

Diesel Therapy: Torturing

February, 2004 - Vice Magazine (US)

By Seth M. Ferranti

Transit, better known as "diesel therapy" to the feds, is maybe the worst part of being incarcerated. Imagine being handcuffed with a chain around your waist securing the handcuffs to your stomach area. You can't move your arms up and down or side to side. Your feet are shackled, limiting you to baby steps. Now get on a bus. And then be stuck on the bus with similarly shackled convicts forever. (It starts at three or four in the morning, and 12-16--hour days are the norm.) You can try and guess where you're going, but you never will. After five institutions and nine years in the feds, I've learned to dread transit more than anything.



The Bureau of Prisons can never do anything easily. Like take you from point A to point B. Instead, they drag you through a spiraling maze of transitional moves with zero logic. What's the method to the madness? Is it intentional chaos-pure torture to keep us beat down, controlled, docile? Only the BOP knows for certain.

Recently I was transferred from FCI Fort Dix to FCI Fairton on a closer supervision request. While my journey was not a diesel therapy nightmare, it was definitely a mini-diesel. I packed my stuff on December 31st. On the 2nd of January I was called up at 8:00 a.m. I got processed and placed in the bullpen with 10 other prisoners. I proceeded to sit there until 2:00 p.m., when we were sent back to the compound. Oops-we were leaving tomorrow. We had spent the whole day in a tiny holding cell for no reason. We were sent back to the compound with no sheets, no blankets, no toothpaste, no soap, no toilet paper, and no change of clothes. And we had no property-that was already boxed up.

The next morning, we were called up again. The whole processing procedure was completed for the second time, and finally, in the late afternoon, we heard the clank of chains. Salvation had come in the form of the Lewisburg BOP bus crew.

We were strip-searched, given new clothes, and shackled. I knew FCI Fairton was only two hours south of Fort Dix so I figured on a short trip. I asked the CO and didn't get the answer I wanted. "You missed your stop, buddy," he said. "We're going to Lewisburg." He smiled while telling me this, like it was some big joke and I was the punch line. I was going to Lewisburg. The famous penitentiary and a favorite holdover spot of the BOP.

So into Pennsylvania I went. A five-hour bus ride, followed by the whole processing/screening routine again. You would think after your initial screening they would already have a record of you, but the BOP is not only barbaric, it's archaic. Most files are on paper. You have one that travels with you, and at every place you stop, they create a new one for you.

Five days in Lewisburg. No phone, minimal reading material, and one TV for 50 people-complete and utter boredom. The whole ordeal requires a willed suppression of instinct. Every night is a toss up to see who'll be on the outgoing bus the next day. If your name is on the list they post at 3:00 a.m., you're stoked. If not, look forward to another day of nothing. The only advantage of being in the holdover is

hot meals, because when you're on that bus and in the bullpens they kill you with baloney-and-cheese sandwiches with milk.

Finally, my name was on the list. I was out of there. I figured I would be in Fairton that night. I went through the same routine again: bullpen, strip-search, change clothes, get chained up, 4:00 a.m. wake up, many hours spent in the holding cell. Then it was finally time and we were marched out into the snow with no jacket (BOP policy, I guess). We ended up at Allenwood. I was getting the grand tour of the whole industrial prison complex. Next we processed to FDC Philly, then we entered New Jersey and drove right through it. I couldn't believe it. It seemed I'd missed my stop again.

Then we were in New York. MDC Brooklyn. This was a new twist. I'd always heard this place was pre-trial. I had never been there before, and I hope to hell I never go there again.

We were herded off the bus like cattle for the umpteenth time, prodded into this tiny little processing bullpen, and held there forever. No hot meals, either more bag lunches. They didn't have any bed space in the units so they put me in the hole.

Two days I was on a bus supposedly bound for Fairton. And you'll never guess where I ended up. Eight days of traveling, after having traversed three states and going five hours west into PA and then six hours east into NYC, I was now right back at the gates of FCI Fort Dix. Right where I started.

Two hours later, I was in Fairton, where I had to get screened and processed all over. I was ready to hit the pound, hook up with some friends, butboom-they threw me in the hole, where I waited for four days to see the captain so he could decide if he would let me on his compound. I guess the regional director didn't check with him before they designated me there.

Now, as I'm writing this, not even two months later, I'm back in the hole. Under SIS investigation. Wondering if my journey is about to start anew. Check with me two years from now. Maybe I'll have some horror stories to tell. Until then, wish me luck, because this diesel therapy shit can drive you nuts.