked. An alcoholic at the other side of the tank came over and got it. By prison practice, he became responsible for washing out my pan. A lot of food went down the cell's two toilets that night.

At Stockton, the food never varies from week to week. Every

Continued on Page 2, Col. 1

San Francisco Chronicle

THE CITY'S ONLY HOME-OWNED NEWSPAPER

FINAL

VOL. CLXXVII, NO. 12 CCCCAAAB SAN FRANCISCO, TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 1953 CA 1-1112 DAILY 10c, SUNDAY 20c

Today Also Will Be Fair In Bay Area

The San Francisco Bay Area today will have a repeat performance of yesterday's fair weather.

The Weather Bureau, not at all apologetic about the expected storm that fizzled out over the Pacific, expects that today's temperatures will be slightly cooler.

With the exception of U. S. Highway 101 into Oregon, which is open to emergency traffic only between Brookings and Fort Orford, all other northern routes are described as "normal" by the State Automobile Association. Roads leading into Nevada likewise are open, but there is ice in spots on U. S. Highway 50 and State Route 49.

Jails Exposed — Life Inside a Sordid Cell

Continued from Page 1
Friday night was macaroni, celery and fish. You could predict the bill of fare with accuracy for the next year.

The Cellmates
After eating I looked around the cell at my companions. This was typical of the way men are put together in California's jails with no regard for offense, age, or past record.

There were first time offenders and ex-convicts, a juvenile and some old men. There were men waiting for trial and some serving sentences.

Usually, the only segregation found is the segregation that divides Negroes from whites or Mexicans from whites.

Among my cellmates were:
The "Tank Judge," Jack, serving nine months for possession of marijuana. The "Tank Judge" is the absolute inmate boss, appointed by the jailers. He decides who shall do clean-up duty, who shall sleep in what bunks. He reports infractions of the rules to the Sheriff's office and thus has the power to put a man in solitary confinement.
Bill Henry is on parole from Folsom. He got picked up on a

minor charge and was doing six months in San Joaquin. He was worried about the possibility the authorities might revoke his parole and send him back to Folsom. "But I'll tell you one thing, Folsom's a hell of a lot better place than this," he told me.
Joe, a red-haired, middle-aged man, was serving a sentence for fondling children.

There was Peters, "The Burlesque King," serving his first time in jail. He was awaiting trial on charges of contributing to the delinquency of his 17-year-old wife who had been arrested in a raid on a Stockton burlesque house.

There was Bob, a graduate of the Stateville Penitentiary in Illinois, and Woods, a 21-year-old arrested for bad checks.

There was Louis, a 19-year-old homosexual. He was very shy and the butt of the obscene jokes. At times—for no apparent reason—he would burst into uncontrollable laughter.

Mata was 17 years old and a robbery suspect.

Pedro, the Old Mexican, looked older than 70. He was in for smoking the weed, marijuana.

There was "The Swede," who had never been in Sweden, and the

"Wino" who was sobering up on six months in jail.

My bunkmate, Tony, was another, marijuana smoker.

I wanted to take a shower. But I had no towel and none were issued. Neither were toothbrushes. The cell was clean, principally due to the efforts of the prisoners. On my bed, I had a mattress, two sheets, and two blankets. The sheets, made of a rough material, were the same used by the last man who had occupied the bed. But at least the fact I had sheets was an improvement.

"Real Lucky"
Some of the boys told me I was "real lucky" to be in Tank A. "You should be down in Tank 4 where they keep the guys awaiting trial. There are 24 mattresses on the floor in there. And there were 88 men in there last night."

The men compared notes on the jails they had made.

One of the men steamed particularly well informed. "Down at Santa Cruz where I did six months, a man could buy anything he wanted. You could send out in the morning for food, candy, everything. The whole thing was in Santa Cruz, I drank all the whiskey I wanted."

The Butte county jail in Oroville, they reported, was another place where you could send the trustees out for additional food.

A Greatly in fact they talked about the downtown Los Angeles County Jail. "The food was good there. Also, they had men who came around with carts. There was a candy cart, and a milk and sandwich cart. A fruit cart, and a magazine and pocket-book cart."

There were no carts in Stockton. And the men who had been in the jail for awhile, had containers in which they saved food from the evening meal to eat at a time when they were hungry.

It's a long time for idle men between meals — from 5:30 in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon. And it's also a long time between meals from 3:30 in the afternoon until 5:30 in the morning.

In Tank A we could tell the difference between day and night. The north side of the cell looked out onto the street, and by craning our necks we could see outside, see people shopping and pretty girls walking down the street.

We could hear the Mexican wetbacks (illegal immigrants to this country) singing in a nearby cell. "Who fed those SOB's canary seed?" one man growled.

The trustees made a play for Louis. They gave him free cigarettes. And talked to him about sex.

They got Louis talking. Louis said he had knocked around and had a lot of odd jobs.

"You know in India," Louis told the trusty, "men can marry men and nobody says anything about it."

What to Do

What do you do in jail? Nothing.

From 6 a. m. to 10 p. m.—read, sleep, play cards, talk. No exercise, no school program, no work program, no rehabilitation. No treatment for the alcoholics, no treatment for the narcotics addicts. Lights out at 10 p. m. You sleep until 8:30, then:

"Get out of bed you bastards." We did a lot of talking the next day.

Adams told us how to float checks without getting in trouble. But it hadn't worked out too well in his case. He was staring one-to-14 years in San Quentin in the face.

Tony told us about the marijuana. "I smoked it all day. The first one makes you giggle. You are real high. Everything is rosy. You ought to try it sometime."

A year in the same cell, talking, sleeping, reading, talking about old crimes and new ones yet to come . . .



Chronicle Artist Hubert Buel visited the Stockton jail at mopping-up time

Make sure of your popularity this Season



BRUSH UP ON YOUR DANCING NOW AT ARTHUR MURRAY'S



WILL YOU ACCEPT A \$1.00 TRIAL LESSON?

A sure way to popularity is to be a good dancer. And, learning to dance the Arthur Murray way is easy as A-B-C. Try our \$1.00 trial lesson and discover the shortcut to good times and dates galore. You'll be thrilled how quickly you'll be dancing like an expert. So don't take chances on missing dances—come in or phone Arthur Murray's.

ARTHUR MURRAY School of Dancing

627 Sutter Street (Near Mason) GRAYSTONE 4-0372

Berkeley • Burlingame • Modesto • Monterey • Oakland • Palo Alto
Sacramento • San Jose • Stockton • Vallejo

Get Arthur Murray gift certificate when you see "Moe, He at the Fair" Orpheum Theatre

FLY TWA
ONE-STOP
NEW YORK

See your travel agent or call
Trans World Airlines, EXbrook 2-2711

(Continued tomorrow)