

People Helped Over 'Rough' Spots

By GEORGE H. BELL
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John W. Darby is a large-framed man in his early 40's. His broad, rugged face and crew cut hair suggest an athletic youth. He moves his hands animatedly when he talks, now gesturing, now sketching pictures in the air to illustrate the point of his words.

As regional director of the Oregon state office of parole and probation, he is immediately responsible for the conduct and welfare of some 600 persons in seven counties in southwestern Oregon who have violated the law.

He talks fluently, colorfully, a little too hurriedly when he gets going on the subject of his work. One senses his frustration at trying to describe the complexities and subtleties of a demanding job.

Pinned to the wall behind him in his office is the fragile black and yellow wing of a monarch butterfly. On his desk, facing whomever is sitting talking to him, is a familiar set of the three bronze monkeys who "hear no evil, say no evil, and see no evil."

Two Seem Symbolic
Though clearly not intended as such, the two objects seem symbolic: the butterfly wing of the delicate nature of the task of trying to bring stability to persons with records of erratic, unstable behavior; and the monkeys of the necessity of trying to discover, foster and strengthen the good qualities of his "clients," persons who have shown society only their bad side.

Through Darby's office, and the offices of his nine field men, come individuals who have been placed on probation for a period of time by courts in the area, or who have been paroled after serving part of their sentences from one of the prisons or correctional institutions in the state.

Darby and his staff are dedicated to doing their best to help those persons, in whatever way possible, to reconstruct or reshape their lives in such a way they will no longer pose a threat to the well being of the rest of society.

"We try to help these people over the rough spots," Darby said, "and to adjust to the pressures of the community."

A Challenging Job
It is a "challenging" job, Darby says earnestly, one that is not entrusted to just anyone. He describes a parole and probation officer as a "social worker with police au-



DISCUSSES CASE—John W. Darby (left), regional director of the state board of parole and probation, discusses a case with one of his field officers, Robert Pillsbury, who has only recently been assigned to the Medford office. Darby's region includes sev-

en counties in southwestern Oregon, with offices located at Klamath Falls, Grants Pass, Roseburg, and Coquille, as well as Medford. A new office is scheduled to be opened next month in Gold Beach.

Having met these stringent qualifications, the newly hired parole and probation officer may expect to receive a minimum starting salary of \$460 a month. Top pay for a field man is \$570 a month.

Two weeks of intensive training in Salem is given each "rookie" officer. Then he is sent to his assigned region where he undergoes another two weeks of training. Throughout his career with the agency (employee turnover is small, Darby says), the officer will continually participate in in-service training to keep him sharp and growing.

The neophyte officer will be joining an agency which was first established by an act of the legislature in June, 1939. From its early beginnings, the organization has grown to a present staff of about 60 field men and 10 administrative supervisors. There are 19 district offices spread all over the state.

In Darby's district, offices are maintained in Klamath Falls, Grants Pass, Roseburg, and Coquille, as well as Medford. Plans call for opening another office in Gold Beach in September, Darby revealed.

H. M. Randall, a former attorney, has been director of the agency with offices in Salem since about 1944.

For anyone who may have some doubts about the worthwhileness of a career in parole and probation work, or, for that matter, about the efficacy of the agency in the first place, Darby is prepared with a few, punchy statistics that more than remove any questions.

"It costs the taxpayer \$1,340 a year to maintain a prisoner in a state correctional institution," he said, "but only \$233 a year to supervise a man on parole."

Too, there is an added plus factor in paroling a man, rather than keeping him locked up, in that when he is returned to society a parolee pays taxes. But, most important of all, he is reunited with his family, often removing them from the rolls of the state welfare agency.

Does parole work? Darby points out that 75 per cent of those persons placed on parole successfully complete their period of supervision, while only 25 per cent are returned to institutions as parole violators.

Of those persons placed on probation by a court, about 80 per cent are successful in completing their terms without trouble, though Darby admits that the statistics are aided in that instance by the fact that many of them are first time offenders.

Every effort is expended to make certain that the odds in returning a convicted person to the community will be comfortably on the side of society.

After the state board has granted parole to an individual, but before he is released from the state institution he must attend a number of classes designed to acquaint him with his obligations and requirements upon release, and to insure that he completely understands his situation.

Also before an individual is released, the agency will have checked out the environment to which the prisoner is returning to make certain conditions are favorable for a new start and that the same circumstances don't prevail which landed him behind bars to start with.

Reports To Office
As soon as possible after the doors of the institution close behind him, the parolee reports to the administration office in Salem for a briefing. From there he reports to the district office nearest the community where he will be living.

It is there he meets the parole officer who has been assigned to his case and the two of them sit down and talk things over for a while to get to know each other. The relationship between the two may make the difference between a successful adjustment and a new life of frustration, failure and a forced return to prison. Both are aware of the importance of a good start.

One of the first orders of business for the new parolee is to see that he gets a job and begins to earn his own way. The parole officer often can be instrumental in seeing that the parolee finds suitable employment. Sometimes a trade that the man learned in prison stands him in good stead in finding a job.

About the first of each month, the parolee must submit a report to his supervising officer in which he details his activities during the months, and, depending on how well the individual is adjusting to parole, the officer may make personal contact with him up to 10 times during a 30-day period.

"We take the dignity of the individual into consideration," Darby said, "and each man is treated with respect for his God-given rights."

"We avoid calling on a man while he is working on the job, and we are careful to visit him in his home during hours when it will be most convenient."

Darby insists he and his colleagues don't expect miracles out of their parolees.

Not To Change Man
"We're not out to change the man completely," he said, "but we would hope to alter those patterns of living which got him into trouble with the law and society in the first place."

"We only ask that a man show us some progress," Darby said, "that he pay his own way, that he hold on to his job and take care of his family, and that he begin to make a reasonable adjustment to the community and society."

The director said his staff was forced to watch a parolee's financial situation very closely because of the inability of some to handle money. Before a parolee can make a purchase of anything worth over \$50, he must talk the matter over with his supervising officer.

The trend in parole-probation philosophy now is to hold the individual responsible for his own actions, Darby said, as opposed to an earlier theory which viewed a man from a deterministic standpoint and held that his heredity or environment mitigated in large degree whatever he did.

Appraise Man's Assets
"We appraise a man's assets and liabilities pretty carefully," he said, "and try to accept him for what he is. Then we work to give him 'staying power' and help him develop a sense of self discipline."

But whatever the underlying philosophy, Darby emphasized that no two cases are alike. "You can't just take the rules and regulations and say, 'This is it.' It would be a lot easier if we could do it that way, but we'd have a lot more failures."

The failures burn in a parole officer's memory. Darby remembered one of his—a 45-year-old cook who lived in the Portland area some years ago.

A happier memory is the case of the 28-year-old man, also from the Portland area, who was sentenced to Oregon State penitentiary for burglary after a long history of short-term jobs, drinking and a series of minor arrests.

Enrolled in Classes
While in OSP, the man enrolled in some classes and eventually was awarded a high school diploma. After serving two years of a three-year sentence, he was granted a parole.

The man went back to his home town, got a job as a choke setter in the woods. His earlier problem with alcohol cropped up again after a while, however, and when his employers began to notice it, he was fired.

For about two months the man teetered on the brink of serious trouble, but his parole officer's faith in him served as a bulwark. The officer finally went to the employers and, after some persuasion, gained a second chance for the man.

A totally unexpected circumstance developed at this point which Darby said, more than anything else, helped to straighten the man out. His younger brother, of whom he was especially fond, began to get into trouble.

By working to keep his brother out of difficulties, the man, without realizing it, kept on the straight and narrow himself. Perhaps he subconsciously began to try to set a good example for his brother.

That's the way Darby wishes they would all turn out. But even though they don't in this less than perfect world, it is hopeful that, mainly through the work of the state board of parole and probation, many potentially chronic criminals can be helped in the tortuous process of living down their "mistakes" and building new and successful lives.

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