

The Lumper

By Presidio Staff Writer - 1965

One of the least mentioned and unnoticed job assignments in this or any other penal institution is that of the cellhouse lumper. Most duties of a lumper vary anywhere from menial chores to the delivering of the mail. This job is officially designated by the classification, "Institutional Convenience."



Hot water is delivered from cell to cell by the lumper who carries a three-gallon, garden-type bucket around the tier twice each evening.



Changing sheets and pillow slips for some 1200 men involves a lot of collecting by the tier-lumper.

The title of "Lumper" is rather unusual because it does not indicate the nature of the duties included in the job. The true origin of this nickname is somewhat obscure, but according to the general knowledge of some of the old-timers, the name became attached in the following manner: the first inmates to assume such general duties, necessary for the smooth operation of any cellhouse, found themselves with numerous errands which involve carrying miscellaneous items from one cell, or tier-range to another. While in transport, many of the items carried which involve carrying by the inmate created a noticeable "lump" in the man's pocket, shirt, or coat; and during those early days of Iowa's then forming prison system, it was very much against the rules to hand, carry or transport anything from one cell to another. Hence, and probably beginning in jest, the work "Lumper" was coined because of these apparent lumps and it became

the Iowa job-name for inmates on a cellhouse assignment.



Inmate lumpers sort letters and packages each Monday thru Saturday and they are then delivered on a clock-like basis to the individual cells.



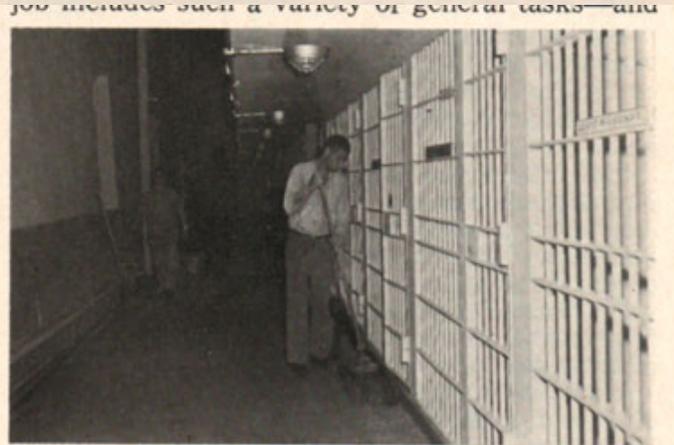
At times the lumper will aid the kitchen crew in their task of feeding men who are confined to their cells.

Inmates living in one of the four cellhouses require the basic supplies that are necessary in any home, and these items are supplied by the institution: hot water, clean bedding and towels, paper, soap, and other essential, to mention a few. These necessities are made available and, in most instances, distributed by the lumper to the individual cells. Hot water is furnished at various times of the day by the lumper who carries a three-gallon, garden-type pail from cell to cell on his tier-range. At meal time he will aid in the serving of food to inmates who are confined to their cells for any number of reasons. Library books and magazines are regulated by the prison library - the distribution and collection of this literature, however, is handled by the tier lumper. Monday and Thursday mornings of each week they pick up the magazines and deliver them to the library where they are processed and upon their return by the lumpers, redistributed. Library books are similarly treated on Tuesday and Friday mornings. Clean bedding and towels are furnished once a week for inmates, and these items are also managed by the lumper. The general janitorial tasks of the cellhouses are tended by lumpers who sweep and mop once a day - this cleaning does not include the individual cells, as it is upto the resident inmate to care for his own cell. The chore which is most anticipated gby other inmates is that of the lumpers' delivery of the mail. Each Monday through Saturday afternoon he distributes the letters and newspapers to each individual cell on his tier-range or assigned area. Every morning the exchange of newspapers (which is substantial in number and usually of various hometown and out-of-state editions) among the inmates takes place in the following manner: if an inmate wishes to send his hometown paper to a friend, he marks the top of it with the recipient's "cell-number address" -for instance, 19-G-25 would indicate to the person sorting papers that this particular one goes to cellhouse #19, G Range, Cell #25. The Head Lumper of each cellhouse must then sort the many newspapers and

exchange them with the lumper in charge of either of the other three cellhouses for individual delivery.



Magazines and books are delivered to the library for exchange as a part of the lumper's work-a-day routine.



One of the regular tasks which confronts the lumper early each morning is that of mopping the floor and tier-ranges.

At present there are a total of twenty-seven lumpers for the four cellhouses - differing in number for each cellhouse. These men are responsible to and under the supervision of their respective Cell-house Captain, who directs and assigns all lumper-duties. Oftentimes, general chores and errands that are required by the Cell-house Captain fall within the lumper's province.

The hours that a lumper is on duty are specific for certain chores, but due to the variety of errands and work in general, he has a liberal amount of spare time. He begins his job early in the morning with the distribution of hot water, and, depending upon the day, then perhaps makes the collection of sheets and pillow slips which are earlier placed between the cell-bars by the inmates. After weeping and mopping, he may have a free hour or two, before his next chore, to follow his own pursuits. The on-again-off-again work schedule of a lumper continues until his evening lockup, which is generally between eight and nine o'clock.

However necessary these duties may be, this particular job-assignment has no pay scale. The job includes such a variety of general tasks - and in the sporadic execution of the same - that it would be difficult to make a comparison of this assignment with others; however, the absence of prison wages on the lumper job is not representative of the other institutional assignments.