

Toll Reaches 910

As U.S. Clears

Jonestown Camp

11/26/78
By Fred Barbash
Washington Post Staff Writer

GEORGETOWN, Guyana, Nov. 25—U.S. servicemen completed the grisly task of removing bodies from Jonestown today, discovering that at least 910 persons died last Saturday when cult leader Jim Jones led them in a mass suicide ritual.

The higher death toll was described as a tentative final count.

"It should be pretty close," Capt. John J. Moscatelli, the U.S. military spokesman, said as the final corpse-laden helicopter flew out of here this afternoon.

With the Jonestown campsite cleared of all bodies, authorities here said that there was no evidence of any massive escape into the surrounding forest, a possibility that had remained a dim hope among survivors and relatives. There was no evidence that force was used on the newly discovered victims, according to spokesmen.

Exhausted U.S. soldiers, after five days of work among bloated bodies and vermin that began to infest the campsite, were preparing this afternoon to conclude their mission to Guyana.

The bodies blanketed the campsite in layers three deep in some places, Moscatelli said. The soldiers, protected by surgical masks and rubber gloves, would remove one body only to discover another under that and still another under that. That is why the count kept changing, he said.

Moscatelli said he hoped the figure of 910—130 higher than yesterday's count—would be final.

The total, more than accounts for the 915 Peoples Temple cultists Guyanese officials believed were living in their country, though no one seemed certain of the true number.

By current estimates, no more than 32 of the men, women, children and babies living at Jonestown escaped last week's violence.

Most are thought to have perished

in the mass suicide. Jones followed a cult ambush on an inspection party led by Rep. Leo Ryan (D-Calif.) as it was preparing to leave from a nearby airstrip. Most took poison, at least three, including the cult leader Jones, reportedly died of gunshot wounds.

In addition, there have been persistent but unconfirmed stories that still

See BODIES, A20, Col. 2

Jonestown tragedy began with ambush of a congressman. Page A20.

BODIES, From A1

others who may have resisted suicide were shot by cult loyalists.

One survivor told reporters yesterday that he witnessed more shootings than is generally believed to have occurred. At the same time, another cult member, Tim Carter, was saying that he watched weeping women lining up to receive the poisoned Kool-aid mixture being distributed to the Peoples Temple members and that he saw his own wife among them, her dead child in her arms.

But during Carter's comments, another cult member burst in and accused him of lying.

At the cult's Georgetown headquarters, four bodies with their throats slit were found on the same night in an apparently related act of violence timed with the Jonestown events. Authorities initially thought these four had committed suicide.

But today, a 43-year-old resident of the headquarters house, who was described by acquaintances as a "simple and uneducated man who would do anything he was told," was charged with murder in connection with the four deaths.

Charles Edward Beikman, originally of Indianapolis, Ind., was arraigned in court on charges stemming from the death of Sharon Amos Harris, 42, and her three children aged 21, 9 and 11. He was also charged with the attempted murder of another resident of the house, Stephanie Jones, believed to be about 11 years old and no relation to Jim Jones.

Beikman, a blond stocky man about five-foot-five inches tall and unshaven, stood silently as he heard the charges which could result in his hanging.

About 46 cult members were in the small, two-story stucco house in Georgetown at the time of the tragedy, local authorities say.

According to surviving cultists, the residents housed there were those most trusted by "Bishop" Jones, as he was known to the Guyanese. Only they could be counted on not to flee the cult and report to the outside world survivors said.

Residents of Jonestown, most of whom came to Guyana believing the camp to be a "tropical paradise," were often greeted at the gates by armed guards when they arrived and kept

through a variety of coercive measures according to survivors.

All of the headquarters residents including Jones' son Steven 13, have been under heavy armed guard since the death last week and barred from leaving the house by Guyanese officials. During the arraignment today, their lawyers here complained that they felt they were "under siege."

Many of those inside are considered material witnesses to the four murders.

Knowledge of events that occurred 100 miles away at Jonestown. In addition, many of the survivors here and in the United States are in a state of fear of retribution from these defendants if and when they are released.

Some of the Jonestown refugees here have been literally hiding in their own guarded hotel rooms in fear of the remaining Jones adherents.

The survivors have been awaiting word from the Guyanese government that they are no longer needed as witnesses and may return to the United States to begin new lives.

Meanwhile, military helicopters continued to search the sparsely inhabited territory around Jonestown with loud speakers calling forlornly into

the rain forest for any other survivors of the suicide ritual.

Ground searches of the area have failed to discover survivors or bodies outside the carnage, Moscatelli reported.

Because the original number of dead, 400, was so distant from the estimated number of Jonestown residents, authorities thought many might have fled into the forest.

There's no indication now that any massive number of survivors, the captain said. There's no indication that there was a mass escape or egress. And there's no evidence that anything was taken in the flight of the Jonestown residents.

The bodies were being dugged as quickly as they were found. They were then placed in aluminum coffins and flown to a makeshift U.S. military camp about one quarter mile across the runway from the civilian air terminal here. C-141 transports then flew them to Delaware.

Moscatelli said no one could be identified visually anymore. The bodies are swollen with arms and legs "as big as tree limbs," he said. Rats have also begun to move into the hot and rainy site as the bodies decomposed.