

Hostage's 97-Hour Ordeal

ATTICA (N.Y.) — (AP) — Phillip "Curley" Watkins was sure he would be freed within hours.

But it was 97 hours, and at times it seemed to him that death was only the sweep of a second hand away.

"I figure when my number's up, it's up. So I always look for the best of things. I guess it just wasn't my time," the 33 year old Attica State Prison guard said yesterday.

Nine Killed

A short time before he had been one of 38 hostages held for four days by rebelling convicts. He escaped when law enforcement officers and National Guard troops smashed the rebellion.

The 97 hours began for Watkins at 8:45 a.m. Thursday when inmates rebelled.

Two inmates cornered him in the yard of cellblock D.

"One guy had a broomstick. I was able to hold him off for a couple of minutes with my club," the guard of 10 years said.

Hit By Shovel

"But I saw him give a guy behind me a high sign and I was hit with a shovel."

As Watkins lay in pain, his right arm broken, other prisoners rushed to kick him.

"But," he said, "another inmate stopped me from being beaten to death."

It was a strange sort of captivity, he said, with his captors—the great majority of them blacks—addressing him as sir, offering him cigarettes and snuff and allowing the prison doctor to set his arm.

"When they ate hot meals, we had hot meals," he said.

"When they had sandwiches, so did we. We had mattresses but they didn't."

When prison authorities issued an ultimatum to the convicts yesterday morning to release the hostages and surrender, Watkins said, each hostage was grabbed by an inmate.

Knew Him

The hostages were blindfolded and taken to a prison



TELLS OF HIS ORDEAL AS HOSTAGE

His wife is at the side of injured Philip Watkins

—AP Photo

yard, where the inmates held knives to the throats of their

"I started talking to my guy and asked him how long he had been serving time," Watkins said.

"Since '63," the man replied. The I asked him if he

'captives. knew a buddy of mine. He said he did. And then I said, 'Well, then, you know who I am.'"

Then helicopters began circling the prison compound. Watkins' captor shoved him to the ground and fell on top of him as cover.

"The guy had time to kill me but he didn't," Watkins said.

He said he would take a few days off to nurse the arm but emphasized:

"I'm going back to work — definitely. I love my job."