

Walter Dunbar, Probation Chief Who Gave Data on Attica, Dead

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Walter Dunbar, State Probation Director and former executive deputy commissioner of the state Department of Correctional Services, died Sunday, apparently of a heart attack, at his home in the Albany suburb of Guilderland. He was 60 years old.

Mr. Dunbar, while a spokesman for the Correctional Services Department in September, 1971, gave out most of the information that led to the erroneous belief that the throats of the hostages during the Attica prison uprising had been slashed by the convicts. He told the House Select Committee on Crime at a hearing in Washington on Nov. 30, 1971, that he was the official source of reports that hostages' throats had been cut and that one hostage had been castrated during the inmate rebellion at Attica.

"I honestly said this because I believed it," Mr. Dunbar said. "If I erred, I erred as a human being."

His statement came as a reply to a question directed to him by Representative Jerome R. Waldie, Democrat of California, who had asked Mr. Dunbar if the reports of slashed throats and other atrocities had been factors in the decision to storm the Attica Correctional Facility on Sept. 13, 1971, after four days of fruitless negotiations.

"At the time of the moment of truth," Mr. Dunbar said, "I was tired after five days and nights. My major goal was to save lives."

Sitting beside Mr. Dunbar as he testified was State Correction Commission Russell G. Oswald, who said later that the decision to storm the prison had been his, but that it had

been approved by then Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller.

Mr. Dunbar had been probation director since June, 1973, and had previously been executive deputy commissioner of the Correctional Services since March, 1971.

He came to New York with substantial credentials. These included service since 1967 on the Federal Parole Board, of which he became chairman; six years as director of the California Department of Corrections, service as a deputy director of corrections and as an associate warden at San Quentin Prison.

A former president of the American Correctional Association, Mr. Dunbar had edited its manual of correctional standards and had been editorial consultant to the American Journal of Correction. He had also been a member of the advisory panel on corrections of the United States Office of Law Enforcement Assistance, the advisory committee of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, a consultant on correctional standards and research grants and criminal law revision, and an assessor of planning on probation and parole for Canada and Britain.

Born in Bakersfield, Calif., Mr. Dunbar received a degree in political science from the University of California at Los Angeles and took graduate studies in public administration and law.

Survivors include his widow, Patricia, and a daughter, Mrs. Roland Lane of San Francisco.

A memorial service will be held tomorrow at Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church in Albany.