Line Screw

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Line Screw

My Twelve Riotous Years Working Behind Bars
In Some of North America's Toughest Jails

An Unrepentant Memoir
by
J. Michael Yates

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To the guards and inmates who gave me my most entertaining decade, and to the memory of two who knew when an inmate is a fellow human being and when a jail is a jail: John Chapman and Ted Colley. They died young.

Contents

PART THREE: NEW HAVEN

The Line is an idea . . . one needs a special kind of vision to perceive The Line .... Death is hardly a "spice". It is the ultimate experience and common destiny of all living beings. To be in the shadow of death is to come as close as anyone alive can to the absolute unknown of the Beginning and the End. Death, whatever it may be, is the closing chord, the perfect balance, the quiescence of all scales, the final equilibrium of nature. Between it and life there is a short gap . . . . This is where The Line runs, at the edge of this final mystery... The object is never death; it is only the price of admission. For those who would dice with God the stakes are high. The feeling doesn't come except in the presence of mortal danger.

- George Jonas, *A Passion Observed*

Preface

The Line is comprised of those members of a system who contiguate most directly with the end user of the service which that system offers. Thus: Line Police, Line Nurses, Line Teachers, Line Corrections staff, *Line Firefighters. These people are comparable to the dogface, the soldier in the trench at the front lines of a war.*
- Itzik Currach, *The Architecture of Management Styles*

PRISON. There are numberless academic theories about why people break the law and wind up in prison. Only one reality of being there.

This book is about being there. It's written from the viewpoint of one line officer - prison guard, line screw - whose perception of the criminal justice system goes something like this: It is the business of the courts to try, find, and sentence law-breakers. It is not the business of a prison or a prison guard consciously to inconvenience further those in custody. Like any institution, a prison has rules that must be observed or, quite simply, the numerous people in this relatively confined space couldn't be fed and accommodated.

Let's get the hot questions out of the way at the outset. Whom does a peace officer, a line screw, serve? He or she works more directly for the law than the citizen upholder of the law.

The most powerful tool we have with which to enforce the law is

the law-abiding public. It is they on whom others model their behaviour and it is they who do not hesitate to report a breach of the law, or "raise the hue and cry," according to our British common law tradition. They keep the peace but are not formal "peace officers."

Under certain circumstances, in the event that someone declared to be dangerous to society is escaping custody, I am empowered to shoot the escapee. Can I find it within myself to shoot the escapee? Absolutely.

To maintain systems of management, operations, discipline, and security, would I use "as much force as necessary" to execute my duty? Let there be no doubt in your mind. The government hired me to do a job whose duties were clearly specified.

Would I obey a manifestly unlawful order from a superior officer to inflict corporal or other punishment on an inmate? No way. I like many cons, both those presently in tenure and those emeritus, but not so much that I want to wear their numbers and uniform. It is a very short trip from one side of the bars to the other via following a stupid order.

Once an inmate knows the parameters of my job and I have explained to him the parameters of his job, I wear one uniform and he wears another; I have an employee number and he has a correctional services number. But we're both locked behind the same bars. All human beings together. We are the line.

You should immediately get rid of the notion that the line in a prison is part of a larger thing called prison, and that the prison is part of a larger thing called Corrections, and that Corrections is part of a larger thing called the Ministry, and that God is in Heaven and all's right with the world.

Anywhere there are walls full of files and computers everywhere you look, communication is bad to nil. Depend on it.

There is the line, and then there is the rest of the mess. Parts of the rest of the mess disagree with other parts, but there is nothing anyone on the line can do about it. They've tried since the beginning of the whole system of *doing time.* To no avail. Thus the elements of the line stick together - guards and inmates - more or less back-to-back against the rest of the mess.

PREFACE

This book is about the line. If the rest of the mess takes a few salvos along the way, that's a bonus.

Prison is tragic. But not serious. This, it seems, is not the popular view. However, it is mine, and its foundation is more than a decade of thinking, seeing, hearing, smelling, saying, and being prison. Also, I am a poet, and a significant part of a poet's job is to look at what passes for reality and point out fraud. It's been this way since the beginning of poetry.

I'm certainly not serious. I ceased teaching at universities because they were such serious places, and when I moved to broadcasting I found that it takes itself terribly seriously. I've also been a logger. Logging takes itself much too seriously.

To me, teaching in a university and being a line screw have the same value and status: no more or less than a way to pay the bills while a world turns in which poetry pays less than crime - and crime, supposedly, doesn't pay at all.

I went to work in prison because I was looking for a job that would engage my imagination while at work; that would pay the damn bills; and, very important, that did not cause me to take work home and interfere with my time for writing poetry.

I found that job in prison.

I remained because, as one who reveres the silly, I had found my comic context.

But aren't there violence and blood and non-God-fearing language in prisons? Certainly, and things even more unpleasant. But this in no way distinguishes life in prisons from what we see in daily life outside prisons, much less on television. Much less in war, in which state we have been for the entirety of my lifetime.

There is violence across the board in the human experience, which we seem to deny when viewing violence in our institutions. I don't expect to see violence vanish from the face of evolution. At the end of language, force waits - regardless of setting.

We forget much too easily that media people, corrections brass, and, quite simply, people have the same social problems as guards

and inmates. Usually it is a matter of degree and of who gets caught. And, these days, how the information is packaged for the rest of society. Corrections has proved itself inept at informing the public, and yet it despises the impression the public has of what goes on in prisons.

What's tragic about being human is that we must make laws and then strive to observe them. And fail. Hence the birth of the prison where one *serves time.* It could be said that we all serve time anyway. It passes and it damn well doesn't serve us. Nonetheless, *doing time is* man's most humane antidote to man's "inhumanity to man." Having invoked Wordsworth, I now defer to an earlier and perhaps more potent authority: Dante.

Dante wrote not *The Divine Tragedy* but *The Divine Comedy.* It takes some life experience to understand the reasoning behind Dante's choice of title.

And, it takes considerable life experience to join the line in prison and emerge twelve years later having had a wonderful time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For years, George Jonas has prodded me to write this book.

Officer Geordie Craig must wear the responsibility for the appearance of this book at this time and it does indeed look good on him, to use one of his favourite phrases. Others who should be "centred out," as we say in the trade, are the very Dutch Deformed Henk Van Staalduinen, Officer Laurel Wade, lately of the Laurel and Hardly show, Cracked Frank Boshard, and Machmellow Ouellette.

Ian Murdoch and Pat and Eileen Kernaghan gave me very important assistance and encouragement. In the home-stretch department, I must acknowledge the extremely effective Denise Bukowski, Diane Bergeron, who gave this project industrial-strength CPR, Dinah Forbes, my patient and good-humoured editor at M&S, and Sandra Payne, possibly the best organizational mind in the Squamolean empire.

Finally, I should like to thank Jack McClelland. In 1967, you were the only honest mind in the Windsor Hotel. If we "young turks" did

anything of significance, it was because of your grounding us in literary/commercial reality.

If I have praised faintly such as Big Little Man, Lumpy, Swede with Swagger Stick, or Howdy Doody, I'm sure they will let me know.

DISCLAIMER

In order to avoid
Having my aging but still quite beautiful
Ass sued off,
I have falsified certain people, times, and places

I

What's a Nice Guard Like Me
Doing in a Dirty Business
Like Poetry?

All time to write is stolen time. There is nothing
in the landscape of living that does not
contravene time to write.
- Cesare Pavese

BECAME a prison guard through a fluke: by simply driving through Vancouver's Kitsilano district at three in the afternoon and getting rear-ended. The woman responsible had never had a ticket, was not drying her nails, and was not blinded by the sun, but she hit me so hard that I was knocked unconscious and into an old Mercedes ahead of me.

Following this little reminder that the random exists came intermittent blindness, migraines (I'd never believed in them before then), severe pain to the whole left side of my body (a shrink told me not to worry about the left side of my head since it is the rational side and of no use to an artist anyway), extreme sound and light sensitivity, and worst of all, loss of memory. Before the accident I could (and now again can) describe the picture-frame hat, the pumps, and the colour and pattern of my mother's dress the first time she took me fishing with bacon-rind, string, a stick and safety-pin when I was three. After the accident, I could tell you the year when *John the Baptist* was painted but I couldn't tell you that the painter was Caravaggio. I had to resign my position as British Columbia Head of Public Relations and Promotion for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation where I

had a huge office, two secretaries, an outrageous salary, and did little day after day.

Attempting to access my memory for purposes of writing was analogous to setting up to paint a landscape and then, at a critical moment, when the light is perfect, turning to find that all the most essential paints and brushes have vanished.

I had never been very fond of Hemingway, despite that his being a fisherman may have had something to do with my winding up a writer. As a kid, I kept seeing him in all the major magazines with fish he had caught and reasoned that anything you could do while fishing must be a good idea. I wasn't proud to be a writer the day the news remarked that he had fellated the business end of a12-gauge. They had given him electro-shock for depression. It hammered his memory. He said: "I'm a novelist. Without my memory, I don't exist." And thus exited time. Now I was learning whereof Papa Ernie spoke.

I tried amazing schemes: I bought a huge drafting table, which I could tilt radically, and an odious orange recliner. Then using a C-clamp I suspended a blue IBM Selectric typewriter like a rat hanging by its tail, reclined the recliner, then eased into the cockpit. It was the only angle at which I could work without excruciating pain. When I rolled the paper into the platen, the page fell down over the keyboard. I never did come up with a way to solve that problem, and when I touched the keys they instantly forgot English. What appeared on the page was a hash of German and French with granules of Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse, and Old Irish. It was intelligible only to me. I tried to navigate in German only. It wasn't dreadful, but I couldn't translate it and haven't to this day - it was sufficiently bad not to bother.

Terrified to toss the monkey-wrench of suicide into the delicate machinery of family, I spent a large part of each day attempting to dream up a way to extinguish myself so that it would appear to be an accident.

Eventually acupuncture whacked the migraines and I've never had one since. This made me considerably more functional, but the other symptoms dogged me.

By 1981, my wife, Hortense, had had enough and said she just couldn't cope any longer with two pre-school girls and "a wounded animal." And that was that. She helped me find an apartment a couple of miles away and we translated me from nuclear father to apostate.

Gone the job. Gone the poetry. Between 1978 and 1984 I published nothing and wrote about the same amount. The writing community didn't know what the hell to do about me. It was easiest just to treat me as if dead. Only George Jonas and Rosalind MacPhee didn't give me up for dead. And one or two officers at Canada Council.

By 1981 I was sufficiently beyond the migraines to live without drugs. I had little more than a low-grade headache to deal with and complete mistrust of my memory and cognitive faculties. I lived in a fourth-floor apartment in North Vancouver with a balcony and a stupendous view of famed Dog Shit Park.

Togged out in white tennis shorts and shoes, and expensive V-necked sweater, Bob Yamamoto knocked on my door to inform me that Oakalla was hiring. I'd met Yamamoto and an ex-spy by the name of Kiley Lark years earlier. Lark had written a spy book while working graveyard shifts at Oakalla and they both swore it was the perfect job for a writer.

My only experience with the criminal justice system was in Colorado as a kid where the local bulls bum-rapped me and a friend and decided to keep us in jail overnight to scare the hell out of us. It turned me into a cop-hater for most of my youth, but the hatred had worn off. I was neutral toward the cops, and my notion of prison was the same as anyone else's who watches television: guards beat the hell out of people for a living, and inmates take guards hostage and riot and retaliate at every opportunity.

I had just applied for my permits in North and West Vancouver to drive a cab. I knew I could drive. But I feared that my brain wouldn't handle much more. Even the idea of a job as a guard was terrifying. There would be procedures to be remembered.

Yamamoto set me straight. It was a job, he said, which had a lot of satisfaction, paid decently, and offered time to write. He pointed out that my brain worked well enough to read and pay my rent and buy groceries.

I applied for the job.

By and by, they called me for an interview.

As I ran the possibility that I might get the job through my thoughts, I wondered whether there was something that might disqualify me. Bob had assured me I had all the prerequisites: self-defence (military, boxing, or martial arts), grade 12, and to be breathing. For self-defence, I had Reserve Officers Training Corps training, San Antonio Golden Gloves weight-class champ (needed one, had two. *Two outa three ain't bad).* I was big. I was demonstrably metabolic.

The idea of having time to write while getting paid for it had a very powerful appeal (never mind that I wasn't writing and rather suspected I never would again, certain habits of mind persist: being a writer is mostly a quest for time to write). On the other hand, I have never been an aficionado of pain, much less death. Getting smacked around wouldn't be nice. Getting dead wouldn't be nice. But, then again, Bob and the other guards I had met never seemed to be beaten up or especially tough.

What the hell did I know about prisons? What would I say in an interview? In a panic, I called Bob, who came right over. Bob mentioned that he had told Williams, the personnel officer, that I was a college graduate, which may have been a mistake. Williams had gone to work at Oakalla as an auxiliary security officer and couldn't hack it, so he went back to school, picked up a degree in one of the social sciences, and came back as an administrator. Bob said a senior correctional officer (S.C.O.) or higher and the personnel man would be conducting the interview. I was to tell them, in answer to why I sought to be a prison guard, that I was looking for work and felt myself suited to the position. He said they would begin throwing scenarios at me. What if I have an inmate running down toward Deer Lake and I am armed with a12-gauge shotgun? Answer: First, I yell, "Stop!" Second, I fire a warning shot in the air. Third, I shoot at six o'clock low and pepper his legs. The birdshot hurts more being plucked out by the nurse than it does going in. If I'm armed with a .38 pistol, same deal, except that I bead in on one of his legs. Guards use bullets called wad-cutters which go right through and come out the same size, if not

stopped by bone. If they asked me what I would do if the con is a nickel-and-dimer running toward Royal Oak Street and I'm armed with a .38, I would not perform the fourth step, shooting at the leg, because it might carry and hit a passing automobile or a house on the other side of the street.

I drove the moo Yamaha up Royal Oak and punched in at the gate with the guard wearing a pistol and a radio, to go down to the Main Gaol (yes, spelled that way - and there were guys who had been there for eons who pronounced it "goal" when giving directions). Past the gate there was a fork in the asphalt. The left went toward Westgate A and B.

The Main Gaol, with its classic Auburn architecture sailing there on the crest of the ridge, gave off august, even heroic vibes to the eye. The Westgate complex exemplified in form how far the human spirit could fall. It bermed down the ridge like an accordion spilling when one hand has drunkenly let go.

"A-side" was the segregation unit - the digger, the hole, isolation, iso, and a dozen other monikers of prison lore - where those who had breached the *Correctional Centre Rules and Regulations* and had been found guilty in Warden's Court did time in isolation while they did their time. Here the protective-custody inmates were housed separate from the population inmates, in a kind of double social ostracism.

"B-side" was a sentenced unit (provincial: "deuce-less" - two years less a day). It had a maintenance area, a Tier Nine (where meals were served, movies were shown, and the "weight-pit" was located -recreation tier), and eleven tiers of cells.

The right-hand spur of pavement went, according to the sign, to the Main Gaol. Along the right fork, a shotgun tower. With the profile of a man in the window. In a uniform. With a shotgun. Could have been a movie set but there were no cameras, lights, facades, or action.

There was a button at the front gate and a uniform let me in and made me sign in a big ledger - like the guest-book at a historic site - then pointed me upstairs toward the personnel office.

It was late afternoon and the two men inside were obviously bagged from interviewing people like me all day. I knew from Bob's description the one in uniform was Mike Adler, a deputy director, by

his blond curly hair. The other guy, Williams, was a little bristly, per-haps from not being the only university graduate in the room.

I handed him the application. The interrogation began. I gave them a stream of idiocy about why I wanted to be a guard. None of the three of us was listening.

Then came the scenarios.

"Mr. Yates, you have an inmate running across the grounds toward the fence. The fence which parallels Royal Oak. You are armed with a .38 revolver and you have a radio. What do you do?"

"I would call for the inmate to stop at the top of my voice. If he stopped, I would arrest him and take him into custody. If he didn't, I would fire a warning shot into the air. If he still refused to stop, I would not fire."

"Why?"

"Royal Oak is a busy street. There would be danger to passing cars. A .38 has a long trajectory; there are houses on the other side of the street." (I grew up with gunsmiths and have always known firearms, although I don't own so much as a .22 rifle and wouldn't have one in my house.) "I would radio the whereabouts of the person escaping."

"What if this person is charged with violent crime and escaping from a maximum unit?"

"I'm not prepared to risk missing."

"Good thinking, Mr. Yates."

"Thank you."

The interview was a breeze. And, yes, when Adler left, Williams did give me the homily about people too educated to be guards. His final nail was that no one with a degree had ever survived the West Wing. I knew that Bob worked in that wing, but I had no idea yet what the term "remand" meant or the difference between maximum and medium. I was asked to wait in the hall. Williams went down-stairs and talked to Mike Adler. He came back and said I was hired. He said to go home and wait till he called me and stay close to the phone. I would then come in to stores, pick up my uniform, and be sworn in.

Right.

I sat by the phone for a month.

There was a minor glitch. Bob had let it out that I was a writer.

Moonlighting and the Public Service Act of B.C. were big issues back then; the no-moonlighting part of the act was struck down following the proclamation of The Charter of Rights. Williams insisted that I write the minister and confess that I was a poet, pointing out that it was a rare year when I made enough revenue to cover postage and paper. I was tempted to add that poetry, as any Aristotelian critic could prove, ceased to be relevant to the human experience somewhere between *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. They evidently already knew that. On ministry letterhead I received a special dispensation to persist with my poetry.

On September 15, 1981, I reported to Central Control at the main desk and told them I was new and supposed to report to Mr. Adler. Mike greeted me with a big smile and invited me into his office as if I were visiting royalty. Politely, he oriented me: I was to come to the administration building each day to sign in and find out to which wing or building I'd been assigned. For the next ten days I would be assigned a training officer and be doing O.J.T. (on-the-job training) at Westgate B.

"You'll be working four-on and two-off until you complete your ten-day training period with a training officer. Then you'll be on call. Right now, we're very short of call-board. You should get a lot of work. And there is a seniority list for auxiliaries. As you rise up, you'll get more work. You could even be assigned permanently to one of the units."

"If you have any problems, come to me or Mr. Brent. We run the call-board. If you get a permanent assignment, let us know. Some of the units aren't very good at communicating with administration except for counts."

"It's almost three. You need to go upstairs to have the warden swear you and the other twenty we've just hired in as peace officers."

"I think you have an edge on the younger fellows, Mr. Yates, and that is life experience. This is a human place on both sides of the bars and we need all the wisdom we can get. You cannot learn what we call jail-wisdom in any classroom or book. Stay close to the ones who have been here a long time and don't let their gruffness put you off. Common sense is the chief tool of corrections." He rose, cuing me to

get my ass upstairs. “Just one thing I can give you which may be of value . . .”

"Sir?"

"Be a distant presence or be a nice guy or a definable mix of the two, but be *consistent.* Consistency of staff in an institution will prevent a lot of trouble and save a lot of lives."

"Thank you."

"Welcome aboard."

All twenty-one of us headed off to Westgate B to be assigned a training officer.

Within four years, of the twenty-one sworn in that day, only I was left in service.

Thus began my picaresque journey through three very different corrections institutions and twelve very educational years. The structures varied from ancient and classic (Oakalla, now demolished, was a classic piece of prison architecture) to state-of-the-art high-tech ultra-max (Vancouver Pretrial Services Centre is the highest-security custodial unit in North America) to the heritage vernacular architect-ture of the administration building (Samuel McLure, who with Rat-tenbury is one of the two fathers - no, mothers - of B.C. architecture, would have been beaming) which presides over sixty-eight fertile and productive acres of New Haven Correctional Centre.

Entering corrections and going back to school to study criminal law was a great gift. I owe corrections for getting my body into shape and proving to me that my memory, my mind, was intact after all.

In the books I wrote during the years I worked in corrections, you will not find the word "prison." No prison metaphors. I didn't enter service as a peace officer to write about or expose the prison system. I had planned to write a memoir in my dotage, and my prison years would necessarily have been a part of the chronicle.

What changed my mind about the *timing* of my writing this book was a corrections friend, Craig Orson, who took me for a four-hour coffee. He pointed out that if I didn't write, no one would. No one ever had. Or worse, it would come out as a vapid doctoral dissertation with all the humanity footnoted out of it. And most importantly, the old-timers, cons and guards, wouldn't be around as resource

people. He listed off those who had already died and were about to die. The life expectancy of those who work in law enforcement (as it is in ambulance services, firefighting, and so on) is very short post-retirement.

Whenever a corrections peace officer addresses a group of other peace officers - say, when he has been seconded for a tour of duty as a teacher at the Justice Institute of British Columbia - he must first establish his credentials. Which jails did he work as a line screw? In 1981, if you had worked Oakalla's West Wing you had the attention of all.

Actually, all you had to say was, " I was a West Winger." In those days it was deemed that anyone who worked Oakalla would work there forever - on the assumption that these people were much too heavy to transfer to Prince George Regional Correctional Centre, Vancouver Island, or Kamloops. Inmates and guards of the West Wing were mythologized as the heaviest of the heavy, big as sasquatches, with the temperament of wolverines. Oakalla was to Canadians what Alcatraz was to the Americans.

A load of nonsense, but it's the same process as amplifying Captain Steele (or Sergeant Preston) of the North West Mounted Police, Almighty Voice, Paul Bunyan, or Dan'1 Boone. It's a part of human nature that we just have to put up with. Humans have always dipped people and groups of people in folklore, and the process is not likely to change.

PART O N E

Oakalla

2

The Warehouse:
On-the-Job Training

Welcome to Hotel Oakallafornia . . .
- Line by the Eagles,
retooled by Oakalla staff and inmates

OAKALLA was the Victorian-era provincial maximum-security dungeon just outside Vancouver that was shut down in 1991. It was once a rust-coloured jewel crowning the steep ridge that oversaw berms of wheat and other crops below. In its early days it was called Oakalla Prison Farms. Work-shops hummed, and its fields were full of gangs doing genuine work. Inmates produced the food they ate and the uniforms they wore, they turned wrenches on the equipment they used, and they built the barns and stables in which the farm animals were housed.

The view of the Coast Mountain massif was magnificent. The grounds - over a mile - between the Main Gaol and Deer Lake were full of pheasant, fox, and rodents of all sorts. The lake was full of trout and carp.

I'm told by the old-time cons and guards that doing time was easy when Oakalla was a prison farm, which it was from 1913 until the early seventies, because there was so much to do. Sentenced time at Oakalla (which was a maximum of two years less a day, as in all provincial institutions) you could do "standing on your head" - although in the old days, they still had corporal punishment. Until the sixties, death row and the gallows were in active service.

Bit by bit, the vast productive organism that was Oakalla was whittled away by the Socred and NDP governments. By the time I arrived in *1981,* the lands between Oakalla's grounds and Deer Lake had been handed over to the Municipality of Burnaby, the city in which the prison resided, on the condition that the city convert them to a park; but the real point was to hand over the supply of food and services to the institution to the Burnaby business community - Burnaby was too poor to create the park. So the beans became wild wheat and marsh-grass to run through and hide in while making the great escape.

By and by, there was nothing left of the work crews but the landscape gang, the kitchen gang, and hit-and-miss clean-up crews. Then Vander Zalm privatized the kitchen. The cons didn't appreciate the new small portions and powdered eggs, and so there was a riot in *1983* over that one. What had once been a virtually self-supporting institution was by that time costing the taxpayer roughly *$85,000* per year per con.

Incarcerated people are no more or less lazy than other people. They prefer at least the option to busy themselves at something. But by the time the politicians finished their spoils-of-office number, handing out pieces of corrections to their election backers, we had little left. Oakalla was just a warehouse for cons. We did nothing by way of keeping them busy while in stir. We did nothing by way of pro-grams to assist them in making re-entry.

In the units of Oakalla that housed sentenced prisoners, East Wing and Westgate B, there were no libraries. What few books inmates had to read were dusters and other formula commercial stuff, and porn mags. And we had a deal with Air Canada: once a week, if anyone remembered, the staff go-fer drove out to Vancouver International Airport and picked up magazines. Week-old current events *(Time, Der Spiegel, Business Week)* were better than nothing.

I once ducked into the basement with my work gang because of a cloudburst. After radioing in position, I began to poke around and found a gigantic library. There must have been ten thousand volumes: dictionaries, anthologies of stories, poetry, classic novels, law dictionaries. It was a couple of decades out of date, but there was

enough air down there so that nothing had been destroyed by mildew.

I reported my find and suggested that the books could be distributed to the units. It would be a great work project. I was even cooking up some ideas about a central resource centre, and carts like little book-mobiles going around from tier to tier. And on I dreamt. The proposal was rejected by the local director, who said that if the cons wanted to read, their visitors could bring in reading material. He said that what we really needed was a truck to come in and haul all that stuff away. And by the way, if there were any books I wanted down there, I could go after shift and take them home. I would be doing the joint a favour.

It all added up to long, empty days in which cons had nothing to do but cook up mischief and go stir-crazy, which led to half-baked escapes, sit-ins and riots. Oakalla became a pressure-cooker that cranked up the collective blood-pressure of the jail until it blew. Then things would be quiet for a while, and then it would blow again in another wing or unit.

The number of suicide attempts rose. The number of successful suicides rose. The number of days of absenteeism rose among line staff. There were more heart attacks, more by-pass surgeries. There were more guards who did a shift at Oakie, a shift drinking at the Legion or Police Athletic Club, a few hours sleeping, then got up in time to reel back on shift and pray for tower duty, where they could sleep it off, or a good work-gang, where everyone could hide. One con acted as a six-man (look-out) to watch for brass while the cons dicked around and the guard slept off the hangover.

The design of the red brick building was based on the classic Auburn model - cruciform: West Wing (remand - for those awaiting trial or sentencing); East Wing (provincial sentenced - two years less a day); South Wing (segregation - for inmates of any ilk who could not pull time in population; also access to gallows); North Wing (administration).

Still, the grounds of Oakalla were beautiful. There was lots of parking, and lots of kidding in the parking lot and camaraderie as uniformed people ducked in the gate and strolled down the hill to

their units. We descended a hill from the gate to get to the Main Gaol. There were many geese on the well-kept lawns, and the hill was fairly steep. If the geese had strayed off the grassy areas onto the driveway, you could take a goose-poop route to Workers' Compensation, as many a guard has done in fact and in fraud. No one was allowed to harass the geese. The geese were holy to both inmates and guards.

It took five or six minutes walking fast down the hill to get to the Main Gaol. First you slipped past Tower Two, a shotgun tower set on the outside of the driveway. And past Tower One, which was the command position for the West Wing yard. The guard in Tower One was locked in by the man in patrol position. Tower One contained the alarm system and telephone, and its guard kept constant radio con-tact with other positions and Central Control. The tower was built of concrete and leaned out over the yard itself. Any place in the yard could be seen from the Tower One position, except for the area immediately beneath it, which was covered by Tower Two and the count position.

Directly across from Tower One was the entrance into the West Wing: the count position. Here the cons were allowed out to the yard and back in for phone calls. It was not a great idea to respond to a scuffle in the middle of the yard from the count position. If it turned into a mess, the shooting would begin from the towers and the life of the count man wouldn't be worth much.

The thing I always loved about coming on morning shift or coming off graveyard was the spectacular view down the ridge and over what is known as the flats. And Deer Lake, which at this time of the morning always had a mysterious saucer of mist suspended over it, was absolutely breathtaking in its colours; the long marsh-grass down the hill was either winter-brown or spring-green. Out over the fields, which once had been tilled but now lay fallow, you could see wildlife of all kinds ambling around.

For both staff and inmates in the West Wing, where I worked most of the time I was at Oakalla, this postcard view had a calming effect. You could look out at it from any tier that faced north; you could see all of the Deer Lake area and the entire massif to the north,

including Seymour and Grouse mountains, and the Lions that guard Vancouver.

Inside Oakalla, once you got used to it, the sound of gates far and near, opening and closing, also had a lulling effect. The bars and walls had been painted with a god-awful off-yellow lead-base paint in layers and layers. When I was first hired at Oakalla, a fire marshal came in and estimated that, should we have a major fire, all life on the top three landings would be lost to smoke inhalation thanks to the paint. A few years afterwards fire-doors were installed at the exit of each tier outside to the yard.

When you first entered Oakalla it smelled institutional: it smelled of food, of wax, of wax-stripper, of disinfectant and human fluids. Then it passed from being an alien smell to being the smell of home, and then the smell was not noticed at all. It became the familiar olfactory landscape, like the smell of your mother's purse when you were a child.

The Main Gaol (the front of North Wing, called Administration) housed the warden's office, officers' mess, and manual records upstairs; the deputy warden, accounting, Central Control, and chaplain's offices on the main floor; electronic records, change-room, book-in/book-out on the ground floor downstairs. Up the stairs of the Main Gaol brought you to Front Hall, which serviced all the departments listed above on the main floor and led to the locked visitors' cage (for visits by telephone through a glass barrier). The Front Hall man keyed you in the North door, the Centre Hall man keyed you into Centre Hall. The Centre Hall man's desk was dead centre to the visitors' cage doors (doors for visitors and for inmates on either side), South Wing was behind him, East Wing to his right, and West Wing to his left. Also located in Centre Hall were conference rooms for lawyer consultations.

East (provincial sentenced) and West (remand) wings were essentially identical. East differed only in that the kitchen was located on One Landing Left. West was unique only in that all new inmates and those returning from courts were frisked in through the West door to Centre Hall.

Both East and West were of normal capacity, holding 150 to 200 drums (cells are called drums or houses, never cells). There were five landings of two tiers, that is, each landing had one tier of twenty cells on the left and one on the right. One guard per tier (two per landing) with some exceptions, such as the "cleaner" or trustee tier. This tier was relatively self-policing. The range was the area on each tier directly in front of the cells. The catwalk ran behind each row of cells (along the outside edges of the building) and provided precarious access to the televisions cons could watch from their drums. Beyond the catwalk were the windows.

On every landing, adjacent to the endgate, there were two boxes, each about three feet wide by six feet tall and a couple of feet deep. These tier-boxes were made of heavy-guage steel and painted with the inescapable Oakie yellow lead-base paint. When closed, each had a Master-brand padlock securing it, which was threaded right to left through the hasp ("right hand on"). Every guard in the jail carried a key that fit all of these locks so that, if called during an emergency, he could rush in, jam the key in with his right hand, twist fingers and hand clockwise and have the key off in a single motion, and fling open the door of the tier-box with his left hand.

Inside the box was a fire extinguisher and the locking system. Two long brass levers hung down. Except at night, the longest of the two was pulled toward the door of the tier-box. It was the night-bar and doubled the security of the locking system. The other bar was the tier-or day-bar. At head level was a beautifully tooled brass dial, about ten inches in diameter, surrounded with cell numbers 1 to 20. It had a pointer and a knob. We cranked the pointer around to the desired cell number and then lifted the day-bar. Tumblers rolled and thunked much like those in a bank vault (or as one imagines them), and that cell door unlocked. The dial also had the letter A. When you turned the pointer to A and lifted the day-bar, it unlocked all the cells in the tier. It took more muscle to lift the bar when cracking the entire tier, but there was a wonderful sound of craftsmanship and good materials. Like the sound of a Rolls Royce door shutting. No one ever commented, but I think everyone liked the sound of the tiers cracking open. The sound of locking down was tinny and unpleasant as the

tumblers moved the opposite way. I don't mean anything symbolic by this; it's simply an impression. In prison one can review the parts of sight and sound. It passes the time.

The South Wing was called "the bug wing: 'It housed - separately - those inmates who for one reason or another could not "make it" in the general population. Instead of twenty, the tiers were only ten cells deep and staffing was doubled. The entrance to the gallows was from South Wing. Such celebrities as Clifford Olson and the Butler Brothers of the Montana Uprising were kept in South Wing Observation where one or two officers stared at them around the clock, seven days a week, to ascertain they did not escape or do injury to themselves or one another. Below South Obs, there was another door which was heavily chained and locked. In case of a riot in the wing, those upstairs, like Olson, in "triple protective custody" would be safe, with staff, from the mob. Actually, given that implements could be made from broken bunk-frames, those upstairs were not safe at all. But prisons, like handcuffs and leg-irons, are only restraints; anyone who would tout them as escape-proof is an idiot. There are such idiots in the ranks of corrections. They do not make life easy for serious line staff who have to cope with escape artistry.

I began my tour of every unit on every shift. The situation of an auxiliary (also known as "scrot," "rookie nookie," and "impersonator of a prison guard") is not pleasant. You sit by the telephone an hour or two before the beginning of each shift - 0500,1300,2100- quivering like a dog attempting to poop a peach seed, hoping it will ring and you will be posted for a shift.

However, ring it did. And I was luckier than most. Some work a few shifts and then sit at home for a month waiting. Once started, I don't think I missed my four-on/two-off rotation even once until I was permanently posted to the West Wing.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING, LESSON ONE:

BOMB SQUAD DUTY

It was graveyard shift in the West Wing and I was, contrary to regulations, poring over the endless mind-numbing pages of required

reading necessary for a promotion. I'd only been on the job three months, but my principal officer had insisted that I compete in the first promotion competition that came up. He said I wouldn't get promoted the first time I tried (it was traditional not to get promoted the first time), but possibly the second or third, and he handed me the huge *Standards* and *Operations* manuals to take home and study (which was against regulations; it was also against regulations to read or study while on duty).

I was on shift with Ian Blocker, who looked like Ichabod Crane. The wing was in the hands of two guards who didn't have six months of experience between them. As senior officer on shift, I was commander of the wing.

I had had the misfortune to work a landing with Blocker one afternoon shift when he almost started a riot over Aspirin. A con had asked for three Aspirins. Blocker insisted that it was reasonable to have two or four but not three, and the temperature of the argument rose alarmingly. I took four Aspirins from my medication box and showed them to Blocker, then indicated for the con to open his hand. He did. I dropped three tablets into his hand and the fourth one into my mouth and walked back to my seat. Blocker couldn't figure out what had happened but decided to let it pass for the moment. Later, he concluded that I had fucked him over and cooked up a grudge. I didn't mind. We were both auxiliaries, but I was senior officer by about a week. It became routine that he mouthed off to me at every opportunity and I pulled rank in return.

During this graveyard shift, Blocker was doing everything he could to botch my studying, including observing that he could "write me up" for studying on shift. I responded by making him do the nominal roll. In those pre-electronic-records days, once a month, a lined composition book had to be cleaned up manually, by deleting the names of released or sentenced prisoners. Each name had to be copied from the board inside the desk cage on legal-size stationery with the number of the con beside it. The list was then sent via the Centre Hall man out to Central Control to be matched against the master count of the entire Oakalla complex.

I figured that hand-printing 180 to 200 names would keep Blocker

busy for a while. I repaired to the office to get away from him until hourly check time. I knew he would come up with something new to spin me when he finished and so, as I studied, my mind was also making a list of rat-shit errands and duties to dump on Blocker.

The phone rang. It was Control. Deputy Director Ollie Brent, the night-jailer (acting warden during graveyard shifts). "We have a bomb threat at Westgate," he said. "Back-up is being called in, but meantime we need one man from each unit to report to the armoury, then to Westgate."

"Right, Sir," I replied. Blocker was listening on the desk phone. He figured I'd send him down and that he was home-free on the nominal roll. He was wrong. I decided to send myself.

Blocker began to protest, insisting that the senior officer had to stay in the wing.

"Call Control and get the warden's number. Wake him up and complain," I told him on my way downstairs to the staff-room to get a parka and hat.

"What about hourly counts?" he argued.

"You can't do'em without back-up."

"I think this is against procedure."

"There's a bomb out there. Now, if you want to draw heat by calling Control every five minutes while they're running a command post, go to it. They'll fire your ass and good riddance. Centre Hall, crack this gate!"

The three of us from East, West, and South hit the gate at the same time. At the armoury, the Control officer tossed each of us a shotgun, ammo, and a radio. The Front Hall kid had opened the front gate and we filed into the night air on the double, cramming shells into the shotguns and radio-checking with Control one by one.

It was December, and the ground was frosty and slick under our leather-soled shoes. The screw from East fell on his ass at the bottom of the Main Gaol stairs and his shotgun clattered across the pavement. We picked him up and told him graphically what we'd do to him if he dropped a loaded weapon near us again.

At Westgate Ollie Brent was waiting for us.

"The caller has been on the phone twice. He knows the Westgate

area. Probably did some time down here. The bomb could be anywhere." Counting the segregation unit at the top of the Westgate complex, the lives of between two and three hundred cons were on the line.

A couple of squad cars arrived from the Burnaby RCMP, and a few minutes later our own prowl truck, Dsio7, drove up.

The Mounties told us that their SWAT was being mustered. Ollie Brent didn't wait. Like the other thirty-year corrections veterans, he was unsurprised by anything; he instantly formed a plan and implemented it. He handed flashlights to the three of us from the Main Gaol and to the three Westgate staff and sent a couple of people around the perimeter of the complex with instructions what to look for.

"Get me a tall ladder," he ordered. Someone scurried to get it. When it arrived, Brent turned to me. "Mr. Yates, I want you on the roof. Good place to plant a bomb."

When I was a floating auxiliary during my first weeks on the job, Ollie had been my boss and had patiently answered all my stupid questions. We had become friends. I put my hand on a rung of the ladder. My flashlight was a heavy monster that could blind people in Alberta. I didn't have enough hands. I started to hand him my shotgun.

"Take it up."

"Is this a skeet-shoot?"

"You might surprise a perpetrator up there."

I have no idea how I made it to the roof on that slick aluminum ladder holding a shotgun and radio and flashlight all in two hands. The Westgate building covered the better part of an acre, tiered down the slope. Its flat-top roofs were punctuated by mossed-over skylights. I could see myself falling through one on top of a sleeping con. So far, they had no idea what was going on while they slept. I strolled around and climbed from one level to the next and then moved back down, examining every likely place a bomb might have been planted. It was getting boring. When I ran out of nooks to check I sneaked up to the edge of the roof and flattened myself and looked over. When I found a cop or guard stalking a garbage can or a Smithrite or a shed,

pistol or shotgun at the ready, I'd sight the megalight carefully and fire it on and off so quickly that he couldn't be sure where the momentary daylight came from. Then I'd roll back beyond the edge of the roof and find another victim.

It was cold. Dawn was trying to make up its mind.

Next, I tried peeling the moss off one of the skylights. Some of the moss came off, but the plastic underneath was so brown no light could be seen from below. The building was as ugly from the roof as it was inside.

As dawn broke through the clear winter air, the view of misted-in Deer Lake was magical.

Then, finally, I got called on the radio. "Mr. Yates, we have to conclude this is a hoax. Come on down."

I hastened across the roof toward the ladder. It was worse going down. Ollie had that get-your-ass-back-to-your-unit expression, but one of the Westgaters handed me a cup of hot coffee. Then over the radio came the news that they'd had another call. The threat had changed. The bombers were going to lob the bomb from Royal Oak Street, which ran past the jail. I was warming my hands on the Styrofoam cup.

"Mr. Yates." Ollie was looking at the ladder.

"Again?"

He nodded.

I handed him the coffee and the light and started up. Half-way up, I stopped. "Mr. Brent?"

He looked up.

"Is there a catcher's mitt in the armoury?"

"up."

It was wake-up time. I spent the remainder of the shift on the roof of Westgate, amusing myself by rapping on the skylights and waking the cons who, having never been awakened in such a manner, assumed they were under siege from on high and refrained from their usual good-morning greetings like "Dummy it, you fucking assholes."

The O.J.T. Lesson: It is holier to be the officer ordering the rookie up the ladder than the rookie obeying the order. And even holier

to be somewhere in between with neither supreme responsibility nor naked bomb-fodder jeopardy.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING, LESSON TWO: VIOLENCE CONTROL

It is traditional that in winter the prison counts are far higher than in warmer weather, and in November we were nearing the critical stage. Staff were being borrowed from one unit to the next for mere escort duty. Regular staff who had been assigned to maximum units for years were being shanghaied to minimum units to cover graveyard shifts. Central Control had a man on the telephone around the clock attempting to coax people back from days of rest or annual leave, or to hasten the healing of the sick. The screws were burned out from overtime, and the overcrowded cons were jittery. With phones going crazy with pleas for staff, everyone was shooting from unit to unit to give the appearance of coverage. Sometimes it was only to cover the line for a meal, sometimes for inside yard, sometimes full shifts for a week. Principal officers (P .0.s) and senior correctional officers (S.C.O.s) were key-jockeying as needed. The people in records were logging all kinds of overtime booking in new bodies. They were haggard and bitchy. I was posted to Westgate B.

In times like these the riot hazard is high. The staff are too tired to be patient with inmates, to joke with them, to take an inmate aside and listen for an hour while he tells you his father has died in India and he should have been there. Daily, staff morale slumps and the inmates pick up the drift. This is very much a two-way street, because a jail has a pulse.

Prison fights are sometimes very deadly affairs, sometimes mostly for show. This one could have been scripted by Mark Twain. First I heard the usual male tones of physical threat rising above the hellish white noise of twelve tiers fall of activity. I checked it out at the endgate. Sure enough, there on the range (the area between cells and walls - quite spacious at B-side), just like boys on the playground, two men were standing with their dukes up, shouting at the top of their voices, while the rest of the tier gathered around, watching intently.

But no punches. I yelled "Staff up!" and called Centre Hall to key the door. When the key was heard in the gate the first punch was thrown. One grabbed the other around the head, they clinched and fell to the floor. I trotted in with back-up and grabbed the guy on top. My back-up grabbed the other guy. It was truly amazing how easily they broke apart. We took them out separately. When I reached back to my belt where the cuffs were tucked, the con noticed the move. "I'm cool, boss. No problem."

"You sure?"

"No shit."

On the way down to the staff room, where the con and I and the PO. (if available) will have a coffee and a T.M. (tailor-made smoke) and discuss the cause and long-term implications of the altercation, the con said, "Good thing you pulled me off when you did, boss, or I'da killed the cocksucker."

"Right. Lucky thing."

Over coffee, my con decided that his beef with the other guy was not that serious and maybe he overreacted. There is provision in the *Correctional Centre Rules and Regulations* for apology and amends-making, thus diverting the perpetrators from the internal justice system. I offered it to him.

"If I Section 19 you and you apologize and shake hands, how do I know this is not dress-rehearsal for a real performance?"

"You have my word." I knew this guy, and anyway he owed me, so his word was solid currency. Had I not known him, he would have had my word that the next time he mixed it up, I'd buy him serious hole-time and put a bug in the ear of the line screws who work the segregation unit.

"Done. Wait here. I should make you fill out the incident report, you dildo. If you had to do all the paperwork, it would take the fight out of you for the rest of your life."

The other officer was waiting in the hall. We compared notes. Seems his con allowed that maybe he was overreacting, too. The erst-while fighters shook hands and we explained that circumstances in the jail just then were hard on everyone and the last thing we needed was two ninnies smacking one another around. I started on the

paperwork. The other screw cuffed them together and took them down to the hospital to get them certified as undamaged. The P O. sent along a shotgun man to tail the procession. When they returned, we plunked them back on the unit.

The fight was definitely bullshit. It could have been a release of the frustration over the restriction of privileges. It could have been subterfuge to reduce the number of roving or available staff while the tier laid a beating on someone on the tier who had offended the tier in some manner. It could have been staged to buy someone else time to smoke a joint in a back tier and disperse the green smoke, or to get rid of watchful eyes, then get Centre Hall to crack someone out who owed a guy up on Tier Two a deck of weeds (when, in fact, he was muleing a load of narcotic in the deck to the other tier).

It is understood that the guards get conned a time or two during a shift. It is understood that the rule-breakers screw up from time to time and get nabbed. The understanding between guards and inmates in a prison is wide and deep. And unwritten. When things go wrong, the con takes his hole-time without snivelling. A guard takes his verbal or written reprimand or few days of suspension without snivelling - unless he can grieve the suspension, spend a week or two drinking at the Legion Hall or the Police Athletic Club, and then collect a fat cheque for back-pay.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING, LESSON THREE:

SUICIDE

Shortly after the pseudo-fight, Tier Eleven in Westgate B was mine for the afternoon shift. I had been called off the tier countless times for back-up and escort duties. The place was absolutely nuts. There was no ventilation. It was difficult, because of the tobacco smoke, to see from one end of the tier to the other - even harder to see the length of Centre Hall from the endgate. I had been on the same tier for two days, long enough to go through the file of each inmate and make a mental note of those with any psychiatric history, those who had been charged internally, and especially those who had been charged in out-side court with assaulting a peace officer (some people just can't relate

to people in uniform, whether a gas attendant, cop, or guard). If the guy whose record suggests he doesn't like uniforms was getting "short" (nearing end of sentence; this term is also used in guard lingo - a guard is getting short when he nears retirement), you discounted him as a problem.

In a provincial sentenced unit like B-side, the population are younger and not terribly sophisticated in the grammar of violence, but they are full of energy. Baby-sitting them for an afternoon shift can be more exhausting than loading boxcars.

Five or six of them were reading or writing letters on their bunks in their drums. One was in the can - I could see his feet. One was down the hall on the phone. The rest were playing poker. They are not supposed to play poker on the tier. But, as it keeps them absorbed, the game has my blessings. I flipped through the files. A kid by the name of Singh drifted away from the poker game and strolled over to see what I was doing.

"What's in my file, Mr. Yates?"

'Near as I can tell, you can find out exactly what is in your file, but not at the line-screw level."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that you can make out a request form to see the P .O. and read your file in his presence, but I'm not allowed to let you read it in my presence." I flipped it open, but held it up so that he couldn't read upside-down. "Nobody says that I can't summarize the contents. What do you want to know about yourself? Height? Weight? The name of your mama?"

"Anything bad about me in there that might affect my parole?"

"Nary a thing. Says you're sound of mind and limb, have grade 12, and have been working for your brother apprenticing as a carpenter. You haven't pissed anybody off in Westgate. In fact, your gang boss says you have been working your ass off and recommends that you be bumped up to a classier gang. You could get carpentry shop. In fact, if you'd like that, remind me to make a note in your progress-log to that effect."

"Thanks, Mr. Yates." He started to walk back to the poker table. He was in for getting drunk and boosting a Lotus. God knows where he

found it. The car chase involved many North Shore squad cars, a roadblock, and some cowboy-cop gunfire. Cops wound up shooting cops by accident.

"Hey, Singh." He strode back. "Says in your file that you're Moslem."

"Yeah. "

"Nice Moslem boys don't drink, do they?"

"They don't steal expensive cars, either. I'm not real religious and I do like to go drinking, but I don't want to come back to this place." He grinned.

"Watch it, Allah will bite you."

"Sure."

The P.O. appeared at the endgate. The noise and smoke were atrocious. "I need you to double back in the morning," he said. "Church escort." I brightened up at hearing this. I had never been to a prison church service. There were two services, Catholic and Protestant. For prison purposes, Moslems and Hindus and Jews were Protestants. No one ever seemed to know or care which service would be on which Sunday. It was the number-one marketplace where major drug shipments passed from one wing or unit to another. The place was absolutely nuts. There was no ventilation. Catholic or Protestant, the problems were the same.

"Fine," I said.

"Tier's quiet. Are they all high?"

"Not according to my nose."

"What are they playing?"

"Canasta."

"What are you guys playing in there?"

"Canasta, Mr. Moreland," they chimed.

Moreland vanished.

Earlier in the evening I had had to tell them what canasta was, and they had another deck ready to double the number of cards if heat came down. The tier was mellow. Most were first-time adult offenders. The game was quiet. No arguments. I was grateful for the smooth shift on Eleven, even though the calm had been broken fairly

frequently by my having to rush off and deal with ruckuses on other tiers.

Ten o'clock. Lock-down. When the cons have appreciated the evening, they scurry about and assist the tier cleaner with his duties without being ordered to do so, and they jump into their cells and roll the heavy doors closed themselves. Such was the case this evening. If they don't like you, they'll drag ass until the P .O. arrives to chew your head off because you're not ready for inspection. You'll have to close every cell door yourself, then just as you're about the drop the night-bar, two or three inmates will have to get out on the range to find something.

That night the tier was clean. I put the night chain on the tier gate. "Night, guys. Good shift. Thanks."

"You doublin' back?"

"Yeah."

"See you in the morning, Mr. Yates."

I was running late in the morning. You can't really see the entrance to B-side until you round the gymnasium. What I saw slowed me for a moment. There were Mounties' squad cars, plain-clothes cars betrayed by too many aerials, two ambulances, and a trauma-team truck all clustered around the entrance of Westgate B at crazy angles in the crisp, clear, blue tinge of 6:30 light. I sped up my pace and skidded on the frost. Goddamn driveway was always slick, from frost in the winter and goose poop in the summer.

I ran through the door of Westgate. The desk man behind the bars looked up.

"Riot?" I asked, nodding toward the rolling stock parked outside.

"Stringer," he replied. Suicide.

I looked through the bars and through the murk down the long hall. Coming toward the two barred doors was a gurney bearing a zipped-up body-bag. A cop, a nurse, and a few staff were still in a clump at Centre Hall desk, talking. The P .O. and two guards were behind the desk filling out forms, with files open before them. I went to the staff-room to grab a coffee.

Klaus Friesen, the P .O. on graveyard shift, came in, grabbed a

coffee and sat down across from me. "Sonofabitch was getting short. He was smart, a good worker. I met his family at visits, good people. Nothing in his file to fuck up his parole."

Joe Grewal came in just then. Joe was a big jolly East Indian who was a favourite with the cons. "Grewal, you had that kid on a gang, didn't you?"

"Yes. His people are from the Punjab in India. I rag him all time, he speaks no Punjabi. His people are ragheads and he don't know no Punjabi. Born over here and all Canadian. Good kid. Hard worker."

"Any idea why he strung?"

"Nah."

I wasn't really twigging to any of this.

"Who was on Eleven last night? I haven't checked the roster," Friesen asked.

This woke me up. "Eleven?"

"Yeah." Friesen was patting his shirt pockets for a cigarette. Grewal flipped him a weed.

"I was on Eleven last night. It was the only mellow tier in the unit."

"Notice anything about this Singh kid?"

"Which one? There are two Singhs on the tier."

"Rajinder." Friesen had brought the kid's file in with him and now he flipped it open to the face-sheet and handed it to me. The nice kid I had been talking to was staring at me from the shitty black-and-white Polaroid on his face-sheet. He was smiling. Usually, they try to look tough or make faces at the camera. This kid was too green: if it's a camera, you smile. I looked around on the page. His mama's name was still the same. The pieces of the jigsaw of reality before me were floating, not interlocking into a graspable picture. Someone asked me something. A voice sounding approximately like mine answered.

"No... I talked with him . . . for a while. He was fine, in a good mood."

"Anyone crowding him on the tier?"

"No, he was playing cards with a whole tableful and getting along with everyone."

"What's your name?"

"Yates."

"Yates, you better do up a report."

"What kind?"

"Anything. A page on con stationery. Just a summary of the evening and the mood of the tier."

"I have to crack the tier pretty soon, then breakfast line, and I think I'm on church escort."

"Do it after church and give it to the morning P.O."

"Yessir."

Of the next couple of hours I don't remember very much. I cracked the tier. I do remember that the inmates were very subdued. Breakfast passed. Then came the call for church. We went outside and John Chapman and I lined up the cons in twos to march up the hill to the Main Gaol. Church was in a room I didn't know existed in the centre of the jail, upstairs above the gallows, the entrance to which was through South Wing.

The cons were sectioned off according to unit in chairs turned toward the pulpit, if it could be called that. The service was given by a group of born-agains who had been playing country music in some barn or honky-tonk pub the night before and were hungover as hell. Every now and then between gospel songs the lead idiot would step up and testify a sentence or two. I glanced over at Chapman. He tried dozing. No go. He looked toward the ceiling. An angry expression kept returning to his face.

The surrounding room was growing vague and distant. The music was distant. What I could see was rapidly growing distant. I felt nauseated. I realized I was about to faint. If I fell off my chair onto the floor and staff rushed over to check me out, the year's crop from the Golden Triangle would change hands. Possibly, I had picked up the flu. With my last grain of consciousness, I bent forward. It helped. I untied my left shoe slowly, then messed around with the laces. I felt less faint. Slowly and deliberately I retied the shoe.

I sat up again. Good. Chappie and I made eye contact and he didn't seem to suspect anything. Good. I was okay. Then I flashed on Raj Singh's picture in the file and my mind rocketed from that image to the conversation with him the previous evening. I folded up again.

This time I went after my right shoe. I pulled out the whole lace and relaced the shoe, then tied it. I had to keep the film of Singh from re-running in my mind. I couldn't. It was one of the longest hours of my life. Again and again I dove for my shoes. I think Chappie had some notion of what was going on but he never mentioned it.

Surely I had missed something in the kid's conversation. Helplessly I dredged my mind, gathering in every word, every gesture of body language that I could recall. I knew his file almost by heart, but I knew I would go over it several more times when I got back to the unit. There had to have been a clue I had missed. Some indication.

By the end of the church service I was seriously considering pack-ing it in as a line screw. Surely a man who nearly faints in a work set-ting hasn't the right stuff for corrections. I wasn't seeing the right things. I wasn't hearing the right things. The kid had probably spoken to me clearly between his words and I had blown it.

Between church and return to the Main Gaol, something like self-exoneration occurred. I simply couldn't find anything to hang my guilt on.

I went to the P.O.'s desk and demanded Singh's file. I took it up to Eleven and relieved the man who had been covering for me. Again and again I read the file. I wrote the report, which stated that nothing had happened the previous evening. The piece of paper subsequently vanished into the empyrean of prison papers.

That day, the inmates on the tier spent most of their time in their drums. Three played a sullen, virtually silent game of cards. The shift ended. I went home. The suicide was a mystery.

But only for about a year. One of the cons who had been on Eleven that night showed up again in remand. I hadn't thought about Singh for a while, perhaps not until I saw this kid. One evening I brought up the subject, and he had a story to tell. It went something like this:

Toward the end of the evening of card-playing, Singh had said something. It was not received with good humour. After lock-up and lights-out, the offended party decided to get back at Singh by labelling him a skinner (rapist) who was in population with the cover-story of the car theft. No one really believed the guy who was attempting to label Singh as a skinner. However, the whole tier, in

whispers, pretended to go along with it and began to plot out loud what they were going to do to Singh when the cells were cracked in the morning. They taunted the kid for a couple of hours, then everyone dropped off to sleep.

Except Raj Singh. He remained awake tearing his sheet into strips and braiding those strips into rope. Between the next-to-the-last hourly check and the last one before shift change, he tested the quality of his night's work.

Weapons Training in Black and White

I consider myself an average man, except in the fact that I consider myself an average man.
- Michel de Montaigne

ONE HEARS the term "back-up" on television cop shows year in and year out with no real sense of what they are talking about. The term does refer to sending more manpower. But, most importantly, it has to do with one's demeanour toward another officer - any other officer, not just one's partner. Firefighters and police share this understanding of "back-up." To be labelled "bad back-up" as a guard is equivalent to being labelled a rapist as an inmate. If your partner gets into a tough spot, you back him up. Even if the situation is some-thing he brought on himself? Yes. If you fold under pressure, you might as well fold your uniform and take it back to stores. The life of the back-up officer is as much on the line as that of the officer being backed up.

I felt pretty good the day I saved Jonathan Marshall's life (and reminded him of it almost daily thereafter). So I shouldn't have been surprised when he let me make an idiot of myself a couple of weeks later at weapons training.

Jonathan Marshall had a twenty-two-inch neck. He was a down-home Canadian black (of which there are comparatively few), a B.C. boy, ex-military. His shoulders were so broad that if you pushed him over sideways, he would be the same height. Nothing bothered him.

He was about as laid-back as they come. He was by no means the only black on the staff of the West Wing, but he was the only home-grown one.

He was so strong and so big that he usually ended any scuffle on his landing by one of two methods. He either grabbed the closest perpetrator and held him at arm's length above his head and threatened to drop him unless the nonsense ceased immediately, or if there was a pile of people punching and kicking one another, he ran across the landing and jumped on the topmost combatant. This usually knocked the wind out of all of them and had the desired result.

Very early in my career as a guard, before I had been posted to the West Wing and was still drifting a shift at a time from wing to wing, I was put on my first day shift in the West. That day on Two Landing one con bit off the ear of another. After the blood was staunched, Jonathan was on the desk and overseeing handcuffed inmates, who were told to stand against the wall and wait to be taken down to hospital and segregation. I'd assisted in settling the ruckus, then had been ordered down to One Landing to assist with the breakfast line. The floors at Oakalla were old reinforced cement and picked up every vibration. I could hear thumping upstairs and raced back up.

I could scarcely believe my eyes. Cuffed-up inmates, and a couple who were not, were in a huge pile, punching and kicking one another. Jonathan had done his famous dive into the middle of them.

A con who had been standing over by the south window had walked over - he was cuffed behind - and was standing on Jonathan's blind side on one leg, with the other drawn back to kick Jonathan in the head. I dove across the floor like someone sliding into home plate and dumped him forward on his mush.

Jonathan looked around and said, "Thanks, honky" The principal officer was now out of the office and tossing us cuffs and leg-irons. As we were jerking and whacking bodies around and fastening restraints, I pointed out to Jonathan (as I do to this day) that he owed me his life.

One day after I had been posted permanently to the West Wing, Jack Cornelius, the desk man, told me I was on patrol during yard (the inmates' outdoor playtime). I explained to him in a whisper that

I had never done that particular job and had no idea what equipment I was supposed to draw or what duties the job entailed.

"How do you think you'll ever learn anything if you don't get you: ass out there and do it?" Cornelius howled at me. "You afraid of a little water?" It had been raining on and off.

"Rookie Yates, Campbell is Tower One and Windfors is Tower Two. They'll show you what to get from the armoury. Go to your locker and get your jacket and don't forget to put the plastic bag thing on your hat."

Campbell, Windfors, and I entered the armoury. Campbell grabbed a shotgun. Windfors grabbed a shotgun. Campbell opened a drawer and drew five green and brass shells. Windfors grabbed five shells. I reached for a shotgun. Windfors called me an asshole.

"Anyone knows the patrol carries a .38. Get one."

"Where?"

"Over there." The .38-calibre pistols were around the corner from the shotguns. I picked one up and wondered where I should carry it. In my hand?

"Yates, you'll probably want to off yourself with that in front of the visits coming down the hill, but you'll need some ammo to do it," said Campbell. I hadn't thought of that and hadn't seen any bullets in the drawer with the 12-gauge shells. I pushed the catch forward on the Smith and Wesson and rolled the pistol left until the empty cylinder dropped out on its hinge. I stared at the empty cylinder ports, then reached for the other drawer and found it full of wad cutter bullets. I picked up six of the silver, waxy, smooth bullets.

"Five, you brain-dead moron."

"Six holes."

"The hammer sits on an empty chamber. Procedure."

"Right." I began dropping the bullets into the voluptuously machined bluish holes.

"Hey, Derek!" Campbell yelled so loud that Derek Van Hendrik, the administration desk man and the brass behind the bars in Control, could hear. "This jerk is loading a weapon in your armoury."

"Shoot the cocksucker," Derek replied.

"Can't. No shells in my shotgun," Campbell yawned. "Doesn't that rookie turd know it's against procedure to load a weapon inside the jail?"

"You idiot, take those bullets out of there and put them in your pocket," Derek yelled from the other room. I took those bullets out of there and put them in my pocket.

Windfors called me back. "You gonna walk around for two and a half hours with that fucking gun in your hand? Get a belt and a holster."

Belt and holster on, gun in holster, I headed for the door again. Derek was into the game now and caught me at the doorway. "What's your radio number?"

"What radio?"

"Exactly. How do you expect to communicate with the universe?"

"I have no idea what I'm doing."

"And probably haven't known for, what, sixty years?"

Windfors and Campbell have cracked up in the armoury. They had a radio and case, which they handed me, showing me how to fasten it to the belt. Then they moved toward the door. I was standing in front of it. "If there is one more thing I'm supposed to have and don't, I'm gonna trash both of you with the radio in one hand and an empty weapon in the other."

"You got it all." Campbell handed me the flat, the key, and the two of them walked past me. I slammed the steel door and locked it with the flat and started down the hall where the Front Hall man was waiting to key us out the front gate of the jail.

"Hey, gimme the flat." Derek was laughing so hard, he was wiping his eyes behind his glasses. The big brass behind him in the cage were trying to maintain supervisory mien as though they hadn't been pissing down their legs while I was being given the treatment.

Windfors walked down the stairs loading his shotgun, then on ahead around the curve of the yard. It was enclosed by thick corrugated tin and surrounded by a heavy and high hurricane fence. The top of the posts were bent inward forty-five degrees and linked by three strands of barbed wire topped by coils of concertina (razor)

wire. We came to a door in the corrugated tin wall. The door to the tower. It had a heavy Master padlock on it. Campbell ordered me to open it.

"What, shoot the lock off?"

"Your tier-box key fits it." Each guard had a heavy chain with a single key on it. It fit every padlock securing every tier in the prison. I tried it on the outside lock. Surprisingly, it worked. "You better load the .38," Campbell said. "When I get in, lock the door."

"Lock you in the tower?"

"Yup."

"Why?"

"Procedure." He turned and climbed up into the tower. I could see him pick up the telephone to call I knew not whom. I locked him in and switched on my radio. I could hear one radio after another calling in. My turn.

"Mainland Base, this is portable 2068, radio-check, please."

Base (it was Derek): "Portable 2068, I read you loud and clear."

"Roger."

"Portable 2o68, what is your twenty?"

"What?"

"Where are you?"

"Oakalla."

"I know what institution you work for. Just tell me your position." I could hear him sniggering as he went through this number. He knew which wing's yard security had just gone out the door. And checking on my "twenty" was not a mandatory part of procedure.

"Yard."

"No. I can see the West Wing yard from here and it is empty. It will remain empty until I call the wing and tell them to let the inmates out. Try again."

"I'm outside the tin fence where I just locked a man in a tower and don't know why."

I must explain that every correctional institution from Oakalla to Stave Lake Camp (near Mission, which is nearly fifty miles away) was on the same frequency. Not counting cops and reporters and every

other nerd with a scanner, a minimum of one hundred people were tuned in to this clown show.

"You are the West Wing patrol position. Did you read that?"

"Yeah."

"Roger."

"Roger."

I put the radio back in its holster and turned the volume down to a low yammer and looked off toward the North Shore massif at the Lions, Grouse Mountain, Seymour, and east toward the Golden Ears. Campbell slid open the tower window.

"You heard the man. You're patrol. Don't just stand there. Patrol, you asshole, patrol!"

I started to walk back toward the door to the Main Gaol.

"No, fizckhead, the other way. You're not going back to the wing. Patrol!"

So I pivoted and strolled west instead. I walked past Tower Two and on up the hill toward the main gate. I had no idea what I was looking for, or where I was going, or what might happen, or what procedure might be should it come to pass. I strolled and looked left and right as if I knew exactly what I was doing in my mix-and-match uniform.

Visitors were streaming down the hill, and so were miscellaneous vehicles of various colours with alphanumeric strings painted on their sides. I fleetingly wondered whether I should challenge those walking down the hill and demand identification and whether I should be stopping vehicles. I was looking guardly and patrolish and making it up as I strolled along. The visitors didn't look as though they expected to be stopped. Neither did the vehicles, which whipped around the blind corner at three times the speed limit. Some of the visitors (who were a hell of a lot more at home on Oakie turf than I was at that point) smiled. Some said hello. I gave them my most guard-like nod and carried on patrolling.

Step by measured step I sank further into feeling quite smug. I had the walk down, I had the nod, I had the patent bill of my hat pulled down low, and behind my glasses I had an inscrutable look in my

eyes. I passed the base of Tower Two in a trance, forgetting that anyone was up there, and walked fifty yards beyond it. Streams of mostly women and a few men passed to the left and right of me. I was the symbolic island and they gave me a foot or two of berth.

Then, with fifteen or twenty people strung out around me on the drive, a voice boomed, "Hey, fuckhead, are you patrolling all of Burnaby or what?"

I turned around, of course, and looked for the source of the voice. Twenty other people did the same thing. It was Windfors. "Come back here, you fucking jerk."

Quickly, purposefully, I strolled back down the road and looked up to receive instruction from on high. My audience of twenty waited expectantly.

"Yates, you patrol between Tower One and Tower Two."

"Right. Why?"

"Look to your left." I looked to my left. "You can see everything from here to the main gate."

"Right."

"You patrol from here back to Tower One. From Tower One you can see everything from there to the front door of the Main Gaol."

All twenty-one of us were nodding in perfect and submissive understanding.

Pretty soon I became an old hand at patrol and at the other yard positions. I even had occasion to train new auxiliaries in the duties of each position. I liked Tower Two and the count positions the best. One could see more of Oakalla from West Wing's Tower Two than from any other position. The count position gave one maximum contact with the cons.

As the junior in the wing, I was frequently stuck with the patrol position. Within a few months, I had been there long enough to do all the positions, including Tower One (which procedure strictly limits to regular staff no lower than the rank of correctional officer, as it was the command position). I was heading out one day when Principal Officer Horatio MacKay, a.k.a. "Plankface," asked to see my

gun certificate. Each guard was obliged to carry, at all times, a card stating his peace officer identification and his scores with pistol and shotgun.

"What does it look like?"

"It's the card that the staff training officer gives you after your gun qualification. Henry Abbot usually signs them personally."

"Who's he?" I asked.

This made Plankface pause. He figured I was having him on. Day after day, he had watched me go out to yard, knowing full well that as junior jerk I was getting stuck with the .38, the radio, and the walking up and down in the rain.

"Give me your fucking card."

"Haven't got one."

"Haven't you been to gun training?"

"No."

"Who's been sending you out to the tower and patrol position?"

"Everybody."

Plankface rushed out the door of the P.O.'s office to the desk man. Lloyd was on the desk.

"Are you sending this man, who has never had gun training, out to draw a weapon and take one of the outside yard positions?" he screamed.

"Not a chance. I'd never send a man without gun training outside."

Nonsense. Lloyd had sent me outside a dozen times. Plankface looked at me. It was guard-solidarity time. Silence. No expression. "I just assumed I was on patrol," I lied.

"Who the fuck has been sending untrained personnel out to handle weapons?"

More silence. Even more lack of expression. The other two outside guys were at the gate waiting for the tirade to subside. One of them, Cornelius, asked, "Are we having yard today, MacKay, or not?"

"Shut up." Plankface jumped back in the office and picked up the phone. "Hello. Henry, I need a man scheduled in for gun training right away. Right." And right then and there I was given a time and a date. "Yates, you're on count," he ordered.

I grinned. This meant some other asshole got to shuffle around in the rain. The count man could stand in the doorway and stay dry.

It was at least a month before I could be spared for a couple of hours for gun training - in the meantime, I was on patrol several times when Plankface wasn't on shift.

When I finally made it to training, there were about ten of us on the range trying to qualify. All officers were supposed to qualify annually, but I knew several who hadn't been near the firing range for at least ten years. Some had never qualified at all. Those who were qualifying for the first time, like me, were new staff. They were not necessarily new to guns. Some of the rookies were ex-Mounties and ex-military, for whom this training was just a formality.

One guard showed up in special yellow target-shooting glasses, and probably would have worn an ammo vest if he thought he could get away with it. He was very serious about guns. He belonged to gun clubs and lived for the next issue of *Soldier of Fortune.* He had a house full of weapons, few of them legal.

About two-thirds of us were qualifying for the first time. The other third were staff in to requalify. The day I went in, Jonathan Marshall had been assigned something he didn't want to do and so came along because he was "way past due" requalifying" and it is very important - in the military this was proved again and again - to qualify regularly."

We all arrived after lunch. Henry Abbot was not there, so we stood around in the twilight of the windowless barn-converted-to-firing-range smoking and gossiping. I have to say I was a little worried about this exercise, because I hadn't held a hand-gun in my mitt in fifteen years, let alone fired one.

Suddenly Abbot loomed over us. He called us in a tight circle to hand out ear-muffs and tell us that we would do shotguns first, then hand-guns. Abbot was almost haemorrhaging from the eyes. Between his grizzled mop and grizzled moustache, his face was red as a tail-light. He scared the hell out of the rookies, and I decided that if Abbot jacked me around, I would remind Jonathan he owed me his life and demand that he pick Abbot up over his head and stow him

somewhere. Only the gun fanatic was hanging on Abbot's every word and asking questions.

A12-gauge with number-8 shot was our first lesson. It couldn't do serious damage beyond twenty-five yards, but was deadly up close. Abbot mostly - and rightly - wanted to give those who had never fired a12-gauge - or who hadn't for some time - a feel for the weapon, its recoil, nomenclature, and pattern. We got the "six o'clock low" lecture: just pepper their asses and the backs of their legs. In the parking lot, you could just fire into the gravel behind them. The gravel would spatter up and they would think they had been hit when they hadn't and stop.

The critical part was the hand-gun training. Pistol rounds carry a long way. Unlike shotguns, pistols required that decisions made under pressure be good decisions. The wad-cutter bullets did minimal destruction to tissue. If you hit a bone in the leg, you stopped the escapee. If the round passes through the fleshy part of the leg, chances are he wouldn't miss a stride. I've had cons tell me that there was a brief burning sensation, but no real pain.

We lined up and at Abbot's signal fired first from this position, then that. Standing. Crouching. From behind a post. With one hand. With two hands, like the guys on TV, facing the target frontally. The targets were human profiles: heads in the bull's-eye areas, with other circles radiating from this centre. They were drawn in black ink on crude white paper, and they stood fifty feet away.

It surprised me how familiar the pistol felt in my hand. We were told to cut the blade of the front sight in half with the crotched back sight and put the centre of the bull on the alignment and to squeeze, not pull, the trigger. The standard police .38 is a good all-around instrument. It does the job without too much recoil. Not much shocking power, but enough for law-enforcement purposes.

I finished one set of five shots and looked to my right, where Jonathan and the gun fanatic were still firing. I thought I was hallucinating. Jonathan was known throughout the jail as a hell of a shot. Had won a bunch of competitions in the army as a marksman. While I was firing, I thought I had heard ricocheting noises through the

muffs. Jonathan stood there with a big grin on his face, firing one shot up into the ceiling and the next at an angle into the cement far under the target. I ducked behind my post and continued to reload.

Abbot noticed Jonathan's wild waving of the arm and ran up and whacked him on the shoulder. Others were still firing. Jonathan stopped firing, still grinning. I pulled my muffs down around my neck and walked over.

Abbot shouted, "Marshall, are you out of your African mind?"

"No, I'm fine."

"Can't you see the target?"

Jonathan looked at the target. "Yeah, I can see it just swell."

"What's the problem?"

"Nothin." Jonathan pointed at the target. "See that target?"

"Of course I see the target," Henry exploded.

"What colour is it?"

"Black."

"I don't shoot at black people. For obvious reasons."

I thought Abbot was going to grab one of the shotguns and brain him. Instead, without another word, he stomped off down the runway toward the target, with the others still firing away until they finally saw him and stopped. Not even Jonathan suspected what Abbot was up to. When he got to the target, he unclipped it, flipped it around and clipped it up again. A shadowy outline showed a negative image on the other side. Abbot stomped back to Jonathan.

"Now, asshole, shoot the white guy."

Jonathan promptly reloaded and blew the head to shreds.

After we finished the final exercises, each of us collected his stack of targets and we filed off to Abbot's office to have our scores tabulated.

Abbot looked up at me from his desk and said, "Very good, Yates, very good. This is the highest score I've seen in a few years. Ninety-three per cent." I couldn't believe it. My hat size increased on the spot.

"Thank you, sir." I was a hero.

Abbot turned to Jonathan, who had shot very well. Before Abbot could say anything, Jonathan said, "Write down sixty-two per cent."

You had to make sixty per cent or you couldn't carry a hand-gun. Shotgun only.

Outside, Jonathan noticed me strutting like John Wayne. "You ignorant honky dickhead."

"Hmmm?"

"Nobody ever tell you about standard of care?"

"Nope." I was busy staring at the numbers on my card and considering which lady-friend I should show it to first.

"Okay, white-ass, listen up. Suppose there's a guy going over the fence, and you draw down on his leg."

"Right."

"You get the shot off. But just as you shoot, he trips, and you put the bullet through his head, instead of his leg."

Jonathan had my attention now. "Whoever shoots him is going to a hearing and maybe to trial. Now, if the shooter is a guy with a low score - like below sixty-five per cent - no problem. He obviously can't hit shit. He just barely qualified to carry a sidearm in the first place. He couldn't be expected to shoot very accurately." I wasn't sure I knew where this was going, but I was beginning to dislike the whiff of it. "Now, same scenario, but the guy who wasted the inmate is carrying a card with ninety-three per cent. This guy is a sharpshooter. He's going down on Murder Two or manslaughter or criminal negligence."

"I'm going back and get Abbot-"

"You? A rookie? You got no chance of getting Abbot to fake your card."

"Why didn't you warn me?"

"Hell, everybody knows white people can't shoot. Black-asses have to know how."

4

Taking Direct and Paying Back

There are two kinds of men who never amount to much: those who cannot do what they are told, and those who can do nothing else.
- Cyrus H. Curtis

THE Correctional Centre Rules and Regulations (a shirt-pocket compendium of gibberish concentrated from many huge manuals of procedure and standards written in altitudinous Hansardese) states that a correctional officer shall obey the direct order of the director or his agent (anybody of higher rank or anybody who has been in service longer) unless the order is "manifestly unlawful."

In the course of a day, an officer may receive the better part of a hundred orders. In a prison context the adjective "direct" possesses awesome magic and terror when it precedes the noun "order." No one knows why. Like many prison traditions, it is simply so.

Obviously, all staff-to-staff (superior-to-inferior) orders are direct orders. If not, what the hell is an indirect order? Suggestion? Advice?

There is one use of the word "direct" which carries clear meaning if uttered with very formal inflection.

An example: I have a-work-gang of perhaps five men. We have been given some stupid task such as sweeping the driveway which, for once, is clean enough to eat on. We put brooms and shovel in the wheelbarrow and amble along telling jokes and talking sports until the coffee-truck comes along. Eventually we saunter to within view of

the windows of the Women's Unit (it was renamed Lakeside Women's Correctional Centre, but was always the Women's Unit to anyone jail-wise). If their guards aren't watching, the women may give us a few bumps and grinds and peekaboo mammaries. Harmless enough.

My deal with each man in my group is don't draw heat on the gang. No shouting. Just shut up and watch the show. But one of the cons, Woodward, let's say, can't resist shouting and gesticulating. Soon staff and inmates of both the Men's and the Women's Unit are gawking at us from the windows. Now I have to do something.

First I say, "Woodward, cut it out."

Then, "Woodward, I want silence and I want it now."

Then, "Woodward, I am giving you an order." When a guard says the word "order," it is time to take him seriously.

Then the penultimate, "Woodward, I am giving you a *direct* order to cease your noise and gestures, grab the handles of the wheelbarrow, and get on up the road."

The word "direct" commits what follows. If Woodward still refuses to comply, I will explain the section and article of the C. C.R.R. (which I have whipped out of my pocket and glance at from time to time) under which he is being charged, then call for the prowl truck to take him back to the unit where he will await internal trial.

That scenario is exceptional. Bear in mind that the rest of the cons on the gang put their own self-interest first. When they have an easy-going guard running the gang, the last thing they want to do is ruin a good thing. Before I used the word "order" the first time, they would have been nudging him and telling him he was being an asshole and a heat-bag.

There is one overriding vulnerability to all correctional systems. No matter how high you elevate the standards for staff, at a whim of the provincial caucus or federal cabinet, the best programs of the best institutions go with the winds. If they target corrections as a place to hit the public-sector budget, the best commissioner of corrections with the best intentions has no choice but to pass it down to his institutional directors.

Just prior to my entering service, they were still double-bunking at

Oakalla, with counts as high as fourteen and fifteen hundred. The place would be virtually splitting at the seams with counts of seven hundred when single-bunking. Comparatively, Vancouver Pretrial has an emergency (absolutely maximum) gazetted count of one hundred and fifty. New Haven's is forty. Logic would suggest that when the counts go up, you increase staff to cover; the reverse when the counts drop. Never so.

The politicians pass it down from Victoria that corrections is to cut fat or they'll start closing institutions, which they have often done.

This vulnerability produces serious morale problems, stress problems, in the line staff and inmates. With staff cuts, each remaining guard is at greater personal risk on the job. This has bred a deep-running resentment, however irrational, among line staff: The "brass" should figure out a way to stand up to the politicians (who know nothing about the parts of the criminal justice system except as they appear as ciphers in the total budget). For the most part, of course, they don't.

Hence there is an ongoing resentment and pay-back in the form of "dirty tricks" for anyone who enters middle management. It is a practice rife with mixed signals because most of the brass were once line staff who pranked their superiors. And this has been going on for more than a hundred and fifty years. Thus there is a high wall between line screws and all corrections personnel above them. It becomes a situation of guards and cons against the system. The inmate code of silence and the guard culture are distorted mirror images of one another.

As a rule, the cons organize and run their own operations very efficiently. When they hit something that they need help with, they let the line staff know.

Whenever a staff member receives a promotion, screws and cons declare open season on him - a well-deserved antidote to various diseases like principal-officer-itis or senior-correctional-officer-itis.

New P.O.s haven't a clue what to do other than hand out keys to

the oncoming shifts. So they attempt to reinvent the wheel. They suck in their guts, throw out their chests and drive everyone nuts for a couple of months, telling staff to do jobs which they are already doing at the time they're being told by the greenhorn to do them.

The old-time P.O.s sit in their offices, read magazines, monitor calls if they're bored, and keep an eye out for pranks directed at them. As soon as the whole shift is accounted for, they give the desk man a look that says, "The shift is yours," and disappear. But not the new guys. They practically beg for abuse.

The movie *Brubaker* was popular with both guards and cons, as was *The Last Yard.* In fact, any movie to do with prison was popular. But especially those which showed the inmates in a favourable light and, better yet, the system to be god-awful.

The weather was mild but it had been raining lightly. The pulse of the jail was not good. It was yard time, but there could be no yard because the urinal in the yard was gefritzed. Nothing but crap on television. The wing was antsy.

The time was about 153o and the shift was under way. I was desk man. What a boring afternoon.

I was searching my imagination for mischief when it was delivered to me.

Ollie Brent (Shift Emperor of all the republics of Oakalla) called to say that we should double-check security on doors to the yard because they were going to open the massive secure gates and allow in a couple of plumbing contractors to fix the pisser.

I reported to Falkland, the acting principal officer. He didn't look up from his book. So I checked the three doors. Secure. Called Brent back and told him to send them through.

It took about ten minutes to get the gate open to the yard. By looking out the window to my left, I had a vista of most of the yard. The plumbers wheeled in a one-ton truck with a zillion doors for tools. The gate closed behind them and two little farts in hardhats and bright yellow rainsuits warily got out of the truck and stared at the locked gate. There are few things emptier and more forlorn than an empty enclosed prison yard.

I could feel my face breaking into a grin. *Brubaker* had been on only a few nights before and I had been moved by some of the issues that the film treated.

On the left side of the desk before me was a wonky old intercom with two long lines of toggle-switches. It was so sensitive that, on graveyard shift, you could hit the switch for a landing and hear how many guys were snoring, or pick up a whispered conversation or someone farting in his sleep. During the day you could only speak to the staff because there was too much white noise.

The plan was coming together in my brain. Meanwhile, the two obviously terrified plumbers out in the rain had fetched pry-bars from the truck and were driving them into the asphalt to expose the drainpipe of the pisserino. *Brubaker*... pry-bars . . . digging . . .

Yesssssssss! I had it.

The intercom had speakers, well-hidden up under the eaves of the roof on the five-storey building, to call people at yard in for phone calls, converse with them during riots and sit-ins and - when you could get away with it - insult the staff in the towers.

I stared at the toggle labelled "Outside Yard." Then I looked out the window at the plumbers, who obviously had serious doubts that even government money was worth the rain and all the ten-feet-tall criminals just a wall away from them. I prayed they had seen *Brubaker* too.

I had to do it. I hit the toggle and grabbed the microphone. "That's it, right there, dig right there. That's where the bodies are buried." It was wonderful. One of them dropped his thirty-pound pry-bar on the spot. I could hear the clank inside. Both stopped dead and looked at one another for a reality check.

The cons on the right side of the wing instantly knew what I was up to and lined up on the range to watch. I could hear them roaring with laughter.

Falkland couldn't make out what I had said, but he knew the sound of the speaker outside. He beetled out to have a look.

"What the fuck are you up to?" he demanded.

"Updating the log, acting sir."

"Bullshit." I pointed out the window. Falkland grinned. "Oh, fuck,

that's beautiful. What did you say?" I told him what I had said. Falkland's mind was whizzing. The two plumbers were still looking around, and then looking at one another. I hoped administration, whose windows also border on the West Wing yard, hadn't heard me. But then the loudspeaker at this time of day - yard time - was quite common. Finally, the worried workmen went back at it. Falkland wanted in. I pushed back in the creaky old chair and handed him the mike. He hit the toggle and roared at the top of his voice: "Take the fucking truck hostage and don't negotiate!" There's no way Brent could have missed that blast. The plumbers were spinning around like dervishes looking for the source of the commands. The cons on Two Landing had tears streaming down their faces from laughter. Falkland dashed out of the desk cage and hid in the P .O. office at the first ring of the telephone.

"West. Yates," I answered.

"Mr. Yates, this is Ollie Brent. Is everything all right in the West."

"Certainly, sir. The inmates are napping or watching TV."

"You on desk?"

"Yessir."

"Who's ROY."

"Falkland, acting."

"Good God. Well, the girls in the office thought they heard the word `hostage' from the yard."

"We're not even running yard. The urinal is down. There are only a couple of workmen and a truck outside."

"Oh, that's right. Well, I think I'll take a stroll back anyway."

"Come right ahead, sir, we have a fresh pot of brew in the staff room."

I could hear the various doors keying and clanking as he came through from Front Hall. Meanwhile, the two plumbers had put their tools back in the truck and were honking desperately. Staff came out from admin and spoke to them over the fence. The plumbers said they had some other emergency and needed to be let out of the yard. They would return to finish the job. The job was finished by other plumbers. The two little yellow guys never returned.

When Brent entered the wing, to my delight he interrogated

Falkland for half an hour and got nowhere. Then he strode up from landing to landing and asked cons and guards if they had heard anything. Not a thing.

Solid, baby, solid.

When Ed Blandish was made director of the mighty West Wing, he at last got to associate with the high and powerful.

For at least the last fifty years of Oakalla's life, politicians had been threatening to close the jail. One consequence was that there was never any new equipment for offices. Everything was old, had three legs, and initials carved into it: walls, desks, chairs, even the plexiglass in the towers. Everyone hated Tower Two. It had no toilet. If you had to take a leak, both cons in the yard and visitors coming down the hill could see quite clearly a thirty-foot arc of wee-wee arching out the door. It was drafty in the winter. Very exposed, and it wiggled on its frame as you climbed. And the goddamned chair was deadly. Hard wood, the back gone, and one loose leg so that it rocked and woke you up each time your weight shifted.

Tower One jutted out in a concrete turret over the yard itself and the chair was reasonably comfortable.

There was actually a Tower Three between the jail door and Tower One, but it was so rickety that it had been condemned by Workers' Compensation. Not removed. Nothing was ever removed. Someone had hung a crude sign on it in red which read: *Condemned.*

The furniture in the P.O.'s and director's offices was just as rickety. Blandish was having none of this shit. He was king of the wing and wanted a throne. The government wasn't going to buy him one.

He beefed up the locking system on the door between the P.O.s office and the office occupied by the director and the S.C.O.

Now, a new and more complicated lock on a door in a prison wing inevitably kicks the collective imagination of the line staff and cons into overdrive. Think of the pool of lock-breaking talent you have in a prison wing.

Blandish shopped for days before he finally found an appropriately expensive high-backed office chair and forked out five hundred

dollars for it. He even called administration and arranged for the furniture company to deliver it right to the front door of the Main Gaol, so that he could supervise its transport straight to the wing and his office.

He made the mistake of telling everyone that he was shopping for a chair. So, plans to "jap" it (fuck it up) in some manner were under way long before he announced that he had made the purchase.

There were thoughts of epoxying it to the wooden floor or deucing the springs in the back so that when he sat in it, the back would fall flat. But finally, someone thought of Tower Two. That way we could ping Blandish, drive him nuts, and the guards would have the benefit of a new chair for Tower Two.

Logistics. Likely a chair that expensive would be heavy. The only way into the tower was up a narrow ladder. What we needed was to temporarily anchor a winch on the roof of the tower, then block or double-block (if very heavy) the chair up, with guards pulling the rope from below. One guy in the tower could simply swing it in the door, release the chair and unhook the anchor and rigging.

The necessary equipment was gathered and stashed at the home of a guard who lived about a block from the jail, because neither Blandish nor we knew exactly what day or time of day the chair would arrive.

There were other matters to organize. Administration controlled the gate, the prowl truck, Centre Hall and Front Hall. It would be necessary to alert the gate man about the time it would be going down, to be sure that the night-jailer (graveyard was the obvious time) was kept busy or sent on some goose-chase to the hospital or got too drunk to notice, and to bring the prowl truck man in on the prank because the truck's headlights might be very useful.

With all in readiness, the chair arrived at about 1300 on a Friday. Blandish went out to supervise. The desk man instantly got on the phone to alert those on shift who formed the central part of the conspiracy, and to call at home those who were off shift and would be let in by the gate man to do the deed.

The acting S.C.O. in charge of the entire institution would likely be pissed as a newt by 0200, knowing him. We would have to keep

him tied up with paper or some phony problem until the prank was pulled. Bad news to have him stagger into the middle of it while on rounds.

By the time the chair was uncrated and behind the desk, it was 1400. Shift was over at 1500. Blandish paid half a grand to sit in that chair for an hour. Then he was gone for the weekend.

A long line of lock-picking heroes had had a look at the three locks, which included an eighteen-inch dead-bolt. There were bets all over the jail about how long it would take to get in without forcing the door.

Seven minutes took the money. Not a mark on any of the locks. We could have gotten illegal picking tools from cops or the locksmith, but one con said they were a snap and he could make what he needed from crap lying around the wing.

Half an hour after Blandish had left the wing, the locks were unlocked and the door closed but waiting.

The desk man was alerted to let the wing know, after dark, when the S.C.O. wouldn't be watching Front Hall, so that we could get the chair outside and to the foot of the tower. When Lewis, the big boss, sat down to dinner in the staff-room of admin, the desk man called the wing, Centre Hall and Front Hall. Thus all the doors were opened wide so that the chair could be rushed straight out from the wing and down the front stairs. Half the problem was solved.

Under cover of dark, the guys with the winch rigging were let in by the gate officer, drove down, and dumped the rigging near the chair, then got the vehicle back to the upper parking lot.

While this was going on, there was a bit of a scare, because the S.C.O., who had had a few belts, decided to walk up and check out the Women's Unit (which is routine). The usual route would take him right by Tower Two. The desk man was fast on his feet and told the S.C.O. that the hospital had called to report a serious problem with a suicidal con on the secure ward. The S.C.O. could check that out and then walk up the other side of the Main Gaol. By the time the S.C.O. got to the hospital, the guards had set up a very unsuicidal con with a promise of a deck of tailor-made smokes, the brand of his choice, to

act like he was going to off himself at first opportunity. Later we learned that the S.C.O. had almost knocked the con over with his breath and had given the poor bastard a long repetitive homily on why life was so profoundly worth living. This was truly cruel and unusual punishment so the guards gave the con three decks instead of one for his Oscar-winning performance and job-like forbearance.

Meanwhile, the riggers had scampered up the ladder to the roof and anchored the blocks, trussed up the chair, hauled it up to the door, and swung it into the tower. The prowl truck gave them a ride to the upper lot and they left for a local bar to drink and howl the rest of the night, anticipating Blandish's expression on Monday morning.

Moments after the chair was out the office door, the con relocked the doors without putting so much as a scratch on the brass facings.

If all capers were as well-planned as this, there would be no cons in jail and guards would be out of jobs.

On Monday it took Blandish several minutes to open all the new locks. When he swung the door open, he looked thunderstruck. The chair was so big that you couldn't have hidden it behind the desk even if you had pushed it over sideways. Blandish was so disbelieving that he actually walked around the desk and looked under it. The P .O. in the outer office was stone-faced because he knew nothing about it. The S.C.O. was still in the staff room brewing up.

Blandish began to bellow. The PO. rushed in. The S.C.O. double-timed it up the stairs. The desk man, who knew all about it, charged in; he was looking for an excuse to see Blandish's reaction anyway. The cleaners (trustee cons) lined up outside the door in their white jackets to check out whatever the matter might be. There wasn't a con or a line screw in the entire institution (including the Women's Unit) who didn't know exactly where that chair was, how it got there, and who put it there. But not one person so much as blinked that he might know anything.

After shouting at everyone standing around him, Blandish screamed at the Centre Hall man to crack him through to admin. He stomped upstairs and straight into Charlie Bessasson's office and demanded that the warden call the horsemen, Inspection and

Standards, and, if necessary, God in the service of retrieving his chair and punishing by firing or corporal punishment those responsible for its disappearance.

Charlie asked whether the locks had been japped.

No, not visibly.

Was this provincial government property?

No.

Then Charlie couldn't possibly set a dangerous precedent by calling in the cops every time the personal property of staff disappeared. This was a place where people who steal live. It would be unusual if they didn't steal. Staff should know better than to tempt them.

A huge five-hundred-dollar chair? Where the fuck would they put a five-hundred-dollar chair in a wing?

Had he searched all the tiers?

No.

Charlie suggested he start there.

Blandish knew intuitively it wasn't in West Wing.

Charlie was having a terrible time keeping a straight face. He asked Blandish whether he was sure he had actually taken delivery of the chair.

That tore it. Blandish stomped back down to the wing and ordered a "roust" (a search of every cell including its occupant, whose personal property frequently gets damaged in the process. There are searches - lift up things carefully and put them back; frisks - go over everything including the high cross-members of the bars and mess things up, but don't break anything; then rousts).

Cons, for obvious reasons, dislike rousts. This one was expected, but never happened. The guards simply hung around on their landings and came down and reported the entire wing had been rousted. No chair.

Blandish interrogated every staff-person who had been on every shift between Friday afternoon and Monday morning.

The look in his eyes began to resemble something I couldn't place. Ahh . . . Wile E. Coyote in the "Roadrunner" cartoons. He then called

the Burnaby detachment of the RCMP; they weren't sure about jurisdiction and kept asking whether the chair was government property.

By the end of the week, all the line staff and cons of the 154 provincial jails in British Columbia, and even those who had gone on to the federal system in B.C. and Kingston, Ontario, knew about the great Chair in the Tower caper. It could scarcely have been more widely known if Lloyd Robertson had reported it on CTV News.

Over the course of the next month or two, Blandish personally searched every tier and every cell of every active and abandoned unit, the dilapidated shops and barns left over from the days of Oakalla Prison Farms. He never found the chair.

He was obsessed with finding those responsible for his loss of chair until the moment he walked out the gate for the last time in 1991. I saw a friend recently who had seen Blandish not long before. Early in their conversation Blandish brought up the chair. He still didn't know any more than he did that Black Monday in September 1982 when he opened the door to his office.

One could argue that, like convicts, guards have too much time on their hands - to dream up pranks as cons dream up escapes.

After the West Wing was closed and all of us folk-heroes of the Old West were scattered on the winds of paper to other wings, B-side, hospital, admin, and segregation, I was transferred to B-side (Westgate B). B-side is the training unit where all the rookies are weeded out and, therefore, is never really out of prank gear.

A daft S.C.O. was transferred in and took one look at that dungeon and decided that order was in order.

If there was anything that Oakie could resist better than any institution on earth, it was systems analysis and streamlining. Self-appointed and formal efficiency experts were reduced to dingleberries by Oakiefenoakie Swamp staff and inmates. I was still in West Wing when the jail switched from manual to electronic records. The computer was japped several times a day by records personnel who resented having change thus thrust upon them. Oakie ran by

tradition, what was comfortable, and what kept cons and line staff happy - not by any logic.

This didn't stop the new S.C.O., of course. He spent several days arranging and rearranging the furniture in his office and making brief sorties out to tell the P.O.s who had been there since the Pleistocene Age to hand out forms according to his new criteria. They ignored him.

Finally, he decided that the rest of the hell-hole could do what it wanted, but his office would be a model of efficiency. He had only one job: to put together work-gangs and assign security levels to the gangs, and designate staff to them. This he could do in half an hour at the top of the shift and have the rest of the day to turn his office into a paragon of efficiency.

A real guard would have organized gangs in the morning, and then closed his door and read or slept or carried on moonlight business by telephone for the rest of the day.

Not him. After he arranged his desk and chair and wastebasket in a configuration of supreme effectiveness, he commanded the carpentry gang to put up new fake-grained wall-board on the wall next to his desk. He then screwed a handful of brass cup-hooks into the board. From these hooks he hung clipboards labelled in the order that he sent out the gangs: metal-shop, tailor-shop, carpentry, brew (coffee) truck, landscape, and so forth. He arranged these clipboards, which hung on the walls like degrees in a doctor's office, so that each could be reached with an absolute economy of movement - without his having to push back his chair or stand up. Even the farthest clipboard could be reached without his having to do anything but reach back with his left arm and grab it. He checked the board, handed the gang boss officer his gang list with his right hand and the dude was outa there. Next. Our new S.C.O. was in his late thirties. This idea was his achievement of a lifetime.

The vibes of that office - this guy was more impersonal and mechanical than the mainframe computer up in records - were so bad that just going into the office could wreck your whole morning. Also he was very "professional" (this word would gain incredible

meaning at Pretrial), extremely fastidious about his uniform and person, and entirely too clean.

One weekend we came up with the perfect prank. We would break into his office and saw the legs off his chair so that he couldn't reach any of his damned clipboards and thereby blow his brain.

Easy compared to the Chair in the Tower number.

Damn, were we wrong.

It was easy enough to send a rookie up to the carpentry shop with a key and a list of tools. We chose a guy who swore he was the same height and wore the same size clothes as our Kommandant. Now we could check out just how much we needed to take off the legs.

We wanted him out of the unit. We wanted him taken away to the rubber ranch. Nobody liked this non-smoking, non-drinking, non-swearing jerk.

The door to his office was a snap to open, and we thought fixing the legs of the chair would be easy. Just cut a few inches off, tap the metal sliders back onto the bottoms and rub some dirt on the leg ends to hide the fresh saw-cuts.

With the first cut we had the height approximately right, but when we sat our ersatz Kommandant in the chair we made two terrifying discoveries. The legs looked and measured the same length, but one or more was shorter and now the damned thing rocked. It had been solid before we began tampering. It would be an instant tip-off. And no one had calculated that when we lowered the height of the chair, its relationship with the desk-top would change, which would be another tip-off - and the desk was one of those ancient eight-legged wooden monsters.

Talk about hard work. It took three shifts of guards and cons filing and tapping and trying for size beginning late afternoon shift on Fri-day and ending Sunday graveyard (Monday morning) to get it right.

We could hardly wait. My gang was about mid-way through the line-up on Monday morning. Apparently, when the S.C.O. made his first grab for a clipboard and turned up about two inches short, he couldn't believe it. He jumped up and ran over to examine the wall for holes. Nothin' shakin' in that department. He sat down again and

pulled his chair into the desk to the usual distance between his gut and the desk edge. He tried another grab. Missed again. Finally he stood, slid the chair into the nook where the knees go, and stood by the wall taking down each clipboard as needed. He then walked over to the desk and picked up the gang list and handed it to the gang boss. Then walked back and replaced that clipboard on its hook, called for the next gang, grabbed the wrong clipboard, and gave the gang boss the wrong list, which the gang boss was obliged to call to his attention.

By the time he had the gangs out on the grounds, our good Kommandant was really rattled. He headed for the staff-room. He wasn't a coffee drinker either, but he poured himself one and vanished back into his office when other staff entered to coffee-up.

All day the staff who remained in the unit made excuses to go to his office and ask questions about the gangs, which would occasion his checking his clipboards, just to keep him cooking. By lunchtime, he looked ready to lose it. By the end of the day he was standing at attention beside the clipboard wall attempting to look nonchalant.

The next day, he unscrewed all the hooks and reinserted them so that he could grab the clipboards as before. There was no way we were going to attempt to level all those legs again. But I guess we had altered his life forever. He requested transfer that day, claiming that he just couldn't handle the B-side experience. They found a corner for him in admin and there he remained until he transferred out.

It was a lot like swatting a fly with a sledgehammer.

The Oakalla Hospital was a thing of beauty and would annoy forever. At Oakalla, any con who couldn't make it in population - because he was little or weak or pretty, or couldn't even make it on the protective-custody tier because he had ratted out someone on the tier, or because he was a dirty judge, lawyer, Mountie, guard, sheriff, or cop -did his time in the hospital.

The wars were between the medical brass and the security brass. The cons and line staff simply wanted entertainment.

Things were a little dull. I don't know who cooked up the scam, but a guard and a con were cast in the lead roles to put one over on

our security-hating Boss Docteur Sutherland. The con was legitimately recovering from some injury or surgery and was due to be released back to his unit.

This was the script: The con would mouth off to the screw. The screw would order him upstairs to his drum. The two would continue arguing up the stairwell, ascertaining that the doctor was watching. Then the con would swing wide on the guard. The guard would appear to deck the con, who would go down on the stairs. The guard would then grab his collar and apparently whack the hell out of the con while he was down. These two guys could have joined a stunt team. Because the stairwell was narrow, no one would be able to see any actual contact because the angle was wrong. The guard would pull the punch and the con would slap his own chest, making it sound as if the blow had landed. The guard would yell, "Staff up!" and security staff would rush up and escort the con to his cell where they would all collapse laughing.

The plan was executed and the doctor freaked.

Ping. Did Sutherland ever ping (ping and spin are terms for flying into a rage). He stood and stormed about the brutal slime in uniform. The local director rushed out and almost collided with the doctor at the door. They called one another everything in the book. The logical thing would have been for the doctor to demand to examine the victim, but he was too busy screaming at the local director. The P.O. rushed up and averred he had seen the whole thing and the con had assaulted the guard. Not true, screeched the doctor, he had seen the whole thing. All the brass in the hospital dashed out the door and up the stairs of the terrace toward the Main Gaol and Charlie's office.

The plan depended on the understanding that, per procedure, the guard would "lay paper" (charge under the *Correctional Centre Rules and Regs)* which would cause a Warden's Court trial; and that under Section 29, inasmuch as the con had apologized and neither guard nor con was physically damaged, the charge would be dropped.

But it went haywire. For entertainment value, it went haywire for the good. For the taxpayer, bad. The doctor, having failed to have all Oakalla hospital security staff fired for brutality, got in his car and drove down to the RCMP detachment and got them to press charges

against the guard. He tried to have the whole security administration of the hospital charged too, but that didn't wash. Still, his action forced the issue into outside court. Now there couldn't be an internal trial because that would DJ (double-jeopardy) the con and the prison would be in deep shit.

The pranksters now had to play out the hand. The kid in the screw's uniform was an auxiliary. If he admitted that the whole thing was a scam, he would be fired on the spot. The con knew to say nothing except to his lawyer. The lawyer told the Crown to take a hike. The Crown was all hot to trot because any sort of prison animal show would make for good media coverage.

A regular staff guard and the auxiliary involved in the prank paid a visit to the defence lawyer and told him the whole story, which the con corroborated. The criminal lawyer then gave the Crown a call and told him that both guard and con were prepared to get on the stand and say the incident never happened. The disappointed Crown vetted the case and reluctantly dropped it on the grounds that there wasn't enough evidence to warrant even a preliminary hearing.

This whole process took a couple of weeks, during which M. le Docteur was fantasizing courtroom glory. The Crown called him to inform him of his decision and thank him for his efforts.

Ping.