

The following is a copy of an article which I had published in the California Prison Focus magazine, in 2009. It got me in a lot of trouble. The guards searched (read: utterly destroyed) my cell twelve times in fourteen days, in response to it. I mean, they wrecked it. But the funny thing is that, after the first time or two, I didn't even have more than a handful of property left for them to toss around. They had to be content with merely destroying my mattress over and over. It eventually became so absurd that I had to just laugh and shake my head at their juvenile antics. I guess it didn't really teach me the lesson they thought it would.

When I finally asked them why they took such umbrage, they told me that it was because this article had been published on the internet. They were afraid their families would read it, and see what savages they are. I countered that I was perfectly willing to publish an apology and a retraction, if they could point to a single thing that I had said which was a lie, or factually untrue. They were unable to do so, which just made them all the madder.

Feel free to reach out to me and share your thoughts on this, or any, issue. I can be reached through my Facebook page <JasonAllenWilcox> or by snail mail:

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Thank you for taking the time to read this and to comment on it, either on my wall or via mail.

## THE Z UNIT: IT'S A ZINGER!

By Jason A. Wilcox

A hard-core yard calls for a hard-core hole [prison slang for solitary confinement], and that's what High Desert State Prison (HDSP) provides. "Z Unit" is as stark as they come. It is one of those new stand-alone Ad-Segs that are all the rage in 180s [the highest-security prison design in California] today. The cells are cramped and spartan, without even a desk, mirror or outside window to look out of. It is hard to tell what time it is, or one day from the other. The monotony is deadening.

After the courts ruled that CDCR could no longer weld us into our cells, they were forced to come up with a whole new twist. Now they not only lock our doors and tray slots, they secure them with two padlocks; one on the tray slot and one holding the door closed. The beds are Pelican Bay-style concrete bunks, with no pillows, and they have two 10"x24" cubby holes in the base of the bottom bunk to store our meager possessions.

Despite the 12-March-2007 memo from the Director of Adult Institutions ordering them to do so, Z Unit staff openly brag that they'll never allow us to have our TVs, radios or personal property. It took me over four months just to get my address book, shower shoes and dictionary out of property storage, and they refuse to issue me the rest.

Not content to deprive us of entertainment from TVs and radios, they also limit us to one book, magazine and newspaper. Any excess reading material is stored in our lockers, which are at the front of our tier, near the showers, where we can never see them, or observe what's being done to them. We must beg, wheedle, cajole, coax and plead with staff for the "privilege" of exchanging a book we have already read for one of the newer ones

from our storage lockers. It can take weeks or months to find a cop who is willing to walk his fat butt down the tier and do an exchange for us. The rest of the turnkeys just scowl and snarl, "Not right now."

Recreation consists of being placed in 8'x15' chain link dog cages, one cell per cage, three times a week, for three or four hours at a shot. It's the only time (except for three showers per week) that we get to come out of our cells, so we try not to miss it. Of course, we have to undergo a butt naked visual cavity search, both going there and coming back, but it's worth it just to get out of our cells. Unlike most Ad Segs, they are pretty consistent in giving us our cage time.

The cage itself is barren, except for a toilet/sink combo in one corner. In contrast to some states, California does not provide board games or exercise equipment to us. We can't even get a view of our surroundings because ten feet from our cages there is a fence with green netting, designed solely to block our view. (Or is it to block the outside world from seeing us?) They forbid the wearing of thermals out there after March 31<sup>st</sup>, no matter how deep the snow is.

The cages are totally exposed to the elements, so we get sunburned in the summer and frozen in the winter. The only good part is a piece of aluminum that covers a third of the enclosed top of the cage. It casts a weak shadow we can take turns standing under, to avoid the unrelenting desert sun. No guards are posted while we are out there, so you better be sure to have your heat strokes or exercise-induced cardiac arrests in your cell, where medical help is theoretically available.

Whether that medical help is any better inside the cell is open for debate. John Clark, RN, is entrusted with looking after our medical needs. He fails in that duty. He'd rather spend all his time leading bull sessions with the guards, than doing his job, even if that means allowing prisoners to die from lack of medical care. Why should he care? He gets paid the

same, no matter how he acts. He refuses to do rounds, or to triage patients. He won't pick up sick call slips, and we have to file appeals to get our meds refilled or to see a doctor. That can take months. X-rays take at least an additional month, by which time any broken bones will have set wrongly, ensuring us a future full of pain and suffering.

As of this writing, it has been four weeks since we've been issued clean sheets. All of our other laundry is full of holes, or way too small to wear. My cellie was given a blanket coated in pepper spray and he's been trying to exchange it for a clean one for six weeks and counting. Over half of all CDCR convicts have Hepatitis C, but the bulls refuse to give us Ajax or disinfectant to clean our cells and toilets with. When we complained, they decided to express their lack of concern for our lives by instituting a joke: once a week they come by and offer us a one ounce shot of Windex, telling us to clean our cells with that. No other means are provided to clean our living quarters, in clear violation of CCR, Title 15, Section 3060.

Older cons used to advise me to "drink a lot of water and walk slow," but the water out of the tap has excessive amounts of arsenic in it, so what should we do? The water also has particles floating in it. The overpaid babysitters who "guard" us claim they'll have the problem fixed "any decade now." We are forced to choose between being dehydrated and drinking poison.

The food is cold when it is served to us, and gloves/hairnets are not used. They used to unwrap everything in our lunches, allow it to spoil, and then serve it to us. But after many, many cases of food poisoning, they now leave everything in its original wrapper, except for popping a hole in our bread bags, so that it will go stale on us. Regarding vegetables, we are given dirty carrots and the stems from broccoli plants. No-one knows what they do with the green, leafy broccoli tops. They either throw them away or feed them to livestock. Either way, we don't see them. And no-one knows why we never get corn, peas or other nutritious veggies.

The law library here is woefully inadequate. Books that we need are either missing, or so badly damaged as to be unusable. To prevent us from working on writs in our cells, they've passed an underground regulation that prevents us from buying manila envelopes. We can't buy them at canteen, nor can we buy them and take them back to our cells from the law library. This means we can't mail our writs to the courts. I've appealed this new rule and hope to win it, since it's so obviously illegal. As for reading books, they have a small cart full of books that they've confiscated from us convicts over the years, and they bring it down the tier every couple of weeks. It's happened twice in the last month and a half. We are allowed to check out one book at a time. Unless we are out of our cell for some reason when they come down the tier. Then, we are just out of luck until the next time they grace us with their presence.

Staff commonly throw away our 602s [grievance forms]. The appeals coordinator searches for any pretext, no matter how bogus or false, to reject our appeals. When I 602ed her for refusing to process our appeals, she refused to process it! Talk about adding insult to injury; she claims that Appeals Coordinators are immune from 602s, which is a blatant lie that, as the person responsible for 602s, she should well know. I sent her sarcastic and false response to her boss, the Chief of Inmate Appeals in Sacramento, but he just threw it away. The "code of silence" is alive and well in CDCR!

To sum it all up, this is a miserable place, made more so by uncaring, sadistic guards. CDCR claims HDSP is where they house the so-called "worst of the worst" mainline [general population] (Except for the "B" Facility here, which recently was converted into a Protective Custody yard.). Because of our perceived reputations, HDSP doesn't pull any punches when it comes to maltreating us. If you are up for transfer to HDSP, you have my condolences. You won't like "High Drama!"

How bad is life here in Z Unit? It is so horrible that I actually look forward to going to the Pelican Bay or Corcoran SHUs, as that will be an improvement over this place, a sort of vacation. Think about that for awhile.

If you are a lawyer, social activist or otherwise a concerned human being who would like to help out in some small way, feel free to contact me. Thank you.

The End.