

# Paremoremo: the guards say please

PAREMOREMO made the headlines last year when a group of inmates took three prison officers hostage, injuring one, in its most serious violent incident since it opened two years ago. But New Zealand's much-vaunted—and much criticised—maximum security prison was a talking point long before it was built. People concerned with prisoners' welfare described the prison as a concrete and electronics jungle, where men had no privacy. Reports of closed circuit television cameras constantly scanning each inmate day and night made the prison seem grossly inhuman—so that after last year's outbreak many people muttered "I told you so". I spent two days inside to see what the prison was really like—and became the first woman reporter to see over the jail that holds the country's "top crims". These are the men the prison psychologist describes as "every-one's concern, but no one's responsibility". No one, that is, but the prison staff who are responsible for keeping them away from the rest of us, and hopefully, rehabilitating men who in many cases make a career out of crime.

By ROSEMARY McLEOD

**T**HEY made me sign the visitors' book, and I became the first woman reporter to see over Paremoremo.

Men were marshalled from the loos in their cells for fear of offending a lady, but blushes were still in store for me and a young Maori caught in his underpants and private tattoos.

"Wow!" he said, and I didn't dare return the compliment.

It's just as well I wasn't playing the role of sweet young thing. It wouldn't have paid off anyway, even with me tactfully clad from neck to toes.

A woman in such circumstances. You can forget about Elizabeth Fry acts among the "top crims". They'll see through you anyway.

When a Government architect set out to design Paremoremo he was told to imagine each prisoner had a gun, a hacksaw blade, a ladder, rope, and a stick of gelignite.

So it's the safest place in New Zealand to be locked up in.

Electronic control means inmates have greater freedom of movement than in other prisons.

This leads deputy superintendent Sid Ward to say there's less regimentation in Paremoremo than in any other jail he's worked in.

I passed the classification block, where prisoners are to be sorted out when they arrive.

"How long are you doing?" one of them called as I walked past.

With him was one of New Zealand's most famous criminals. He was carrying a copy of "Mad" magazine.

Men have few personal items in their cells. But nearly every cell has a photograph of a girlfriend or beaming bride, and a few Christmas cards.

Prisoners can tune in to three radio stations.

Radio Hauraki is one of them.

In most cells there's a pile of paperback, usually cowboy stories.

As we walked past the cells one man asked the deputy superintendent for a new pair of sandshoes.

Another asked for a private talk with him.

Next day I saw him waiting outside Mr Ward's office.

Mr Ward makes a habit of walking round among the prisoners so that they have access directly to the top if they have a grievance.

There was a quick salute for my benefit behind his back as we left classification centre, but he probably wouldn't have minded if he'd seen it.

Bad language was the officers' chief worry as they took me round.

I didn't hear any.

The cell blocks have a corridor down each side, so no one can look directly out a window.

But the sun still manages to get into the cells, through the mesh.

There's a certain amount of privacy. Scrutiny of the interior of a cell can only be attempted by leaning up against the cell doors.

And contrary to popular belief the "big brother" television eyes are not in-

stalled in the cells. I looked.

Showers are at the end of the cell blocks. Men can shower every day without supervision — except in certain sections of the prison.

At the moment "A" and "B" blocks are like that. "C" block has yet to be opened, and it will hold the best behaved prisoners who could be transferred out to other institutions.

So far 113 men have been transferred to less secure establishments.

"D" block houses the worst behaved men — some of whom are still awaiting trial after last year's incident.

Here men are let out of their cells only one at a time, and have three guards as escort.

Security was strengthened after the outbreak.

The small punishment block holds men who have broken prison rules.

Conditions there are harsh. The men spend all day in their cells — except for an hour in individual exercise yards — without a mattress during the daytime.

They have no radio, though they can read. Meals are served in the cells.

Two cells have double doors for men who are violent or noisy.

Each block has a hobby room in which men can paint, make baskets and rugs, or do needlework and tapestry.

**E**ACH day starts at 6.30 when the prisoners are woken. Half an hour later cells are opened, and the men go to breakfast.

At 8.00 there's a work parade, and the men return

to their blocks just before twelve. They have lunch, and can then go into the exercise yard or recreation area.

From 1.00 to 4.45 they return to the workshops. The evening meal is served at 5.30.

They usually take only a quarter of an hour over each meal. After that they can go to the gym, discussion groups, the library or the recreation area until they're returned to their cells and locked in at 8.30.

When Paremoremo first opened recreation areas were a problem. Prisoners dismantled the light tubes and threw them at officers.

Indoor bowling balls were hurled through the windows.

Mr Ward sighs: "We've finished with all that silly nonsense for some reason or other."

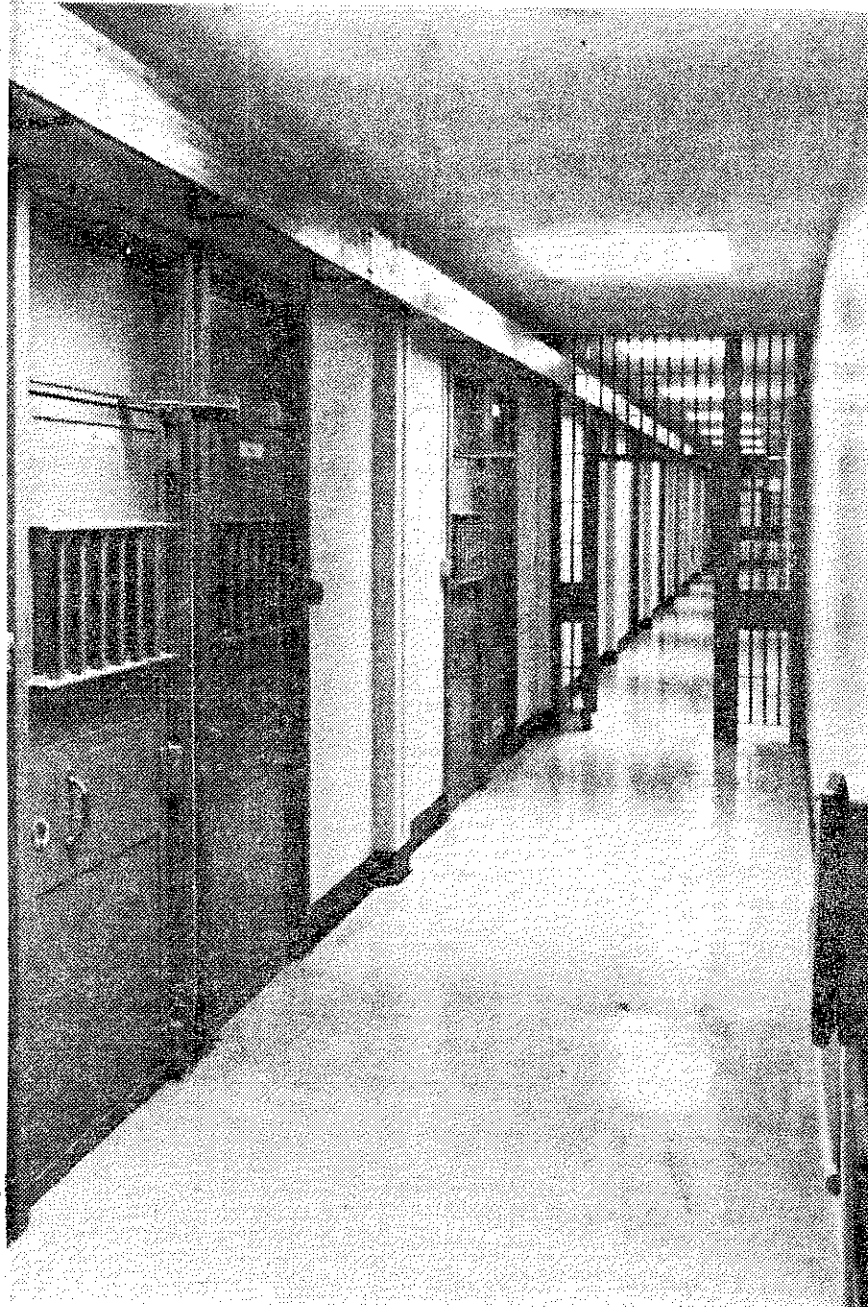
The "nonsense" can't be completely over — a meshed-in sign relating to the conduct of prisoners has been set alight and the mesh torn away.

The gym at Paremoremo is large and well equipped. "One of the things they seem to go in for is the body beautiful," Mr Ward said.

Striped sneakers are a prestige symbol among the weight lifters. They save up for them with what's left of their meagre allowance after compulsory deductions.

Every second Saturday night the prisoners see a free feature film selected by the Justice Department.

But on alternate weeks they put in a few cents each to get a film of their own choosing — provided it doesn't show too much sex, violence or crime.



THE reception area holds prisoners till they're classified and sent to the main cell blocks.

One prisoner was poring over a race book as I walked past. The prisoners bet 10-cent chocolate bars on the horses — without the staff's blessing.

I never did find out who the bookie is. But on usual odds he must have the sweetest tooth in Paremoremo.

They buy sweets, cigarettes, fruit and toilet necessities out of their pay. The prison shop sells them at near-wholesale rates.

The most a prisoner can earn on the new bonus rates and grading system, which began this year, is 56 cents a day. The least is 12 cents a day.

Sixty per cent. of his earnings are banked for his release. He can spend the rest.

Gratings range from A to I, but only a limited number can be on the top I grading.

Inmates do all the cooking. In the butchering section a tall, tattooed prisoner tossed a carving knife from hand to hand as he watched me. He kept it up to the count of three.

I sighed with relief — probably audibly — as he put it on the table and advanced.

"I don't believe I've had the pleasure," he said with considerable charm.

A prison officer told me who he was — one of New Zealand's most notorious criminals, serving a life sentence for murder.

I looked at some paintings in the corner he'd done. A still life of flowers wangled from the chapel — and his memories of the South Island coast.

He'd painted a Maori girl after the style of Goldie.

"He always painted them old, but I reckon they must have been young once," he said.

His is a trusted job. The knives in the kitchen are the only ones in the prison, and must be checked in every night.

The men eat off blue plastic plates, with white plastic cutlery.

The prison buys meat in bulk carcasses, so the butcher can save up choice parts like fillets and T-bones for treats.

Otherwise money for luxuries like icecream and fruit salad at Christmas are donated by outside groups. Magistrates are among the donors of these special funds.

**T**HERE are 23 murderers in Paremoremo. There are 135 prisoners altogether, with 96 disciplinary staff.

Laurie More, the chaplain, probably knows them better than anyone.

He has been in Paremoremo since it opened.

Every Sunday about 40 prisoners attend his Protestant service in the small chapel. They sit on wooden benches made in Mount Eden.

It's a simple room, with an illuminated altar and flowers supplied by schoolchildren.

Laurie More likes to make his services informal. The

Just before Christmas, for instance they saw "Tom Jones".

"ARE you sure you won't be too embarrassed?" Superintendent Eddie Buckley asked, as I left for the workshops.

Thanks, I said, I was sure I wouldn't be. And in fact there was less reaction from the men than there is walking past a building site in the city. These men play it cool.

All around the workshops are evidence of the prisoners' interests — and their sense of humour.

The large clock at the end of the carpentry workshop bears a printed sign saying "clock".

Newspaper cuttings of the All Black tour and Cassius Clay are pinned to large sheets on the wall along with remarkably sedate pin-ups and photographs of Miss New Zealand.

Clay is the prisoners' hero — probably because he seems to represent the underdog, and so far has managed to beat his jail sentence.

At the end of one workshop is a gaudy poster, painted by one of the in-

mates, which features a softball player hitting a ball with plenty of "pows" and "zaps".

It's advertising a fictitious Big League match starring the "All Cons" team.

Near one smiling young Maori there was a psychedelic painted ashtray on a stand.

Prisoners still make mailbags, but they hate doing it.

"I don't blame them either," said the instructor. "We had 18,000 to do before Christmas. The air was thick with dust and tempers were frayed."

We passed a young man sweeping the corridor.

"Just helping out, boss," he told my escort.

"Don't strain yourself," said the officer drily.

One man sat working with a string of fat rosary beads round his neck, looking rather like a hippy.

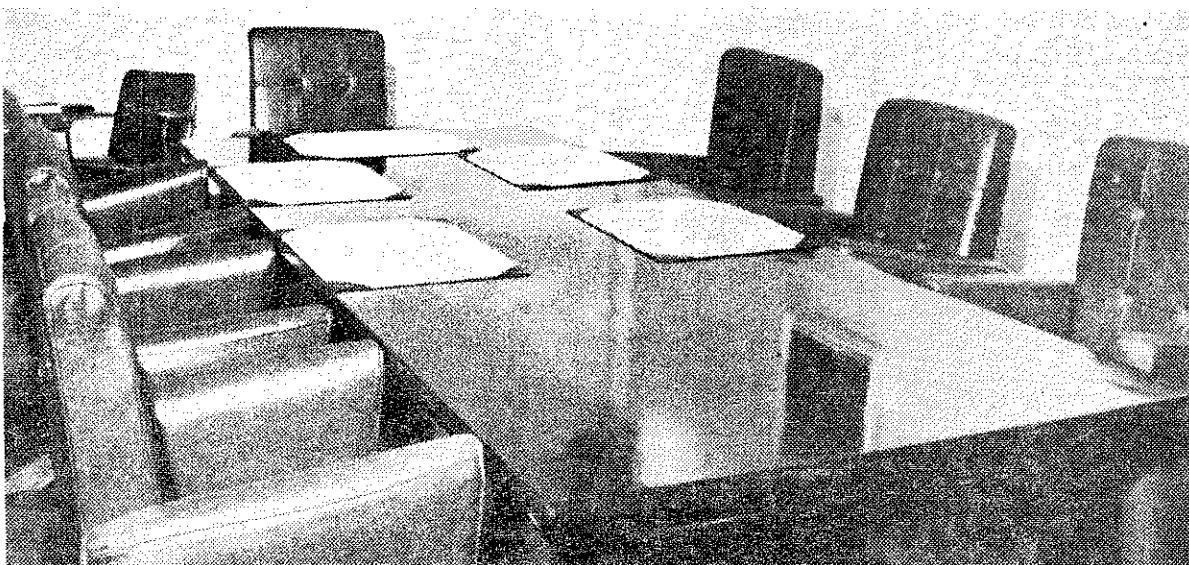
He's allowed to wear them because of his religion.

And there's a young man with a completely shaven head.

"We don't mind," said an officer. "It gets pretty hot here in summer, and anyway he'll make sure he grows it before his release."

One prisoner is made barber to each cell block. Most men have average length hair.

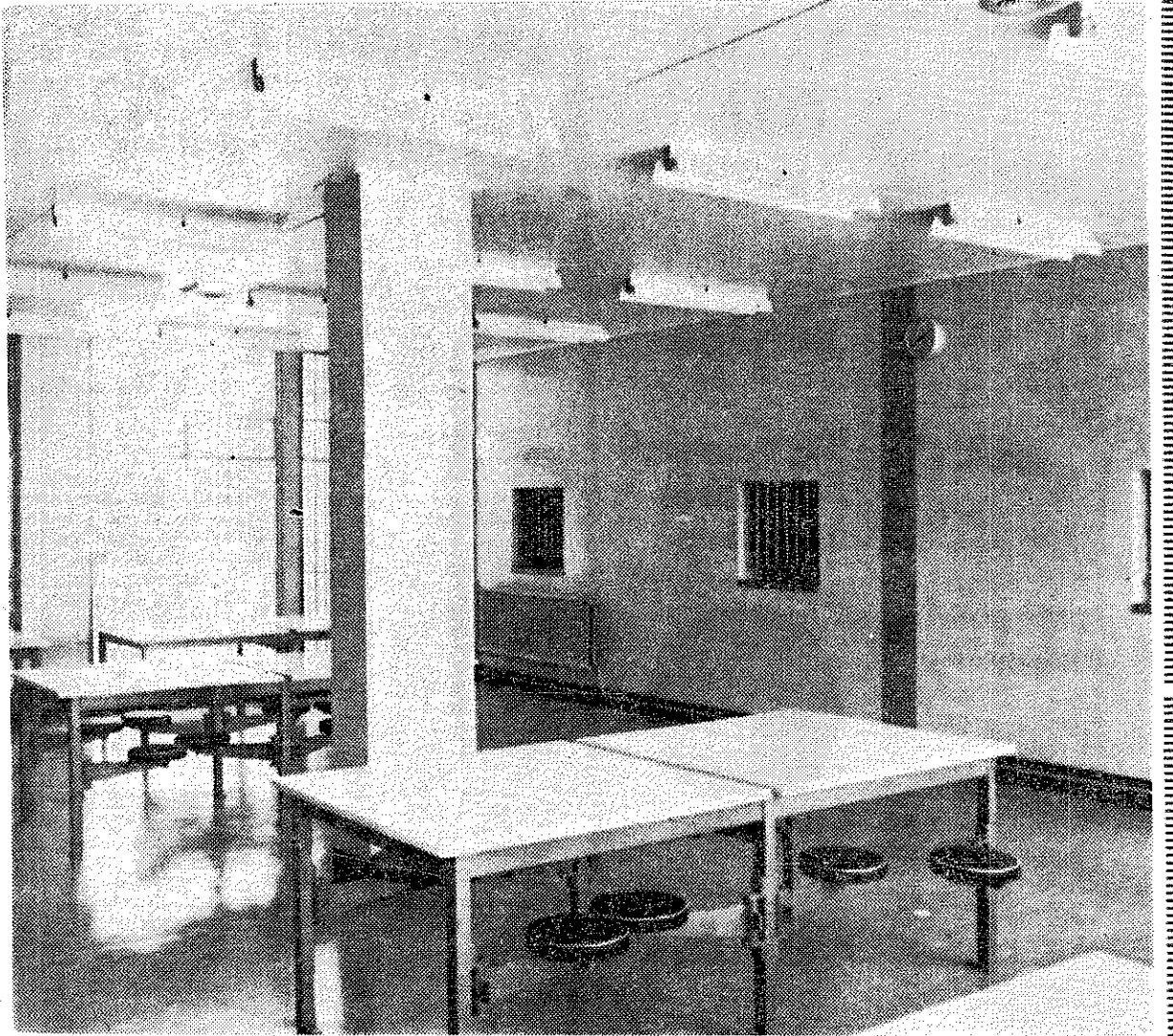
In the book shop there's a prominently displayed book cover. Its title: "I Hate Crime".



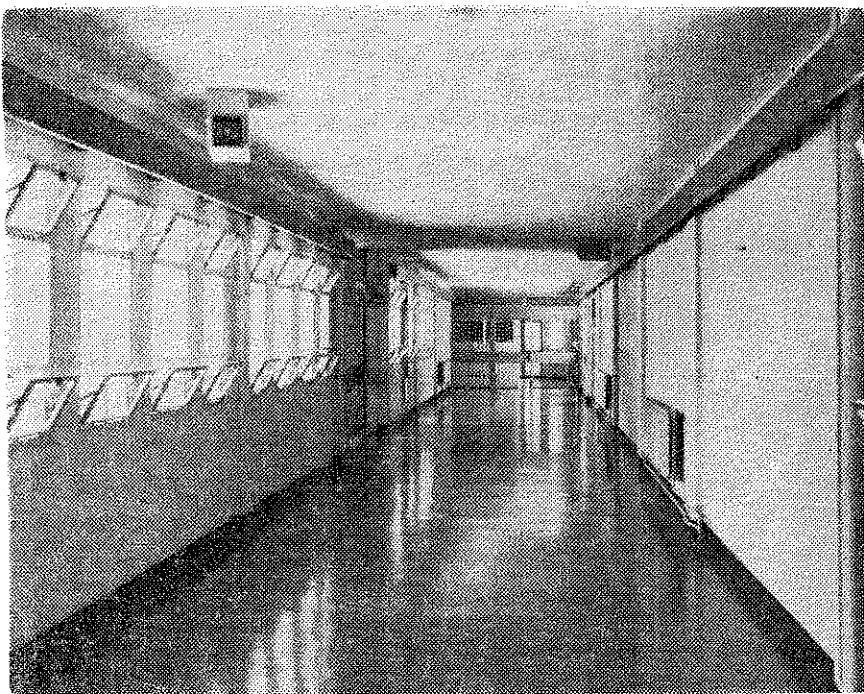
PRISONERS made all the furniture in the plush prison boardroom. They make upholstered furniture for the armed services, too.

# ... and the prisoners say thank you

## The bookie has the sweetest tooth in the jail



● INMATES eat their meals off plastic plates with plastic cutlery, under constant supervision.



● THE central control complex at the end of the corridor opens all the bar gates in the prison by remote control.

men select their own hymns, and some accompany him on the guitar while he plays the electric organ.

"It's rather ironic praying for the beauty of the world in here," he says.

So he projects scenic pictures on to a screen. It doesn't matter, he says, if they pray with their eyes open.

Sermons are often little more than an informal chat. He doesn't believe in lecturing. They've often had enough of that, he says.

"If I see one of them pull out his tobacco and start rolling a smoke, I know I've lost him," he said.

Recently he has begun bringing in outside choirs for the service. For many men, he says, it's a very emotional experience to see a woman after many years.

If that's so, they managed to hide it very successfully from me.

Prison officers say they don't know how prevalent homosexuality is in Paremoremo, but it does occur.

While I was there they separated two men working together because one was fond of the other.

It's as much a criminal offence inside as it is outside.

Mr More shares as much of his outside life as he can with the men.

Talking about a trimaran with two inmates headed them into a navigation course.

Some things about prison life make him sad — like Maori prisoners far away from home.

"I walked around the cells at Christmas asking them how it went," he said. "A man would say to me, 'Great — I had three cards.'

"That leaves me cold — why didn't he get 30?"

In one case, thanks to him, a man got a letter from home for the first time in more than 10 years.

"The other day a man came to me asking me to teach him to do long division," he said.

"I didn't go to theological school to learn to do that — but it's his immediate need. You have to build up their confidence."

Mr More arranges visitors for the men, to give them a life line back to society, but he has to be careful with selection.

The contact brings its problems, he says, when a man is released. Well-intentioned people sometimes find themselves not so keen on ex-prisoners exhibiting a natural desire to maintain the relationship.

"It's O.K. for me," Mr More says. "I'll have anyone in my home."

Sometimes he has built up great friendships where he least expected it.

One man, he says, couldn't stand him because he was a minister, and was always rude to him.

Then one day the prisoner put his head round the door and said, "Hey, Laurie, why don't you tell me to go to hell?"

Calling him by his christian name was a big start. The prisoner ended up staying at Mr More's home.

"When he left I was really sorry to see him go," Mr More said.

Later the man phoned him to sort out a problem.

He hasn't heard from him since, but "that doesn't matter".

Once a man is in Mr More's office his crime is forgotten.

"Look at it this way", he says, "Jacob was the biggest con-man in history — he fooled his own father."

"Then there was Moses, he was a killer, but he was the one God gave the Ten Commandments to — including the commandment 'Thou Shalt Not Kill'.

"Most Old Testament characters were failures. They failed, and they failed badly."

The prison psychologist, Dr Gordon Parker, echoes Mr More's ideas of the good in all the prisoners.

"We must not treat them as less than ourselves," he says.

THE offender's basic need, policy says, is to have a genuine interest taken in him.

Every prisoner knows if an officer is sincere or merely there to earn his wages.

"Just because someone is capable of murder, doesn't mean to say he's capable of facing a life sentence," he said.

"Each of us has more capability than we realise to do the thing that put him inside."

"Most capital offenders

are very safe men, and have no need whatever for maximum security.

"The public must make up its mind whether it wants them here for the cost involved."

I could see his point when I thought of the quiet, bespectacled young man who served me coffee.

He brought the tray into the office without spilling a drop, bustling round with the milk and sugar, and studiously ignoring me.

He's serving a life sentence for murdering a girl. In spite of myself, I was specially courteous.

"Help yourself to the biscuits," Mr Ward said.

"No thanks, sir, I just had a sandwich in the kitchen."

Another lifer, who cooks the meals, smuggles food to his friends.

"You could get solitary for that," Mr Ward said.

As the prisoner left he said, "Of course I didn't mean it."

Dr Parker says that people who work with the prisoners should think of them as "my fellow sinners".

"Most of these men are excellent folk whom anyone would be honoured to befriend," he said.

"That's the sheer sober truth — I'm not a sentimentalist."

"Whatever a prisoner appears to be, he wants to be a man again. And a man is not a man without being trusted."

But there's a conflict between that sentiment and the facts of prison life.

No one takes any chances.

When the men file in to the visiting rooms in white shirts and "civvy" trousers they pass through a special metal-detecting device, and visitors have their bags taken from them.

I saw some sheets and blankets hanging out cell windows.

The officers in charge were later reprimanded.

"You get used to seeing something lying about — but underneath they could be filing away at something," Mr Ward said.

Dummy guns have already been made from wood in the workshops — and apparently they look pretty good in poor light.

But the men don't need smuggled guns. The warden who was injured in last year's incident was bashed with a dismantled folding chair the prisoners had straightened out.

Staff know the prisoners are watching for weaknesses in the system, and they can't be confident about future incidents.

But in the meantime there are pretty courteous relations between staff and inmates.

A man passing through the remote control grilles taps the control tower and says "Thank you".

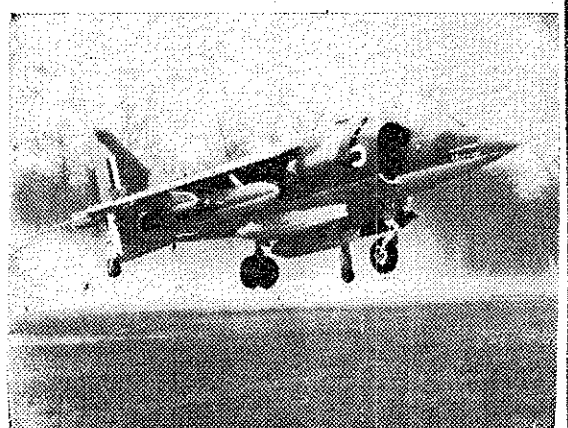
Mr Buckley turns and says "That's the sort of little thing that's important."

And the prison officers constantly say "please".

Compared with Mount Eden jail, where men sleep two and three to a cell, with the degrading slopping-out parade in the morning, Paremoremo is a five-star hotel.

Even if no tourist would want to stay there.

## A CAREER IN THE RAF



**THE ONLY OPERATIONAL VTOL STRIKE AND RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT IN THE WORLD**  
**THE HAWKER SIDDELEY HARRIER IN SERVICE IN THE RAF**

Have you the ability to become a pilot in the Royal Air Force? If so did you know that you can join the RAF by initial enrolment right here in New Zealand? Many young New Zealanders have in the past joined the Royal Air Force and some have reached the highest appointments in the Service.

### DIRECT ENTRY COMMISSIONS

Under the Direct Entry Scheme you could be flying solo in a jet aircraft in the United Kingdom within five months, after basic training in New Zealand, followed by conversion onto one of the latest aircraft types in the world such as the Jaguar, Harrier, VC10 or the Nimrod.

The type of career offered is a direct entry commission, pensionable at the age of 38, in the case of candidates entering after their 22nd birthday on completion of 16 years service. There are good opportunities for further selection to serve until the age of 55.

**Age limits:** 17½ to 25 years.

**Education:** UE (or a School Certificate with at least 50% in each subject) in English, Mathematics, and 3 other subjects, only one of which may be an Art, Handicraft or Practical subject.

### UNIVERSITY CADETSHIPS

Candidates seeking a longer term flying or technical career to the age of 55 (with an option of retirement at the age of 38) may be sent to a United Kingdom University under the Commonwealth Nomination Scheme (paid for by the RAF) followed by entry to RAF College, Cranwell.

Details of either scheme may be obtained from:

**THE SENIOR ROYAL AIR FORCE LIAISON OFFICER,**  
British Defence Liaison Staff,  
P.O. Box 1812,  
WELLINGTON.