

# A History of Filth, Uprisings, Sexual Assaults and Escapes

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NEW ORLEANS,—Orleans Parish Prison—the county jail here—is a hell hole, even by prison standards.

Its dismal 43-year history is a chronicle of filth, overcrowding, understaffing, uprisings, sexual assaults and mass escapes.

Grand jury reports and national publications have said it is fit only for the rats that are its sole willing inhabitants.

City voters have approved \$3.5 million to build a new prison, which will probably cost around \$14 million with the federal government chipping in.

But the new prison is about three years away from completion, and nobody is sure the old jail, which houses nearly 1,000 inmates in space designed for 500, will hold together that long.

On Sept. 20, 267 prisoners rampaged through its dingy recesses, burning mattresses, ripping out plumbing, chanting militant slogans and brandishing foot-long homemade knives from barred windows.

Police armed with riot control gear finally quieted the uprising, but by that time \$15,000 worth of damage had been done.

Possible charges against

participants in the riot are still under consideration.

No less than 84 participants in the riot are still under consideration.

Two days after the uprising, five inmates—including a convicted murderer of six persons—went over the wall right in front of a guard tower that should have been manned and wasn't. The guard responsible was fired.

The next day brought two legal developments that could affect the prison and its administrators.

A group of inmates filed motions in U.S. District Court here to shut down the jail and have city fathers cited for contempt for failing to improve the prison as ordered by the court last year.

At the same time, District Attorney Jim Garrison's office said it was launching an "in-

depth investigation" of the prison administration, headed by Criminal Sheriff Louis A. Heyd Jr.

U.S. District Judge Herbert W. Christenberry ordered the city of New Orleans a year ago to correct conditions at the prison without delay.

Heyd, who has always agreed with the assessment that the jail was unfit for human habi-

tation, asked the city for improvement money, but got very little.

In their petition to have the prison closed, inmates contend it has "deteriorated to such a condition as to be uninhabitable for either animals or humans."

"Because of the absolute, sordid and inhuman living conditions," the motion said, "plaintiffs fear that a complete

breakdown will soon occur in parish prison, and that rioting, killing, arson and anarchy will occur, and that the closing of parish prison is a necessity in order to save innocent lives."

Christenberry scheduled hearings on the motions Oct. 13.

Heyd says his testimony at that hearing will be the same as it was before Christenberry last year.