

# The Soledad 'Games'

*By Tim Findley*

The light scattered down in sharp iron shadows from the top of "B" wing in Soledad Prison and spread itself flatly over the little group of inmates huddled around the bolted-down table.

Mapes sat hunched over for a long time. His blue knit watch cap was rolled tight over his eyebrows so that the dark sockets of shadow it cast made it hard to tell if he were even awake.

"You ain't gonna learn nothing," he said to the reporter finally, in a tone dry and flat, but not threatening.

"You won't learn ----, unless you live here. man, because everybody here wears a mask for everything they do, and the only time you take it off is when you go in that cell at night and they lock up and you try to remember who you really are."

Like any other man in almost any other place, what an inmate needs to know most at Soledad is what is expected of him. The same goes for a pris-

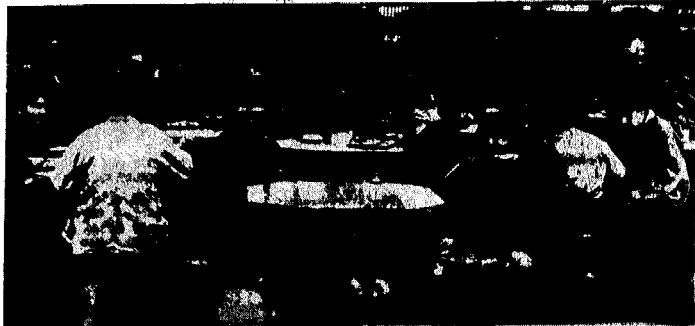
on staff, themselves part-time prisoners in the sketchy science of penology.

"When I first started on this job," said a 10-year veteran correctional officer, "we had a lot more contact with the inmate. Sure, our job was primarily custody, but it was also getting to know these men and their problems. Now, that's the counselor's job. I hate to even use the word, but I'm becoming more of a 'guard' than I was ten years ago."

"They keep wanting us to take on these custody jobs, like covering the hall at noon," complained one of the non-uniformed correctional counselors.

"I mean, how can I establish some rapport with an inmate and then be prepared to beef him an hour later for something he does on the way to chow?"

"You never know what you're supposed to do," said an inmate. "I haven't known what I'm



Inmates at a Soledad chow hall — what they need to know most is what's expected of them

## Behind Prison Bars

# The 'Games' at Soledad

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supposed to do in here for years."

"Rehabilitation" as a functional definition of a prison's purpose has been dropped from the vocabulary of most persons associated with prisons — including inmates — by tacit agreement that it means nothing.

There is general agreement that an inmate will find his own level in the maze of vocational, educational and counseling programs offered in prison and decide privately for himself about his future.

His release from prison may depend partially on the time he has put in and the programs in which he has participated.

### Partnership

The result for men who run and work at prisons like Soledad is an awkward partnership of custody and treatment, with resulting confusion not only for the inmate, but for the staff as well.

For almost any change in his status, from transferring to another prison, to being sent to "the hole," to receiving word on his parole data, an inmate must see his correctional counselor.

The counselors — men in civilian clothes assigned one to each wing at Soledad — are also given a kind of paternal role, helping inmates with individual problems and concerns.

Many of the counselors are former correctional officers, although increasingly they are young criminologists or sociologists in corrections for the first time.

### Unlimited

Their power over the details of an inmate's life in prison are virtually unlimited, and the guideline for dealing with individual inmate problems is principally based on "whatever works."

To the inmate, however, what the counselor says in his various reports often means the difference in how long a man stays in prison, and it's common knowledge among the inmates that when dealing with counselors you "tell 'em what they want to hear."

"Dig," a black inmate said with a scornful crack in his voice, "I go to my counselor and he wants to know am I guilty of my crime. I told him I was, and he gets out this Bible and asks me if I'd like him to read from it. I figure that's his trip, so I shine him on and let him do it, man, because I'll do anything that will help me get out of here."

The counselor, a conservative-looking veteran in the Department of Corrections, is a fundamentalist Baptist.

"Any man who adopts the Christian philosophy as part of his way of life won't be back in prison," he said with conviction. "That's if he wants. If he doesn't, then fine, I'll leave it alone."

### AA Role

"You're in Alcoholics Anonymous, eh?" said another counselor, interviewing a man prior to his appearance before the Adult Authority. "What's the first rule of AA?"

The inmate looked at him blankly for a minute, then struggled with a rote axiom that sounded roughly correct.

"I know that doesn't mean anything," the counselor said later, "but it gives me some idea if he was even listening in those sessions."

"See, you can hear about all this stuff like urine in the food and somebody getting snuffed

## Men and Women We Lock Up

Who are the men and women the people of California keep locked up?

Next week, *Chronicle* reporters Charles Howe and Tim Findley reveal what they discovered about the convicts they met during their three months inside California's prisons. There are the "Nazis," the racists and the homosexuals who rule by fear. There is also the new breed of prisoner — the revolutionaries.

Howe and Findley also went into the worst places in the prisons. In official language they're "adjustment centers," but inside the prisons they're called "the hole" — monkey cages gone mad, where inmates scream in rage and throw fecal matter at their keepers.

Their searing profiles of the prisoners begin Monday in *The Chronicle*.

and like that, and maybe that has happened once or twice, but don't listen to that as being the problem in here," said a tired-looking 50-year-old inmate with a "life top."

"It's all the little ---, all the games they play with your mind. Each officer has a different set of rules; every counselor wants to hear you say something different. Except none of 'em really listen, they just want to see how well you play the game."

### Special Group

Correctional Officer Thomas Martinez recently began a staff-inmate "Special Communications Group" after writing a letter to former Soledad Deputy Superintendent W. G. Black.

"As for myself," he said in the letter, "I have reached the conclusion that 'hard-core bitter minds' on both the staff and inmate sides of the fence have contributed greatly to a very serious lack of communication, which . . . has contributed to, if not being the main reason for most of the tension and incidents that have occurred in the past."

"What's really happening here is the blind leading the blind," said Carstairs, a prematurely balding inmate with a college education he makes use of as an instructor in the education department at Soledad.

"Nobody really knows who runs this place. I've been here three years and I've only seen the superintendent once. I'm just doing my own number and giving them their time, and I hope they choke on it."

### Monotone

The raspy loudspeaker went on again in "B" wing, the monotone no different at 9:30 p.m. than it was at 6 a.m.

"All inmates report to your quarters. Start Count. Start Count."

Doors thudded shut with heavy echoes intermingled with the sounds of toilets flushing and men shouting meaningless remarks as the officer walked down the tier, peering in each cell and counting one by one.