

# A look at life on the inside at ... MALAK HOUSE

Exclusive by  
CHRISTOPHER  
TAYLOR

The grim reality of life inside a juvenile detention centre would be enough to turn the most rebellious teenager a long way from a life of crime.

Malak House is no Hilton but then it is not supposed to be.

It is a world of wire mesh, bolted doors, bare and unwelcoming "bedrooms" and unformed children.

If you are over 10, under 17, this is a place you will end up should you continually flaunt yourself on the wrong side of the law.

But the appearance of the centre is in stark contrast to its atmosphere.

The sounds of chatter — even laughter — fill the air as the centre's inmates take a craft course in the bare dayroom.

The inmates are often from broken homes.

They are almost always repeat offenders — many with alarming records for housebreaking and theft.

Many have alcohol or chronic petrol-spliffing habits.

Their average age is 14.

Alcoholics Anonymous runs a course at the centre.

The AA representatives are not always treating the children's problems but the psychological nightmares left over from a life with alcoholic relatives.

Superintendent Mr Kerry Grace rules Malak House with a calm but iron hand.

But he is far from the full-bellied giant of a prison boss you would expect — quite the opposite in fact.

He seems always ready with an understanding ear, advice for his inmates.

He is respected. But muck about with the centre's rules and you could find yourself in "time out" — a tiny, depressing isolation cell — courtesy of Mr Grace.

He has the final say on who enters and leaves the cell.

If the message is not delivered by solitary confinement, an inmate may be transferred to the Giles House centre in Alice Springs where security is geared to cope with high-risk prisoners.

Malak House works on a theory — the better behaved you are, the more you get.

It is a system of levels.

Level one inmates are usually new to the centre.

They are at the level because they are not known to staff — it is not known if they can be trusted.

Level one means bed at 8 pm, confinement to the compound, very few privileges outside of television.

A step up the ladder to level two can mean bed an hour later, use of the centre's swimming pool, possible work detail in the kitchen.

Level three inmates can be entitled to day passes for outside work, school or a visit to their families.

Each prisoner under the age of 16 must attend the centre's school.

It is geared toward personal development, personalised education and specialised treatment for illiteracy.

Bed time means a room devoid of furniture or color.

A single bed, wire meshed security windows and heavily bolted barred doors.

## Designed

The centre is designed to hold 12 inmates but can hold up to 20.

At the request of many of the young Aboriginal inmates — and in line with a recommendation by the former Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Commissioner James Muirhead — the children sometimes share a cell.

Although security at the centre appears to be tight, the long list of escapes this year stands as a damning indictment.

The inmates claim escape is easy — some of the time anyway.

Correctional Services Department officials claim the many escapes this year can be blamed on a group of ring-leaders who have since left Malak House.

They say security is as tight as it can be — as tight as it is at any other Australian juvenile facility.

The department has high hopes for the new \$1.6 million Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre, to be opened at Berrimah next year.

If you are over 10 and under 17, this is where you will end up should you continually get on the wrong side of the law.

## Bradley: Locked up for 4 days

Eight months ago Bradley was thrown into a small, barred, cold cell where he was to stay for four long days.

It was the result of an ugly confrontation with the boys in khaki.

Bradley (not his real name) bashed a cop in the Malak House car park.

The police had been returning the 16-year-old from a court appearance where he was sentenced for breaking and entering and stealing cars.

He says it was not his fault.

"The cops started it," he said.

It caught Bradley a lesson, but he still complains that stints in solitary are far too long.

Under the law, prisoners can be held in solitary confinement only for 12 hours without a break.

Bradley's four days were broken by short trips to the shower and dining room.

"It was still too long — especially when I didn't even start the fight," he said.

Bradley — like most Malak House inmates — is a repeat offender.

He has spent many months at the institution.

But in many ways he is one of the juvenile justice system's greatest success stories — breezing through the system with only the odd hiccup.

He is looking forward to his release in nine days.

His complaints about Malak House are many, but seem trivial.

He says occasionally the youth workers (guards) pick on kids for no reason.

He said they are sometimes deliberately provocative, attempting to rile the inmates and punish them.

He does not like the female inmates either, calling them "little bitches".

He, like many others, has escaped. "I kicked out a mesh window and they sent these two blokes around to fix it," he said.

"They left it open and they weren't watching so I just bolted."

He was on the run for three weeks but eventually gave himself up — he could not see the point in running any longer.

He believes it is far too easy for inmates to escape.

"But this place is not too bad — it's all right sometimes."

"Over all they treat us pretty well."



The controversial juvenile detention centre, Malak House.

## Girl, 13, prefers prison to home

She reckoned she had stolen 20 cars since she was 11 and she giggled as she said it. She did it because she hated her mother, hated her home and did not want to live on the street.

Juvenile prison meant a hot meal and a roof over her head. It was her fifth time in Malak House. She is 13 years old.

But Tracey (not her real name) says she wants to get her life sorted out before she reaches 17.

She does not want to graduate to the adult prison system.

"I can't stand living with my parents and I don't want to live on the streets," she said.

"I prefer to be here than at home."

But despite the fact that Tracey has led a frightening life of crime and prefers to be behind bars than with her parents, she keeps breaking out.

She was on the outside for three days — staying with friends, robbing houses and stealing cars.

She gave herself up for the same reason she says she escaped — boredom.

"There was nothing to do

except sit around and watch television," she said.

Another time she was dragged into solitary confinement for a two-day stint.

It was punishment for bashing a guard.

She said it was tough but admits she deserved it.

But despite her tough exterior and her long record, Tracey's major complaint about Malak House is disarmingly childish.

"We should be allowed to smoke," she said.



# Malak House denies claims of cover-ups

By CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR

The doors of the controversial Malak House juvenile detention centre were opened exclusively to the Northern Territory News yesterday, ending a year of public debate and allegations of lax security at the facility.

The Correctional Services Department opened the centre after alarming claims of huge departmental cover-ups by a Malak House youth worker.

The youth worker, who refused to be identified, approached the NT News with the allegations.

The youth worker said physical violence against inmates, the rape of an inmate by another prisoner, a rash of escapes and escape attempts, and barbaric prison procedures, were being hidden by staff from the department and the media.

The youth worker also claimed the centre was a health risk. Inmates as young as eight were subject to violence at the hands of the centre's staff and the spate of recent escapes could be blamed on the failure of officers to do their job adequately.

Correctional Services Department officials have angrily denied the employee's claims.

They say Malak House is being run as efficiently as possible. The officials accompanied the NT News on a tour of the facility to try to dispel the claims.

The Probation, Parole and Juvenile Justice director, Ms Lyn Keogh, said the department had nothing to hide in its running of the centre. Ms Keogh said children younger than 10 by law could not be housed at the centre.

"So any claim about the mistreatment of children as young as that is without foundation," she said.

She also denied claims of beatings and rapes of prisoners, saying if they were true police would have become involved.

She said security at the centre was as tight as could be expected at a juvenile detention facility.

The youth worker who spoke out claimed to be acting in the interests of the centre's inmates.

"I know I will probably lose my job - I'm prepared for that, I'm prepared to pack up and leave town," the guard said.

"I feel dirty having to come to the press but where else is there to go?"

"Malak House doesn't need stories like this - it's just the administration is not doing its job."

"I know it looks like we are all doing a bad job - we probably are."

"But without the numbers of staff that are required and without the funding for extra staff it is impossible to do."

The rash of escapes was a direct result of low staffing numbers, the guard claimed.

"Security is a joke - it is rotten," the worker said.

• The inside story: Page 2

# NORTHERN TERRITORY News



6861 330 Z1 12 DEC 1989

## A milestone for two countries

The signing of the Timor Gap treaty by Senator Gareth Evans and Mr Ali Alatas yesterday (below) was a milestone in Australian-Indonesian relations.

One of the most prospective oil and gas regions in the world, the Gap should have major benefits for the NT.

Senior NT News reporter FRANK ALCOOTA and award-winning photographer LYNDON MUEHLENSEN were on board the RAAF VIP jet for the signing by Australia and Indonesia over the Timor Sea yesterday.

For the full report and more pictures, see P3.

Phone 82 8200 DARWIN: Tuesday, December 12, 1989 50c (COUNTRY CLASSIFIED: 12 1300) TERRITORY EDITION



# CANE TOAD PLAGUE THREAT

By LEONIE BIDDLE

A north Queensland scientist has warned that the next Wet season could boost cane toad numbers to almost plague proportions throughout the Top End.

James Cook University research fellow, Dr Rick Speare, urged authorities to mount a search-and-destroy campaign for cane toads at Borroloola following their arrival there.

Dr Speare said cane toads were advancing

across the north Queensland gulf area at the rate of 30 km a year.

He said the toads would have been relatively dormant during the cooler dry season but once the weather warmed up and the rains started they would multiply rapidly.

He said if the advance continued the effect on the Territory's wildlife, particularly carnivorous marsupials such as goannas and snakes, would be catastrophic.

Dr Speare, heading a research project into cane toad diseases, said urgent action was essential to curb the numbers.

A mass collection and eradication campaign in the Borroloola area

was one way of reducing numbers to buy time.

He said similar campaigns were under way in Queensland centres.

"Science is still trying to find a biological answer to the ecological threat posed by the cane toads," Dr Speare said.

In the meantime collection programs were worth a go until a long-term solution was found.

He said the Territory and Federal Governments should consider starting a collection program at Borroloola and paying people to collect and destroy cane toads.

Dr Speare said his team's disease research had identified a

soil fungus which was fatal to cane toads.

But he said the fungus did not spread significantly through cane toad populations and only between 1 and 6 per cent of toads died of the fungus in an area where it was prevalent.

NT Conservation Commission wildlife researcher, Dr Bill Freeland, is also involved in the research project.

Dr Freeland had helped identify a virus in frogs he collected in Costa Rica which could be used in conjunction with an Iridovirus found in native Australian frogs.

The Iridovirus has been found to kill tadpoles and toadlets.

DON'T GET CAUGHT IN THE WET!

IN DARWIN



RADIO CONTROLLED VAN COVERING

MOTOR • MARINE • TRUCKS  
SPECIAL FITS • ENDURANCE  
HEAVY DUTY • ECONOMY  
PREMIUM & "SWITCH" BATTERIES.



Telephone: 81 7000

Just Holler for a Marshall

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

\$5.00 TRADE-IN FOR YOUR OLD BATTERY 12 MONTH WARRANTY ON ALL BATTERIES

MARSHALL BATTERIES

**INDEX**

- Letters: 9
- Finance: 10
- Television: 21
- Crossword: 21
- Comics: 22
- Classifieds: 23
- Sport: 27
- Weather, tides: 27

**NATION WIDE AUTO WHOLESALE**

WANTS CARS, TRUCKS COMMERCIAL MACHINERY

PH. 47 0956

2721 STUART HWY THE OLD PATERSONS BUILDING