

doesn't make an effort to maintain good physical health, then whether you're here or in (prison) population you'll lose your health." He practices what he preaches by getting up every morning at 4 am to exercise. He spends his three hours a week in the yard pen running. When rain cancels yard call, he runs the length of the tier for most of his shower hour. He appreciates the little yard time that he gets. "It wasn't always this way," remembers Wilkerson.

Before the late 70s CCR inmates didn't have any outside time. What fresh air they got they sucked through heavily screened tier windows. Wilkerson sued in court, complaining that the lack of sunshine and fresh air was detrimental to a prisoner's health. He based his argument on an earlier legal ruling—*Sinclair v. Henderson*—where the court held that Angola death row prisoners, confined just down the stairs from CCR, should be allowed a certain amount of outside time each week. Wilkerson's suit was denied.

But not long afterwards, as a result of a major prison suit contesting overall prison conditions (*Armstead v. Phelps*), prison officials provided CCR limited use of the pens originally set up for death row prisoners. Today, CCR prisoners receive the bare minimum of three hours yard time per week. Something is better than nothing, and this was a big step up in their living conditions; a step many inmates took without thought of what the years of inside solitude had done to their bodies.

"I noticed the effect no sunshine and fresh air had," said Wilkerson. "I saw some guys throw a football and break their arms because their bones had gotten so brittle, their muscles so weak. Dudes would run the yard and hit a small hole and their ankle would just snap. Pop! This is the effect that long-term cell confinement has on an individual, who, despite the fact that he may exercise indoors, doesn't come in contact with the outside. It was really devastating to see." Studies concerning life in isolation point to physical exercise as a pertinent means of retaining physical, mental and emotional stability.

HISTORY, con't

had to obey the rules, and were made to work.

Times changed, not out of heartfelt compassion to eliminate insanity and physical deterioration, but for economic reasons. In the progression of the American penal institution, the Auburn system won out. Northern states, except Pennsylvania, concluded that working in factories was simply more profitable. And due to continued prison overcrowding, across the board isolation dissipated. Along with it went the strict code of silence. Cellblocks in which prisoners shared cells were conceived in the North, while dormitory housing was instituted primarily in the South. Solitary confinement became what it has always been—a punishment tool. The 'dungeon' or 'hole' was created for unruly prisoners: total isolation in a dark, dank cell for a specified amount of time, with diets of bread and water.

In sum, early American prisoners served hard, lonely time at the hands of good-intentioned reformists seeking a viable means of rehabilitation. A few lucky prisoners were released with their sanity and physical stamina intact. The majority either died from such harsh conditions, or were released ill-equipped to start over.

Excerpts from an 1866 report by the Board of Inspectors of the Western Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, recommended the separate system be abolished:

As we have made from time to time our frequent visitations to the convict's cell, and have engaged him in conversation and studied his situation, we have often been oppressed with the feeling of despair that seemed to settle upon his face as he would look forward (sometimes through a quarter of a century) to a hopeless future. In his loneliness he broods over his condition, walking his dreary cell in the quiet hours of the night, and during the unemployed moments of the day. No human face visible save that of the officers and his keepers, he feels that 'his hand is against every man and every man's hand is against him,' and having no object or interest beyond his own walls to attract his attention or arrest his thoughts, he falls back upon himself and his fancied wrongs, and in sullen anguish preys upon his own vitals!

"Man is formed for society. He cannot well live without it. Ostracize him from the world and his fellow men, and he soon loses his own self-respect, because he feels that he has forfeited that of others."

In 1890, the United States Supreme Court ruled that extended solitary confinement was infamous punishment.

"Let's look at it like this," said Wilkerson. "The penitentiary, period, can have a psychological or mental effect on a person's sanity. I think that when you are in a cell the chances are that those factors are greatly aggravated."

"When I came to Angola this time I had, call it intuition, a feeling I'd be put in CCR because of that escape from New Orleans. So what I did, I changed my psychology about myself. I refocused my thoughts on the differences between living in prison population and in a cell. I forced myself to believe that in spite of the major privileges I might be forfeiting from not being in population, prison was still prison. I think this early self-reeducation played a great part in being able to weather the storm. . . . Still, at that time I was looking at six months, maybe two years of cell time. But it didn't happen that way."

All the long-term cell confined prisoners in Angola assumed at the beginning of their solitary journey that they would be released after a year or so. That's just the way it was back then;



BOLT

DIARY OF A PLANT

(composite diary entries of extended lockdown prisoners)

7/15/76: *One, two, three, four, turn. One, two, three, four, turn. One, two, three, four, turn. One, two, three, four, four and a half—yeah!, turn.... No yard today. They say it's too wet. Field lines are out, so it's not too wet to work. That sucks. It always sucks. One, two, three, four, turn. One, two, three, four, turn....*

after a hard dose of the cell, you were released, given another chance. But times changed. These prisoners were caught in the transformation. At some point it became obvious to them all. They had been planted.

Then there was Colonel Nyati Bolt. As prison reform took root in Angola in the early 70s, and as Angola earned a reputation as being the bloodiest prison in the nation, Bolt watched from his cell as the prison took on a new face. Before discharging a 45-year armed robbery sentence in October 1992, Bolt spent 23 years in extended lock down—sometimes more than 23 hours a day in a cell. "I feel like I've been through hell," he told the *Angolite* in a recent interview.

His cell confinement was in contrast to others who have spent over 20 years encased in a cement tomb. Bolt's stay was by choice, not by force. He chose to suffer the torment of cell confinement rather than work in prison. "I refused to work in the fields," Bolt wrote from his home in Oakland, California. At Angola it is mandatory that everyone work, the only exceptions are inmates with serious health problems. For the average, physically fit prisoner, work begins in the fields—hoeing the sides of ditches, picking okra or cutting tall grass with a swing blade. In Bolt's early years of imprisonment that work included picking cotton and cutting sugar cane. "I will not work on a plantation and be a slave for the state," he often told other prisoners who were amazed at his fortitude. While Wallace, Woodfox, Wilkerson

and Tropez were filing legal petitions in court, complaining of their long-term cell confinement, Bolt rode out the turbulent years of solitude with stubborn insistence. "A matter of principle," he claimed. Just by saying, *I'm ready to go to work*, he could have been released at nearly any time during his confinement. He never spoke those magic words.

According to Bolt, his original placement in a cell had to do with his suspected involvement in the Brent Miller killing. He was never charged for that involvement. "The hardest part of living in a one-man cell all those years was the monotony of endless time and blatant solitude," reflected Bolt. "Why didn't I go crazy? I was strong-willed, which allowed me to block out the institutional bullshit by absorbing myself with positive mental feedback." He spent much of his time with "self-constructive endeavors such as reading educational materials, letters from pen-pals/friends, visitations from extended friends and family, and exercising in my cell." Bolt admits positive aspects of his confinement: "I am a stronger man, which allows me to deal with situations I am faced with on this outside world, with helluva patience, and without resorting to stereotypical negative attitudes or behavior such as the use of drugs or resorting to the criminal predatory mentality." Yet, when asked if extended lockdown units are a necessary evil he gave a resounding "No! It is never a necessity. It only increases one's attitudes toward violence. The tension isolation brings with it is incumbent to violent behavior/reaction."

Bolt's choice of a cell did not come without consequences, the worst of which nearly killed him. Just a year before his release Bolt suffered a stroke while reading in his cell. The seriousness of the stroke was not immediately recognized by prison officials. It was only after a security officer noticed Bolt's speech was incoherent and his balance was unstable that the prison medical team was notified. He was whisked to Charity Hospital in New Orleans, where he spent a month under treatment, then two more months in the prison hospital before

returning to his CCR cell. Eight months later Bolt regained most of his mental facilities. Today, he says he suffers from lapses of memory and periodic head-jarring headaches. He feels his stroke was brought on by tension and stress that built up over the years of his confinement:

A career criminal when he arrived at Angola in 1970, upon his release he moved to Northern California where he is enjoying his freedom, living a crime-free life.

Samuel Tropez is 47 years old. He would happily work if let out of CCR. Tropez has lived in a cell at Angola for half his life. When he arrived in CCR on August 30, 1971, he expected to be returned to the general prison population within six months. Today, after 23 years of cell confinement, he sees only one way out. "I'm on the pardon board waiting for a hearing. I think I'll get out of prison easier than I'll get out of this cell." He's probably right, and that enhances the likelihood that he will die in that cell.



TROPEZ

Tropez was transferred to CCR after a fight with other prisoners. "I got in a knife fight, ya heard me. A knife fight with four dudes for about two hours. I got juke 21 times. You know, you gotta have quick movement, keep the others off balance. You know your life is at stake. I hit one of them under the heart and that slowed him up," he explained. In fact, it killed him.

Originally sentenced to Angola on a murder and manslaughter charge out of New Orleans, Tropez was young, illiterate and mentally challenged when he entered prison. "I had went to an insanity hearing because I had a lot of murder charges on me. (The prosecution) told me to make a deal to knock out the rest of the murder charges and they'd give me time for two. My lawyer told me to take a life and 21 years. I had to. I had so many murders I was charged with."

Out of the five longest confined prisoners, Tropez is said to be the most unstable. It may be that mental health evaluations are the key factor in preventing him from leaving extended lockdown. Tropez has survived a secluded life in CCR for over two decades. He contributes exercising and TV as ways he's coped with his miserable existence. "The cell . . . the iron takes away your strength; from being around it all the

DIARY OF A PLANT

(composite diary entries of extended lockdown prisoners)

9/3/78: *Jacked-off twice on Barbara Walters. Sweet bitch. Wish I could see her do something besides sit behind that desk.*

Shit fight three cells down. Charlie been savin it in a milk container, soakin it in bleach, for four days. Hit Nub with it comin out the shower. God awful stink.

Only thing got rid of the smell was the tear gas they put on us.

time, sleeping on it, sitting on it, it sucks your strength. That's why I exercise everyday." He is not unlike the rest when it comes to his environment forcing him to study. "I have to do it myself. Struggling with myself to learn, ya heard me."

He admits that his cell confinement has fostered hate. "I have a lot of hate in me. I've been abused like this here. This is what the cell has did to me—made me lose that feeling for a human person." For Tropez and others who were obviously mentally unstable to begin with, cell confinement can agitate the problem. The cell closes them off from the world, their feelings slowly evaporate. They find nothing to focus



CCR YARDS

those dying feelings on. Yet, as they all do, Tropez lives on hopes and dreams. "My hope and dream is to get out and get married and have a nice job, settle down and raise some children. I'm not about too much luxury or too much money, ya heard me. I just want to be free and live. In this cell there is no life."

Tropez doesn't get regular visits. If he is fortunate he will receive a visit a year from his mother. He's okay with that. "They can just send me money. I want my family to live their life and not worry about me."

In Sue Halpern's book, *Migrations to Solitude*, she tells of a 1989 research project, in which a thirty-two-year-old French woman voluntarily crawled into a cave to live in isolation for 111 days. She was wired head to toe with electrodes and performed certain visual and mental routines daily. The point of the experiment was to find out what happens when you remove someone from time as we measure it.

Within days, day ceased to exist for the woman. Her sleeping pattern became obscure—up forty hours, sleep thirty hours. She noted a "dull numbness" that took over her senses. But "[t]he true problem is loneliness," she wrote in her journal. "Also you think about your life. . . . You have time to think, you know. You're a thinking machine when you are alone."

One year after completing the experiment the woman killed herself. She parked her van along the side of a street, took a fatal dose of sleeping pills, laid down in the front seat and went to sleep for good. In an interview only two days before her suicide, she told a radio personality, "It was a risk that came with this experiment—to become half crazy, to become schizophrenic. It didn't happen to me. But maybe it's a time bomb—I won't say anything more about it."

Herman Wallace's gentle smile and soft eyes compliment the subdued words he speaks. He is a self-educated man who takes that extra effort to relay a point as clearly as possible. His present demeanor and concentrated communi-

DIARY OF A PLANT

(composite diary entries of extended lockdown prisoners)

9/5/78: Barbara didn't show. Jacked-off on the weather girl. Big fine legs.

Charlie tried to hang himself. Didn't try hard enough.

Goin on the review board next week. Last time, and the time before that, I got denied "based on the nature of my charge." Haven't been able to change that.

cation has not always been a part of him. It is something he acquired through 23 years of cell confinement: "I have been able to elevate myself intellectual-wise. Being in a cell [as opposed from the general prison population] has given me a lot more time to read and has forced me to study. I have to educate myself. If they put me in a cage underneath the ground I'd have to read and study to retain my sanity."

Nevertheless, Wallace admits that the solitude has taken its toll. "Being perfectly honest, I don't think I'm totally sane, per se. There is a lot I'm holding back, a lot I hold within myself to keep what little sanity I have left. In the same token I'm confident I can function within any society, whether that be in a society beyond prison or in general [prison] population. Who doesn't have emotional problems within themselves to deal with these days?"

He also contributes his "togetherness" to the family support he has received through the years. "My parents and my family have always been here for me. I've always gotten visits. . . ." Out of the 55 inmates in CCR, most are like Tropez, who does not receive regular visits. "The reason why they don't is not because their people don't love them or don't want to see them. But because of this setting. People don't want to come here and visit behind a screen they can barely see the face of their loved one behind," said Wallace.

Regular visits in CCR mandate visiting between a heavy mesh wire, which prevents any

physical contact. The inmate is kept in handcuffs and leg shackles throughout the two-hour visit. Through persistent negotiations between CCR inmates and prison officials, approximately three years ago contact visits on a disciplinary report-free basis were instituted. CCR inmates who stay disciplinary-report free for 90 days are allowed to write in for a contact visit once a month. Providing security and available space, they will receive a supervised visit where they can kiss and touch their loved ones. Wallace, a model inmate as far as his disciplinary record is concerned, spends his contact visits with his wife of six years, who he said has been the biggest support in his life. "I can talk to her about anything. I do, and that helps."

For any prisoner, visits and communication with family members and friends is a crucial component to character and intellectual progression. This is especially so for those prisoners locked down in cells. Open lines to the outside world mean more sensory perceptions to keep the mind and soul occupied. Lack of



WALLACE

DIARY OF A PLANT

(composite diary entries of extended lockdown prisoners)

6:17/83: Had a weird dream last night. I dreamed I got shot five times in the stomach. I felt each bullet hit me and sink into my gut. I didn't die, but just laid there in pain as my mom and my sister reached out for me, to help me. We never touched. I woke up holding my stomach and sweating. So real.

outside communication creates a stagnant reaction. It limits the stimuli on which the mind can draw.

In the July 1993 issue of *Corrections Today*, a magazine for prison officials and employees, the value of human contact is exemplified: "Staff perform inmate [head] counts in the Florida death row unit at least once an hour, compared with six times daily for the general population. The higher number of counts is required for two reasons: to provide greater security against escape attempts and to allow death row inmates a greater opportunity to communicate with staff. Human contact in the unit is considered extremely important because the inmates spend much of the day in isolation." Officers at Angola make more head counts on death row, CCR and other cell-block units than in the general population.

As with all the other long-term CCR inmates, Wallace exercises regularly, trying not to miss any of his three hours a week yard time. He also keeps up a heavy load of correspondence and, depending on the availability of books, studies history and politics, which he also writes about. For those who can afford them, CCR inmates are allowed portable, battery operated or manual typewriters. Wallace has one. "I do a lot of legal work, on my own case and on trying to effect changes in CCR." Wallace has been witness to many changes that have come to CCR over the past two decades. Some good, some bad. "We use to have an hour group hall time, where we could all come in the hall together. Then se-

curity, and rightfully so for their own protection, set it up to where only three men could come out at a time. Then that changed, and they started letting only one man come out, about 1981, and that's where we are today." Wallace has discharged the armed robbery sentence that originally placed him in Angola in 1967. He is still under a life sentence for Miller's murder.

Albert Woodfox was convicted along with Wallace for the Brent Miller killing. He has been in CCR since April 18, 1972. The 47-year-old Woodfox originally came to Angola with a 50-year sentence for a 1969 armed robbery conviction out of New Orleans. While in New Orleans jail he escaped and fled to New York for a brief period before being apprehended. Like Wallace, Woodfox is a former member of the Black Panther party. He does not believe his lengthy stay in a cell is a repercussion for once being a Panther. He feels he is being made an example. "I think we're being held in here as an intimidation factor for the other inmates," he said. An intelligent, articulate man, Woodfox has spent his years in a cell educating himself. He says it is how he has managed to keep sane. "I've used the time to educate and reeducate myself in just about everything—economics, politics, history, psychology, sociology—just about anything I can get my hands on." Ironically, he feels that intrusion and not seclusion is the hardest thing for him to deal with. "Not being able to get away from the same people, same conversations, same type of activities going on in the other 14 cells on my tier."

Woodfox is pretty much resigned to his fate in a cell. He sees little hope of ever getting into the prison mainstream. "I don't think I'll ever be placed in population. . . . We have letters from the DOC—myself, Hooks and King—which say as far as conduct was concerned our conduct is exemplary. But that they didn't want to be responsible for letting us back into population. After we filed suit on our confinement and we had a hearing, DOC's position was that they were protecting us. They say they have inmates and security personnel that will want to seek retribution because of the Brent Miller killing. I think that's absurd."

Many who have been locked into a secluded environment seek a religion they can accept to keep hope alive. Just the opposite has happened with Woodfox. "I think I lost a religious faith instead of picking one up. I was raised Catholic. . . . I recall an incident that pretty much caused me to pull away from the Church. I was almost molested by a priest. I never gave the incident any thought until four or five years ago when these things started coming out about these priests molesting all these children. That's when I had this flashback and remembered when I was 12 or 13 the incident with a priest. He didn't do it because of a nun that came in when she did. But if she hadn't come in I think it would've happened. I really couldn't tell you if remembering that was the beginning of my withdraw from the Church and religious beliefs, but I can say it wasn't the only factor." Woodfox claims he is spiritual, just not religious.

The flashback Woodfox relates is, according to others who have found themselves in a solitary environment, not unusual. In August



WOODFOX

THE BIRD-MAN

Robert Stroud pleaded guilty in 1909 to killing a man in the Alaska territory and received a 12-year sentence. He was sent to Leavenworth prison where, in 1916, he defended himself from a clubbing by stabbing a prison guard. For that killing Stroud received the death sentence.

On April 15, 1920, his mother's unrelenting pleas convinced President Woodrow Wilson to commute the death sentence to life in prison. Upon receiving the order of clemency, Leavenworth warden V.A. Anderson told news reporters: "Stroud will be kept in the segregated ward during his sentence, which is for life. He will never be permitted to associate with other prisoners. He will be allowed only the customary half hour each day for exercise in the court. . . . He will not be permitted to see visitors other than members of his immediate family." So began Stroud's solitary journey. The man later known as the *Bird-Man of Alcatraz* spent 54 years in prison—42 in solitary confinement. No federal prisoner has ever spent more.

Stroud did not have TV or radio to keep him company, so he turned to birds. By 1931 he became a leading authority on canaries, and in 1942, published *Stroud's Digest of the Diseases of Birds*. Birds kept Stroud from going insane.

Stroud spent most of his time locked in a solitary cell at Leavenworth. He was transferred to Alcatraz in 1942. In 1959 he was again transferred, but this time out of solitary and into the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners at Springfield, Missouri. He was 70 years old. It was the first time since 1916 that he was free from solitary confinement. "I have seen my first TV program, but I've been too interested in people to spend time with it," Stroud wrote to the attorney who helped him get to Springfield. "I probably walk three miles a day and feel like a million. . . the yard is a beautiful park. . . . I've seen more people and spoken more words than I did in forty years. Imagine what a pleasure it was to lie on the grass for the first time since 1914, how it feels to sleep without a door being locked on me. . . . It is amazing to see many of the most controversial things I have advocated for years practiced here as a matter of course. I could live a happy and useful life here, for in this hospital I've seen pitiful cases where an hour's talk at the bedside of a lonely and suffering human being can give a new hope, and where hope is impossible, much courage." Interestingly, in his early years of isolation Stroud wrote a comprehensive and very critical book of the penal system, *Looking Outward*. Prison authorities confiscated the book. It was never published.

In the fall of 1959, just after his move to the medical unit, Stroud appeared in court for the first time since 1920. He and his lawyer had filed a petition to contest the sentence given some 41 years earlier. Federal Judge Walter Huxman ruled the original order of secluding Stroud to solitary confinement for life was illegal. Then ruled the matter moot. "There are features in the case that challenge the imagination and even shock the court, but what is done is done," wrote Judge Huxman. At the end Stroud tasted bitter victory.

Four years later, on November 21, 1963, his heart gave out. He died while still imprisoned in Springfield at the age of 74. Considering the decades he spent in solitary, Stroud accomplished much during his long life. But some question President Wilson's commutation of Stroud's death sentence. Through hindsight they see it as a curse.

DIARY OF A PLANT

(composite diary entries of extended lockdown prisoners)

12/25/87: One minute past midnight. It's hard for me to believe it's my 15th Christmas in this cell. It just goes on and on. Same thing day after day. I wonder how I've changed? I wonder if I'm crazy? Crazy people don't know that they're crazy, so maybe I am. But who would know? Who would care? Am I gonna make it another year? Do I care if I do or don't? — Merry Christmas to me.

1993, the *Associated Press* recounted the kidnapping incident of 68-year-old millionaire Harvey Weinstein. Weinstein was held captive for 12 days in a dark 8-foot deep utility shaft. His captors shackled him and covered the shaft with a heavy metal plate. "I begged my captors to take me out and shoot me and leave me on the road where my family could find my body," he told reporters shortly after his rescue by police. He recalled how he combated the solitude in the dark pit that nearly drove him mad. In his mind he wrote "the greatest autobiography never written," and in visualizing his past he found that "it was astounding the memories that would come back," and the clarity of those memories.

Monotony is perhaps the number one foe of a cell confined inmate. For a person planted in a cell, every tomorrow is yesterday. "The only thing that changes is whatever change you can construct on your own," Woodfox said. "I have routines that I follow, but there are times I change up, deliberately change, because I get tired of being so predictable to myself. . . . Basically, there's nothing in CCR for an individual to pursue to improve himself. You can hang onto the TV from the time it comes on to the time it goes off. Or you can get involved in the games that make up prison culture. That's what makes it most difficult for me, fighting not to get caught up in these negative pursuits."

In CCR there are four TVs to each tier. The prisoner must view through his cell bars the TV

closest to his cell. They can be turned on at 6 am and must be turned off at midnight during the week. They can stay on all night on the weekends. Needless to say, they get a lot of use in this isolation unit.

Woodfox believes those who can control their use of TV can use it to help themselves. "I think the TVs probably fit in more to keep some of these people sane. TV is an escape. It's going to distort their mind unless they have a strong foundation. But you can be objective and always realize that this is fantasy. I really do think these TVs do a lot right now," he said.

There are those who will disagree with Woodfox's opinion of TV watching. Which station to watch, and how loud to set the volume are sources of contention and stress. In addition, most planted inmates have no contact with reality; nothing to balance the endless fantasy marching across the screen. Nonetheless, when the only question is whether or not you will die before you go insane, the demons on the set are more benign than the demons in the mind.

"I think now and in some instances, cell confinement for certain periods of time is a necessary evil," admits Woodfox. "Just not for years and years. It's something like a Jekell and Hyde situation. Maybe I've developed all the emotions and attitudes society and the DOC wanted me to develop—anger, bitterness, the thirst to see someone suffer the way I'm suffering, the revenge factor and all that. But on the other hand, I've also become what they didn't want me to become. I've become a well-educated, well-disciplined, highly moral man. . . . I've become more focused on what caused me to be in this penitentiary. From the beginning it wasn't just an act on my part but an act on society's part that pretty much decided it. Being an African-American pretty much determined where I'd wind up. It's sad to say that I had to come to prison to find out there were great African-Americans in this country and in this world, and to find role models that probably contribute more now to my moral principles and social values, when I should have had these things available to me

DIARY OF A PLANT

(composite diary entries of extended lockdown prisoners)

3/4/88: I'm sick and tired of this jerk on my tier. His attitude sucks! He prides himself in being a convict, when all he really is is the classic lock down coward. Love to blow hard and heavy because he knows he's protected by his cell. He's a yes-man, a shoo-shoo'er, and believes he's a lawyer. What a piece of trash! A real nuisance to be around, and I can't help but be around him. A small punk that grows 10 feet tall once he's locked in the protection of his cell. Someday....

in school. So I feel cheated, really cheated. . . . I think what really helps me, I've never considered myself to be a criminal. I've always considered myself a political prisoner. Not in the sense that I'm here for a political crime, but in the sense I'm here because of a political system that has failed me terribly as an individual and citizen in this country."

In the ICE text, a researcher recounts his experiences at a 'winter-over station'. During his stay he clearly noticed a difference between the people who had spent many winters in the Antarctic and knew the ropes of adapting in a micro-society, and technicians on their first or second tour. The researcher found that the novice technicians spent much of their spare time in large groups, engaging in horseplay, drinking, watching TV, and pursuing other passive activities. The veterans, on the other hand, congregated in small groups of two or three close friends; devoted time and effort to personalizing their living quarters; and they were all avidly involved with hobbies, usually things having to do with the Arctic. In comparison with the CCR environment, the researcher's observations are strikingly similar. Longtime CCR prisoners are generally quiet and stay to themselves. Most pursue activities having to do with prison—working on their own cases or litigating to improve the conditions of their confinement.

cious reading; for others, extended movie watching.

Woodfox has been in a cell ten years longer than Simonis. "I've seen people go crazy, cutting themselves, hanging themselves. I've seen horrors," said Woodfox. "I've seen people do things to themselves and have other inmates do them something because they just couldn't handle being in a cell 23 hours a day." Why some adapt and progress as a person and why some don't is a mystery to proficient researchers that study micro-societies and the effects of isolation. "The reasons for these large individual differences are not fully understood, but it's believed that such factors as the subjects' genetic make-up, personality, attitudes, and perception of the immediate situation may all play some role," according to an entry in the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*.

Monotony, loneliness, the limited stimuli of sensory perception connected with long-term cell confinement causes varying changes in the mental and emotional stability of men and women who live these lives of solitude. They

ANGOLA'S LONGEST CELL- CONFINED PRISONERS

Living in a single cell 23 hours a day. Depending on the weather they receive a maximum three hours a week yard time.

YRS	NAME	PRESENT LOCATION
24	Lee Lane	Hawk Unit
23	Samuel Tropez	CCR
23	Herman Wallace	CCR
23	Robert Wilkerson	CCR
23	Albert Woodfox	CCR
18	Alvin Dillard	CCR
17	Louis Singleton	Clinical Services
14	Curtis Perkins	Clinical Services
14	Grady Brewer	Camp J
13	James Lee	Hawk Unit
13	George Sharp	Camp J
13	Dennis Lennon	CCR
13	Paul Billiot	CCR
13	Jon Simonis	CCR
12	Dale Albert	CCR

DIARY OF A PLANT

(composite diary entries of extended lockdown prisoners)

2/17/94: Oh! My back. These cold mornings affect it more than anything. Hmmm. Twenty-years ago I could hop out of this bunk, do 200 push-ups, 100 sit-ups and wait for the breakfast tray. Those days are gone. I'm getting old quick. Too quick. And I haven't even saw the world yet. Hell, I haven't even saw the prison!

exist in a pool of helplessness and hopelessness. They do not know how to escape their cell confinement, and they do not know if they ever will. It is a stressful life that invites instances of differing degrees of paranoia. In such a condensed world your mind is apt to play tricks on you. As stated in the 1866 report on solitary confinement: "he feels that 'his hand is against every man and every man's hand is against him. . . .'"

There is no doubt that long-term cell confinement in CCR is a punishing existence. Yet, one cannot overlook the positive attitude most of these prisoners exhibit. Yes, they have been planted in cells, but as such they have rooted themselves in self-evaluation, education, spiritual reformation; captured the meaning of self-growth, and capitalized on it. They have done this to preserve their sanity. The solitary existence they live has forced them to take root. Their survival in the face of solitude is astounding.

The American penal system was created on a pretension that solitary confinement is good for the soul. The stark loneliness that struck deep into the criminal was thought to bring his immorality to light, reforming his dastardly ways. It was not long before two obvious repercussions surfaced—mental, physical and emotional imbalance, and economic inefficiency. Thereafter the conditions of solitary confinement took on gradual modification. Today, single cell long-term confinement is used for punishment and control. For that purpose. . . it works.

HEADING BACK TO WALNUT STREET

The nation is in an uproar over crime. State and federal legislators are taking away millions and millions of dollars from domestic programs to build more and more prisons. Society doesn't seem to mind, and is willing to pay more for harsher prison conditions. Case in point: H-Unit at the Oklahoma State Prison in McAlester. While state officials call their newly designed state-of-the-art maximum security unit a wizardry in prison control, prisoners confined to the unit see it as a cement tomb. Both sides agree it is a bold step by the state to see just how far they can go in isolating prisoners.

According to a January 15, 1995 article in the *New York Times*, the new unit, which can hold 400 prisoners, is mostly buried in the ground. Air is ventilated through ducts, and no natural lighting exists in the living quarters. Most cells are occupied by two prisoners who share 116.9 square feet—a violation of ACA requirements of 80 square feet per prisoner when confinement exceeds ten hours a day. The double-cell occupancy causes significant psychological stress between the two prisoners who cannot escape one another's presence.

H-Unit inmates are confined to their cells 23 hours a day during the week, and 24 hours a day on

weekends. They are allowed a 15 minute shower three times a week. Weather permitting, inmates are allowed one hour a day on the yard during the week. They spend it in individual 23 x 22 foot concrete boxes that have 18-foot concrete walls topped with heavy mesh wire.

Because there are no windows in the living quarters of H-Unit, these prisoners exist in a world of cement—they have only memories of a blade of grass, or a tree, or even the plain dirt ground. Their only contact with guards while locked in their cells is through an intercom system, or at feeding time when a guard opens a slot in the door to deliver the trays. When the intercom is on prisoners can speak to the guards in the control center. When it is off they can speak to one another, or to themselves.

Amnesty International is protesting the living conditions at H-Unit. Will the group's pleas be enough to change the conditions? Probably not. Not at a time when control, not tolerable conditions, is foremost in the minds of prison officials and society. H-Unit is a few steps away from America's first prison, Walnut Street Jail, which spread more insanity than salvation.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

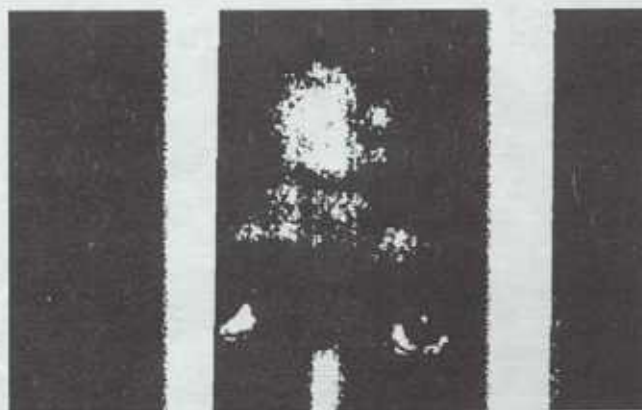
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DIARY OF A PLANT

10/10/94: Happy Birthday to me, again.
Don't ask.