

City Prison's a Much Better Place These Days

Constitution reporter Dick Hebert revealed conditions at Atlanta City Prison in an October series of articles about a sentence he served at the prison after feigning drunkenness and being arrested. This is an account of his return visit this week.

By DICK HEBERT

It's hard to smuggle drugs or booze into the Atlanta City Prison these days.

Not only that, men in the prison dormitory spit into tin can "spittons" instead of on the floor . . . once dirty rest rooms and shower rooms are newly painted . . . a steward is changing things in the kitchen . . . and inmates don't assign bunks

to other inmates any more. The guards do that now.

Things have changed since early October when a Constitution reporter did "time" at 561 Key Road SE. Articles on his stay drew public attention to prison conditions and a short while later Police Capt. Ralph Hulseley was named prison director to begin a total reorganization.

"Sometimes you just have to take the bull by the horns and go with it," Hulseley said this week after a month on the job. "We've got a jillion things to do.

"We were lax in security. Now we've tightened up on searching the prisoners as they come in the door. And every man that

comes back from the hospital is strip searched."

That's because prisoners used to go to Grady Hospital for illness, get a prescription and fill it, carry the pills back into prison and peddle them to fellow inmates.

"Now we dispense the medicine to the inmates. The hospital sends us the pills. They don't give them to the prisoners. We keep a record of what we give him.

"Soon we'll have a water fountain in here and we'll make the prisoners take the pills in front of us, as prescribed. We intend to prosecute all inmates caught with illegal drugs in their possession. We've already prosecuted one. He got 12 months

probation in DeKalb Criminal Court.

"I won't say we've stopped it, but we've certainly curtailed their (pill) supply," Hulseley said.

This was corroborated in talks with some of the prisoners there this week. "They won't let us get them in here anymore," one said. "They've gotten real tough. They even strip search us sometimes now."

Hulseley's "get tough" policy has also meant new house rules being written for prisoners and guards.

They will include forbidding inmates to sell anything. In October a brisk trade was continuing in the men's dormitory. The merchandise was everything from smuggled-in instant

coffee to pieces of junk collected from the streets.

Coffee is still being smuggled in and brewed in the dormitory, Hulseley said, but he hopes to stop that with a fence. The contract has been let to build an eight-foot high fence around the main prison building. An armed guard will patrol the fence. The top foot of the fence will be barbed wire.

"We're too vulnerable now," Hulseley said. "Anyone can come up and stick something through a window."

Many of the fire escape doors in the building have frames that have been kicked through. The doors themselves can be torn open easily, Hulseley said.

"The trouble is, this whole

area's open to the public. Once we get the fence, everything will have to come in through the back door or the kitchen door, and we're keeping the kitchen door locked.

"There are too many people running around this building and the whole property that have no right to be here. We intend to prosecute those people who are prowling around our property and have no business here."

He said he has made no changes yet in the "hole" — a four-by-eight-foot windowless room where troublesome inmates are kept in solitary confinement.

"I'm not at all happy with it

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City Prison Life Is Better Now

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as it is," he said. "But it's necessary for discipline." He said he uses the "hole" to sober up those drunk on booze or pills.

His plans include possible furnishing of such cells with an iron-lattice bunk and toilet facilities. "Hole" furnishings now include a pail and two blankets—no bed, mattress or plumbing.

The 1966 budget of \$539,399 tentatively approved for the stockade is about \$40,000 over this year's budget and most of the excess is earmarked for things Hulseley is counting on to improve conditions.

They include a new women's dormitory wing, a new clothes washer, a dishwasher to remove current health and sanitation hazards in the kitchen, and repair of a walk-in refrigerator that appears to be rotting at the seams.

In progress is conversion of a gymnasium into a two-story men's dormitory to relieve crowding that has grown so thick that 150 double-decked bunks are pushed to within inches of each other in the men's dorms.

In the new dorm, single beds will be used, and the young will be separated from the old and feeble. The facility can handle up to 200. "I'd like to see us get into that place in the next 60 days," Hulseley said.

He also plans to make room for an emergency area for ill patients and "in case we ever have anything like an epidemic or something."