



— Staff photo by Dan Loftin

## *Concrete Slab for a Bed*

SPRINGFIELD, Tenn. — Separated from adult offenders, a juvenile housed in the Robertson County Jail's drunk tank sits on a concrete bunk where he sleeps. He must also use the filthy commode and sink unit in the cell.

# Juveniles Occupy Dingy Drunk Tank At Robertson Jail

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SPRINGFIELD, Tenn. — Two juveniles, one serving time for concealing stolen property and the other for being drunk, spent the past weekend in the Robertson County Jail's drunk tank.

The particularly dingy cell housing the two 17-year-olds has three concrete bunks, an ancient topless commode with a sink on top, and a hazardous-looking makeshift lamp with exposed wiring.

"We fixed this ourselves," the youngster serving a 60-day sentence for concealing stolen property said proudly as he pulled an electric cord to show how the lamp was turned on and off.

THE CONDITION of the drunk tank cell — with paint peeling off its walls — is like that of most other cells at the jail, which was built in 1967.

Its physical condition and the fact that juveniles are housed in the drunk tank are just two of the things that probably will come under fire when a Tennessee Corrections Institute annual report on county jails is released tomorrow.

"We've got nothing to hide," said P.R. West, chief deputy at the Robertson County Jail.

"We can't change it anyway."

West's comment came exactly two days after the chief of correctional facilities inspection for the Tennessee Corrections Institute said conditions under which many Tennessee county jails operate is a blatant violation of human rights.

L.E. (BUDDY) ROYSTON said there are minimum standards for jails in Tennessee and those that comply get \$8 a day per inmate to house state prisoners. Those not complying get \$6 a day.

"There's nothing we can do about the physical plant here," West said. "But administratively, we comply with the standards."

One of the minimum standards in Tennessee is that "there shall be separation — by sight and sound — among males and females, adults and juveniles."

"When adequate space is not available for secure separation, consideration shall be given to the boarding of prisoners in another facility that can securely house them," the regulations read.

"THE WOMEN that we get are segregated from the men by sight, but not by sound," West said. "Our main problems here are that we need better quarters to house women, juveniles and problem prisoners."

He said those prisoners who need to be isolated from other prisoners are often thrown in the second drunk tank.

Sometimes — especially on weekends — as many as five juveniles are housed in the drunk tank where the two 17-year-olds were found when a *Tennessean* reporter-photographer team toured the Robertson County Jail.

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— Staff photo by Dan Loftin

## Exercise Facilities Lacking

SPRINGFIELD, Tenn. — Howard Jackson, left, and Franklin Knight, two Robertson County Jail inmates, spend long hours in their cell with nothing to do but talk and read since the jail has no exercise facilities except for so-called "day rooms" where inmates eat at picnic tables.

# Robertson County Jail Houses Juveniles in Dingy Drunk Tank

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"A LACK OF funds is the problem you have with making improvements," West said.

"We've met with some of the County Commission members, and there's the possibility of renovating the present jail or even building a new one.

"You can ask for funds all day out that doesn't mean you are going to get them. We've fulfilled our obligation. But right now there are no funds available to do any renovating.

"We've also made available a copy of the state's minimum standards for jails to the County Commission."

Robertson County Executive Emerson Meggs verified that the Robertson County Commission members have been made aware of certain minimum standards for county jails across the state.

"I'VE BEEN in office about two months and we've begun a study to see what the state is doing and also what other counties are doing," said Meggs, who added:

"I'm not going to admit to anything, except to say we're studying the situation and then we'll make a determination what we might do locally."

During Sunday's tour of the Robertson County facility, two inmates — one the jail cook — were being housed in the jail's laundry room.

In addition to the washer and dryer, there were bunk beds for each of the two prisoners and shelves overhead to store their belongings.

**PRISONERS** — except for those housed in the drunk tanks and women — normally eat in what are called day rooms. The day rooms are a little larger than regular living cells, having two picnic type tables and a bench on either side of the table. The day rooms also serve as exercise areas.

There was no exercise area for the juveniles nor for the female inmates at the jail.

"If we get three to four women or five juveniles, we're hurting," said Jimmy Jones, a jailer.

Royston, the chief of correctional facilities inspection, said he does not like to see makeshift housing arrangements.

IT IS NOT a good idea to have juveniles sleeping on concrete bunks, he said.

"Housing juveniles in jails is a big issue these days," Royston said.

Another seemingly potential problem at the Robertson County Jail is the fact that the jailer has to open manually certain cell doors with keys to let inmates come and go.

"Yes, if there was a fire we would have to let them out this way," Jones said.

Royston said most of Tennessee's jails conduct no fire drills

and have no evacuation diagrams despite the Maury County blaze more than five years ago that killed 42 persons. The comment came after yesterday's jail fire that killed 27 inmates in Biloxi, Miss.

ROYSTON SAID 89% of Tennessee jails conduct no fire drills and only 38% have mapped out evacuation procedures.

"What happened today in Biloxi was tragic; what happened five years ago at the Maury County jail was tragic," he said yesterday. "While these tragedies will occur, you can't help but wonder what preventive measures could be used. What are we not doing that we should be doing?"

"I am outraged that 27 people are dead today who weren't dead yesterday."

He said recent figures show 46% of Tennessee's jails do not have more than one exit, 59% have drafted no plans in case of emergencies and only 61% have smoke and heat detectors.

THE INSPECTOR said there is still polyurethane in many jails.

"You would think that after 42 people die, they would be in there the next day tearing all that stuff out," said Royston. "That's what you'd think, but it isn't so."

"We have made some improvements in the last five years but there's still a long way to go."