

Inmate jumps from window at jail and breaks ankles

By Pam Sohn The Chattanooga Times

A Hamilton County jail inmate on federal hold escaped from the Hamilton County Jail with a wild jump from a fifth-story window. But his crushed ankles stopped him from running any farther than the roof of the parking garage between the Hamilton County Courthouse and the Hamilton County Justice Building. Much of the fracas was captured on film by a television crew, filming at the jail for a story on how the public can help prisoners over the holidays. Late Tuesday evening, Johnny Taylor Alexander was still being treated in Erlanger Medical Center's emergency room. No information about his condition was available from hospital officials, but jail officials said Alexander's ankles appeared to be broken. Jail Chief Tony Bennett said Alexander told apprehending officers and rescue workers he tried to escape out of "an act of desperation." Bennett said Alexander told them he had pried and broken the fifth-floor window on the south side of the jail with a piece of metal from a heating device he'd taken apart. Once out the window, Alexander shimmied down between two concrete pillars for several feet, then jumped to a screen mesh area, Bennett said. Then with a running leap, Alexander tried to jump to the open roof of the nearby courthouse parking garage, barely making it. Bennett said the inmate hit the wall, but scrambled over. Alexander had succeeded in getting outside the jail's security barriers, but that was about as far as he got. Jailers who found the broken window began a search immediately, Bennett said. And in the meantime, authorities received a report that a TVA security officer was checking on a man down on the roof of the parking garage. "It appears to have been a desperate act," Bennett said of the first Hamilton County Jail escape in 15 months. "We'll do a complete investigation of it." A Channel 3 TV news crew, at the jail working on another story, got much of the search and rescue efforts on tape. Bennett said when jail officers and rescuers reached Alexander, they couldn't get an ambulance into the garage, and the rescue gurney wouldn't fit in the elevator. So the inmate was strapped on a board and taken slowly out of the parking garage on the hood of a vehicle. Alexander, of Monteagle, was being held in the jail awaiting trial on federal charges of conspiring to manufacture and distribute methamphetamine. He has been in the jail since Nov. 25.