

Unfounded Rumors Still Cause Fear and Uncertainty in Attica

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ATTICA, N. Y., Sept. 17 — Though the rebellion at Attica has been brought under control, horrifying rumors that preceded and accompanied the killings of prisoners and their hostages last Monday still fly around the town, engendering fear, uncertainty and anger.

With most reliable sources of actual information still behind walls, pending investigations, the false reports gained just as much credibility as those that seemed valid.

"One of the greatest problems around here now," said a retired guard who has lived here for many years, "is these rumors. There is no task force to run them down. A guard hears something. He tells his wife. She embroiders it and you never know what it's all about. But everybody gets scared."

One of the most pervasive rumors is that the area was faced with an invasion of infuriated blacks from all over the state because many of the prisoners who staged the insurrection were black. All the guards are white.

Within 48 hours of the assault on the maximum security prison by state trooper, National Guard troops and Department of Correction guards, some residents of this usually serene community were leaving to stay with relatives and friends many miles away.

Urged to Leave Town

Mr. Louise Marley, who saw the prison built in the late nineteen-twenties from her home, said her daughter and son-in-law pleaded with her to leave town. She had heard the rumor, but refused to leave.

"I am 77 years old," she said, "I believe in God and that gives me strength. Some of the people I know did leave. They still haven't returned."

There are many who recall hearing the police talk about radio alarms of approaching black invasions. In a sheriff's car near the prison one night, after the authorities had regained absolute control of the prison, a radio crackled:

"An unknown number of armed blacks is on the way from New York City." Such reports were taken on face value by many law enforcement men.

Another rumor that continues to be heard in the frame houses, the comfortable bars, supermarkets, the fraternal organizations and churches is that hostages were mutilated by prisoners. Though no one has found such a case, many persons believe it.

An administrator in one hospital where a wounded hostage was being treated, when asked if it was true, as reported by so many residents, that the man had been castrated, denied it. But she added:

"But somebody else was." However, she said she knew nothing more about it.

Hayden Dadd, who has been

lawyer here for decades, said:

"You don't know what to believe. Rumors change from hour to hour. There was one guy who was saying: 'I saw a guy holding a blowtorch to a hostage's foot.'" The rumor still gets about, although there has been no medical evidence so far to support it."

On the other hand, there is a continuing desire on the part of many people here to accept the original reports that the nine hostages killed during the assault had their throats slashed. This is in spite of the fact that autopsy reports and a statement by Governor Rockefeller have said that the men were killed by bullets and that, so far as is known, the prisoners had no guns.

Another category of rumor has been gaining credence simply because there is no proof or disproof. One of these is that after the authorities seized the prison, many inmates were forced to crawl to cells and were beaten by their captors.

In explaining the multiplicity of rumors, Herman Schwartz, professor of law at the University of Buffalo, and one of the leaders in the group of lawyers from the American Civil Liberties Union that is seeking to investigate the circumstances around the prison violence, said:

"By denying access to information the authorities are creating the atmosphere for rumors."

An indication of the scope of rumors here came in a comment by Emerson Moran, spokesman for Deputy Attorney General Robert E. Fischer, head of the state investigation here. He said:

"If we're going to get into the business of dispelling rumors, we're going to be going all the way to the grand jury. Memories fade. Stories change."

One report that has become increasingly insistent is that the men who broke the prison rebellion used dum dum bullets in their guns. These bullets expand after hitting a body and cause a much bigger wound than the usual bullet.

No confirmation or denial of this report could be obtained from official spokesmen. A hostage said to have been hit by one of these bullets is in a nearby hospital.

Officials at the hospital said they had been told not to discuss such aspects of the case. They said all they could say that was the patient was in serious condition and that any other information must come from the state police.

A lieutenant of the state police said he could not comment on the report because it was under the jurisdiction of prison officials here. The telephone number he gave for prison officials did not answer.