

How the Hostages Died

--Bullets, Not Slashings

Autopsy Contradicts Earlier Reports by N.Y. Prison Officials



AP Wirephoto

DR. JOHN EDLAND
He did the autopsies

N.Y. Times Service

Attica, N.Y.

The nine hostages killed in the Attica correctional facility died of bullet wounds, it was reported yesterday after official autopsies.

On Monday, State correctional officials said the hostages had been killed by convicts in knife attacks and beatings.

Some of the victims had their throats slashed, the officials had said.

CONFIRMATION

Late last night State Correction Commissioner Russell G. Oswald confirmed that all of the hostages had died of gunshot wounds and none from slashed throats.

The commissioner made the confirmation in a long rambling statement that contradicted reports by several of his deputies as to what happened inside Attica during Monday's assault.

Oswald said: "They all died of gunshot wounds — none of them from slashed throats."

The Monroe county medical examiner, Dr. John F. Edland, who performed eight of the autopsies, said earlier yesterday:

"All eight cases died of gunshot wounds. There was no evidence of slashed throats."

BLOOD

He added, however, that some of the guards and inmates on whom he performed post-mortems had clotted blood on their faces and necks.

The ninth wounded hostage, who was taken to nearby Batavia, N.Y., because of inadequate medical facilities at Attica, was declared dead of gunshot wounds at Genesee Memorial Hospital by Dr. Muhtesem Veznedaroglu.

A tenth hostage died at the Rochester hospital on Saturday night of injuries reportedly suffered when he was thrown from a cellblock window during last Thursday's riot.

Five investigations were ordered into the prison tragedy yesterday and Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller asked Judge Harry D. Goldman, presiding justice of the Fourth Appellate Division in western New York state, to appoint a board of visitors to enter Attica and to safeguard the rights of prisoners.

Few in this town of 2800 people believe that the guards were killed — per-

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haps by fellow law-enforcement officers — in the hail of rifle and shotgun bullets that fell in the courtyard where they were being held prisoner by the inmates.

That there was a great deal of confusion during the assault by troopers was underscored when hostage Frank Strollo told reporters yesterday that when troopers first got to him, they asked him whether he was an inmate or a hostage. At the time, Strollo was on the ground, his hands and feet tied and his eyes blindfolded.

"I didn't answer them," Strollo said, "because I

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didn't know whether they were inmates or not. After all, they might have just been looking for hostages to kill. So I just lay there like I was dead."

One of the troopers, however, recognized him and pulled his blindfold off.

AIDE

On Monday, in the wake of the assault on Attica prison — in which 1000 state troopers, sheriff's deputies and guards retook the prison from rebellious inmates who had held it since last Thursday — Gerald Houlihan, an aide to Oswald, said that the dead hostages had had their throats slashed and had been beaten. He said that the inmates had not had guns.

Yesterday Houlihan twice repeated that the more than 1000 inmates who rioted had not had guns.

Throughout the four days of negotiations, Houlihan and other observers had maintained that the inmates had no guns — only bats, clubs, makeshift knives, swords and captured tear gas canisters. When Houlihan was informed of Edland's disclosures, he acknowledged that he and Oswald were aware of them.

GUNS

Later Houlihan came out of the prison to announce that the state police and guards, searching the debris-strewn cellblocks, had turned up a quantity of homemade zip guns.

Edland was asked if any of the wounds could have come from zip guns. He said, "No."

The disparity between Houlihan's and the medical accounts of the death of the hostage guards was only one of several contradictions yesterday.

Assisted by Dr. Kenneth Marten and assistant medical examiner Richard Abbott, two of the few forensic pathologists in western New York state, and observed by the state police, who had requested him to do the autopsies, Edland examined all of the bodies and concluded that all of the guards had died from gunshot wounds.

MISSILES

"Some were shot once, some as many as five, ten, 12 times," he said, with "two

types of missiles, buckshot and large-caliber missiles; many were shot at, I believe, a fair distance." He said the bullets came either from rifles or handguns.

Edland was asked if the bullets could have come from state troopers' rifles. He said, "I'm not familiar with the weapons carried by the state police." He refused to speculate further, saying: "I'm not interested in prosecution or defense in any case."

Nevertheless he carefully addressed himself to points that contradicted official versions of how the guards had died.

Houlihan had said that one guard was emasculated. Edland said: "None of the bodies were mutilated except by gunshot and stab wounds."

TIME

Houlihan had said that two of the guards had been killed before the assault on the prison took place and that rigor mortis had set in. Edland said: "All died yesterday morning."

He said that one of the hostages had "a single cut in the back of the neck" but that the cause of death for all of the hostages was gunshot wounds. Edland said all of the bodies of the hostages had their hands tied behind their backs, "that many were beaten severely about the head" and that "one had his back beaten and his buttocks."

Edland was asked if there was any difference in the character of the wounds in the bodies of the guards and those of the inmates. He said "no difference," and he answered similarly when asked if the men were dressed alike.

DENIAL

Asked again if there had been an instance of castration Edland said, "There is no evidence of that."

He discounted a report that Rockefeller had phoned urging him to cancel his press conference at which his remarks were made.*

He pointed out that post-mortems were matters of public record and added, "I am my own man and I call things as I see them. All I know is I have 27 bodies in my office which is more than I ever want to see, again in one day."

Edland said state trooper observers watched as he performed the autopsies. "I think they kept waiting for the next case to show up. Finally we ran out of hostages. I'm used to not finding what people tell me I will find," he said.

* SEE NYT