

Soledad Witness Attacks Defense

By Charles Howe

Upset over an apparent contradiction in his own testimony a key prosecution witness against the so-called Soledad Brothers lost his temper in court here yesterday.

Thomas A. Yorke, who said he saw the murder of guard John V. Mills on the night of January 16, 1970, at Soledad Prison, pointed his finger at the table occupied by defense lawyers Floyd Siliman and Richard Silver and exclaimed:

"These people are trying to trick me! They are liars and shysters and they have tried to put my life in danger!"

'EVIDENCE'

Then Yorke, a short, stocky, 34-year-old convicted killer, turned to Superior Court Judge S. Lee Vavuris and pulled a thick envelope from his pocket.

"Your honor, I have some documents I would like to put into evidence," Yorke told the incredulous jurist.

Vavuris then declared an immediate recess and later cautioned the jury to disregard the incident and "wipe it from your mind."

EXPLOSION

Yorke exploded during his third day on the witness stand and while under cross-examination by Silver.

Yorke, who in the past has not hesitated to correct or re-phrase a defense question, blew up as he described how he witnessed the death of Mills, who was assertedly thrown from the third tier of "Y" wing by the late George Jackson.

Yorke testified he had seen Jackson with his right arm around Mill's neck in a "choke hold."

POSITIONS

Then Silver placed a projection of the tier on a large screen and asked Yorke to mark the various positions of Mills and the defendants.

In marking the exhibit,

Yorke placed Jackson and Mills in such a position as to make it virtually impossible for Jackson to place his right arm around the guard's neck.

When Silver noted this apparent discrepancy, Yorke complained he was "unfamiliar" with the slide machine and implied the defense had cleverly addled his wits.

During Yorke's brief outburst defendants Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette looked on impassively.

Yorke is a native of British Honduras and he was paroled from state custody last December. He was convicted of voluntary manslaughter in 1968. He is now confined on a federal immigration charge.

ENVELOPE

It was not learned what was contained in the envelope he unsuccessfully attempted to give Vavuris.

Yorke had earlier testified that after inmates discovered he was an informer he was held in protective custody for almost two years against possible convict recriminations.