

Convicts Fare Better Than Insane

CO's Seeking To Ease Lives of Mental Patients

BY EDMUND WATKINS

An attendant walked down the aisle of a mental hospital.

On one of the cots lay a middle-aged patient who had been confined to the institution for several years. Most of the time, the patient was good-natured and reasonable. But sometimes he became irritable and even violent.

That night a volley of abuse greeted the attendant as he approached the cot. Then the patient kicked over a container of waste matter.

WATER CURE

The attendant ran to a washroom, where he soaked a large towel in water. After wringing it out, he clamped the towel around the patient's neck.

The attendant pulled the ends together and began to twist. First he tightened the noose. Then he gave the towel a slow turn to let the patient know what was in store for him. The patient begged for mercy.

But the twisting continued. The patient's eyes bulged, his tongue swelled, his breathing labored.

At length, his body fell back on the bed. His face was a dreadful white, and he did not appear to be breathing. Fifteen minutes elapsed before he showed signs of returning life. The patient was "subdued."

HAPPENS OFTEN

Leonard G. Edelstein, executive secretary of the newly-formed National Mental Health Foundation, smiled grimly after telling the story.

"If you think that was an isolated case, you're wrong," he said. "It happens quite often in mental institutions all over the country."

A tall, dark-haired young man with earnest blue eyes, Edelstein served for nearly two years as a member of Unit 49 at the Philadelphia State Hospital, Byberry. He was one of approximately 3000 other conscientious objectors assigned by Selective Service to work in American mental institutions during the war.

Headquarters of the Foundation, which is headed by former Supreme Court Associate Justice Owen J. Roberts, are in the old Friends' Meeting House at 35th st. and Lancaster ave. It was there that Edelstein told of his experiences and those of his fellow CO's.



BEDLAM, U. S. A., 1946: There's too much of this . . .



HAVEN'T CHANGED

According to Edelstein, mental institutions haven't changed very much since the day when Charles Dickens described a newly opened "lunatic asylum" which he had just visited in America.

"... and everything had a lounging, listless, madhouse air which was very painful," Dickens wrote. "The moping idiot, cowering down with long, disheveled hair; the gibbering maniac with his hideous laugh and pointed finger; the vacant eye, the fierce, wild face; the gloomy picking of the hands and lips with munching of the nails; there they were all, without disguise, in naked ugliness and horror."

Says Edelstein: "The remarkable advance in psychiatry, medicine and hospital administration has not reached the greater number of our State institutions, though well-established private hospitals are today staffed by competent professional persons and in some State institutions progressive measures are being taken to make psychiatric and medical treatment available in addition to mere custodial supervision."

COULDN'T ANSWER

But...

One night, a patient sat staring blankly at the wall.

"Come on, buddy, time for bed," shouted the attendant. No answer. "Let's get going, mister!" the attendant repeated.

Still there was no reply. The attendant went over and found the patient weeping and in terrible pain. He had tried to answer, but couldn't speak.

"They beat me up — this morning — three of them. They took me downstairs and the attendant, he said to the other two: 'Give it to him good!'"

PLAY ON PHOBIAS

Edelstein told of attendants maliciously or negligently administering overdoses of drugs to patients; of milder forms of brutality such as teasing and taunting, with the attendants actually playing on the patients' phobias.

"Sometimes they'll agree with a sufferer that he has snakes in his stomach," he said. "Sometimes they'll jump out from dark corners and slap

patients, or threaten that they are to be drawn and quartered at dawn."

These things go on despite the known fact that most patients are fully aware of their plight.

"We're wrong if we think that either mental illness or deficiency brings with it a benevolent dulling of the sensitivities," says Edelstein. "The sick or deficient are often more deeply affected, and their nerves more sharply jarred by a petty indiscretion than healthy persons."

LOWEST TYPE

"The attendants, receiving pay estimated at between one-half and two-thirds of the wages paid prison guards, frequently are the lowest type of floaters," Edelstein declared.

"Although there are many devoted people who do a good

... and not enough of this in our asylums today.

job in the face of tremendous difficulties, the majority are often in need of help themselves."

In his own experience, Edelstein found that the Golden Rule worked marvels.

"I found that if I treated them as human beings, I invariably got results," said the young man.

Memory of continued kind treatment endured throughout several months in the case of a catatonic patient who could not speak or move.

DIDN'T FORGET

Emerging from the spell, the patient expressed touching gratitude for Edelstein's kindness.

"You were kind to me even if I couldn't talk to you," he mumbled. "And I want to thank you, sir."

In general, Edelstein declared, the hospital administrators try to do a good job. But they

have to operate with undermanned staffs and too little money. In 1944, the average cost of maintaining a patient in a State hospital was about \$6 per week, contrasted with \$18 for inmates of correctional institutions.

TEACHING PUBLIC

One of the most important purposes of the Foundation is enlightenment of the public with regard to the mentally ill, Edelstein continued.

"The public must be taught that insanity is an illness, to be understood and sympathized with just like any other illness," he said.

"The old belief that 'once insane, always insane' is as out of date as the witches' cure, and those who hear and spread this notion are fostering an attitude of defeatism which breeds indifference and inactivity."

**Leonard
Lyons**

Broadway Gazette

As part of "Operation Housing," the veterans' project to dramatize their inability to find homes, a member of the American Legion's Duncan-Paris post will spend one night, with his wife, in the most publicized apartment in N. Y. After the curtain comes down at the Morosco, the veteran and his bride will move into the three-room apartment which is the set of "The Voice of the Turtle."

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The American Academy and the National Institute of Arts and Letters will donate \$3000 to PEN for food packages for starving authors and artists in all countries of Europe except England.

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Boro Pres. Lyons of The Bronx, who went to Queens for the U. N. welcoming reception, says his hat was stolen there by a famous city official.

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Bill Mauldin now is wearing the first suit he's ever owned. He bought it shortly after he

entered the Army, when soldiers were not required to wear uniforms off the post. Until he entered the Army, Mauldin never wore a full suit.

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After months in uniform, Mrs. John MacCormac of the Times put on her first pair of high-heeled shoes and an evening gown, tripped, and broke her ankle.

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Tom Guinzburg, son of publisher Harold Guinzburg, is back from the Pacific, where he served in the Marine Corps. He reported to his parents that during the invasion of Iwo Jima he received only one letter—a bill from Brooks Bros.

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Frank Sinatra will fly to N. Y. for the Veterans' Rally at Madison Square Garden in support of OPA and Veterans' Housing Projects. Jerome Chodorov is writing the script for the show.

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M. Fodor, the veteran Balkan correspondent, vows that he is

so sensitive to sunspots that he is able to give RCA at least 24 hours' notice of the magnetic storms which have been disrupting communications.

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U. S. film producers are negotiating for the use of the modern, German-built studios in Vienna where movies can be made at a studio overhead of only \$250 a day. The successful bidders will bring the casts there and, using the same sets and alternate casts, shoot the film in English and other languages.

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Malcolm Muir, head of Newsweek, has been holding an IOU from Henry Luce, head of the rival magazine, Time. Both are junketeering over Europe now. Luce lost \$20 to Muir at gin-rummy, didn't have the cash, and gave him an IOU.

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Kenneth Davis, author of the Eisenhower biography, has been unable as yet to find a British publisher for the book.