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A Mindless Rage-- New Aid for Cons

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Vacaville

Call him Serov. He has been permanently locked in isolation for the past eight years because he likes to kill and mutilate people.

When no one is around to attack — and he has killed three fellow prison inmates over the years — Serov swallows pieces of metal that doctors then remove from his esophagus or stomach.

Serov and 28 other non-psychotic inmates who may be among the most dangerous and violent of the 19,300 prisoners currently in California penitentiaries were transferred to the California medical facility on February 15, and placed in a maximum security lockup called Lister Unit.

PATHS

Eventually, about 300 of the 700 men confined in various adjustment centers — prisons within prisons — will make their way here for an eight month stay where, it is hoped, their propensities for violence will be channelled into more constructive paths.

The new program, initiated by California prison director Raymond K. Procunier, has drawn more fire than a dozen O.K. Corrals.

Critics of the program have charged that psychiatrists here are attempting to make passive, depersonalized "Clockwork Oranges" out of inmates whom some have characterized as "political prisoners."

These critics cite brain surgery performed here in

1968 on three volunteer inmates (the results were less than encouraging) and maintain that strange psychotropic drugs will be used on Serov, and, eventually, other inmates.

Prison officials conceded that they did ask for grant money as part of a tentative program to perform psychosurgery called an amygdalotomy. In this operation a portion of a volunteer's brain is removed with a view toward making him non-violent.

And officials concede that several years ago they experimented on volunteers here with the muscle-relaxant drug succinylcholine — trade name Anectine — which, when given in stiff doses, "makes a guy feel like he is dying."

RAGE

Part of a program called "aversion therapy," Anectine treatment drew cries of rage from critics of the California prison system and has been discontinued.

At Lister, says Procunier, "we are trying to determine whether these inmates have a mental problem or are just mean bastards that nothing, really, can change."

These especially violent inmates have all been in lockup for years. "You let one out and within a few hours he is mashing an officer over the head," said Max May, who is program administrator of Lister Unit.

There is no brain surgery at Lister, nor are doctors using Anectine.

Dr. Stephen A. Sheppard, staff psychiatrist in charge of the unit, described how the men at Lister have been

chosen.

"We take no psychotics and no aggressive homosexuals. Each inmate has the program explained to him and is asked to sign a consent form before he is transferred here."

Five of the 29 inmates here have claimed they were in one degree or another, "coerced" to sign the consent form. None of them, however, has asked to be transferred back to his old adjustment center.

No far-out experimentation goes on at Lister, Dr. Sheppard emphasized. The press has not been allowed to tour the unit yet.

When an inmate is transferred to the Lister Unit — and some come in with their eyes bulging and the muscles along their necks knotted in rage and fear — they get a complete physical and psychiatric evaluation.

Sheppard said that about 25 per cent of the new arrivals have organic problems: their teeth have gone bad after years "on the shelf" or the lack of exercise in the maximum security adjustment centers has caused vascular problems.

Some, labelled "dummies" years ago because they were unable to read, are found to have problems that in no way actually impair their intellect.

The inmates participate in months of group therapy and personal psychiatric treatment.

Dr. Sheppard and his colleagues also use a tool not often found in prisons — old-fashioned compassion. The inmates are all addressed as "mister" for example.

Another aim, said Sheppard is to try and allay the apprehension many of these men have regarding the self-fulfilling prophecy "that because they are expected to act badly they will act badly."

An inmate, over a cup of coffee, put it this way:

"Up at San Quentin I had a tough guy jacket on me.

They were always lookin' for me to act up and I did. Here, the living is easier and I want to make it. I'm getting too old to spend my life in the hole. I want to see the sun before I die."

FAIL

As part of an ongoing program, when the men of Lister finish their eight-month "course" here — and a few are expected to "fail" and spend more years in adjustment centers — a new dossier will follow them.

The new dossier will contain an individualized psychiatric prescription for physicians at the California Men's Colony at San Luis Obispo, where most of the graduates will be sent. None will be returned to the prison where he was formerly confined.

To critics of the program one prison staffer said this:

"This program could be



DR. SHEPPARD
'Clockwork oranges'

discontinued, perhaps through intense outside pressure. Then, I suppose, these men would all be returned to isolation, where they would spend the rest of their lives vegetating or dreaming.

"But you must remember that unless an inmate is driven into psychosis by isolation — and some are — the dreaming eventually ends. And then all he has left are the cell walls and the thoughts in his own mind."