



Attica Prison Bloodbath --- 9 Hostages, 28 Cons Killed

Five-Day Revolt Is Crushed by Troops-- 29 Guards Are Freed

N.Y. Times Service

Attica, N.Y.

The siege of Attica prison ended yesterday in the bloody invasion and mass deaths which five days of taut negotiations had sought to avert.

Thirty-seven men — 28 prisoners and nine hostages — were killed as an estimated 1000 state troopers, sheriff's deputies and prison guards stormed the facility under a low-lying pall of tear gas and retook from inmates the cellblocks they had captured last Thursday.

In this worst of prison tragedies, several hostages — prison guards and civilian workers — died when convicts slashed their throats with knives. Others were stabbed and beaten with clubs and lengths of pipe. Most of the prisoners killed in the assault fell under the thick hail of rifle and shotgun fire laid down by the invading troopers.

Walter Dunbar, a deputy director of corrections, said that two hostages had been killed "before today," and that one of them had been stabbed and emasculated.

Of the remaining seven, he said, five were killed instantly by the inmates and two died in the prison hospital.

Dunbar said that in addition to the 28 dead inmates, eight others of the prison's population, which he put at 2237, were missing. Two of the dead prisoners, he said, had been killed "by their own colleagues and lay in a large pool of blood in a fourth-tier cellblock."

He said he considered the assault on the prison an "efficient, affirmative police action."

ASSAULT

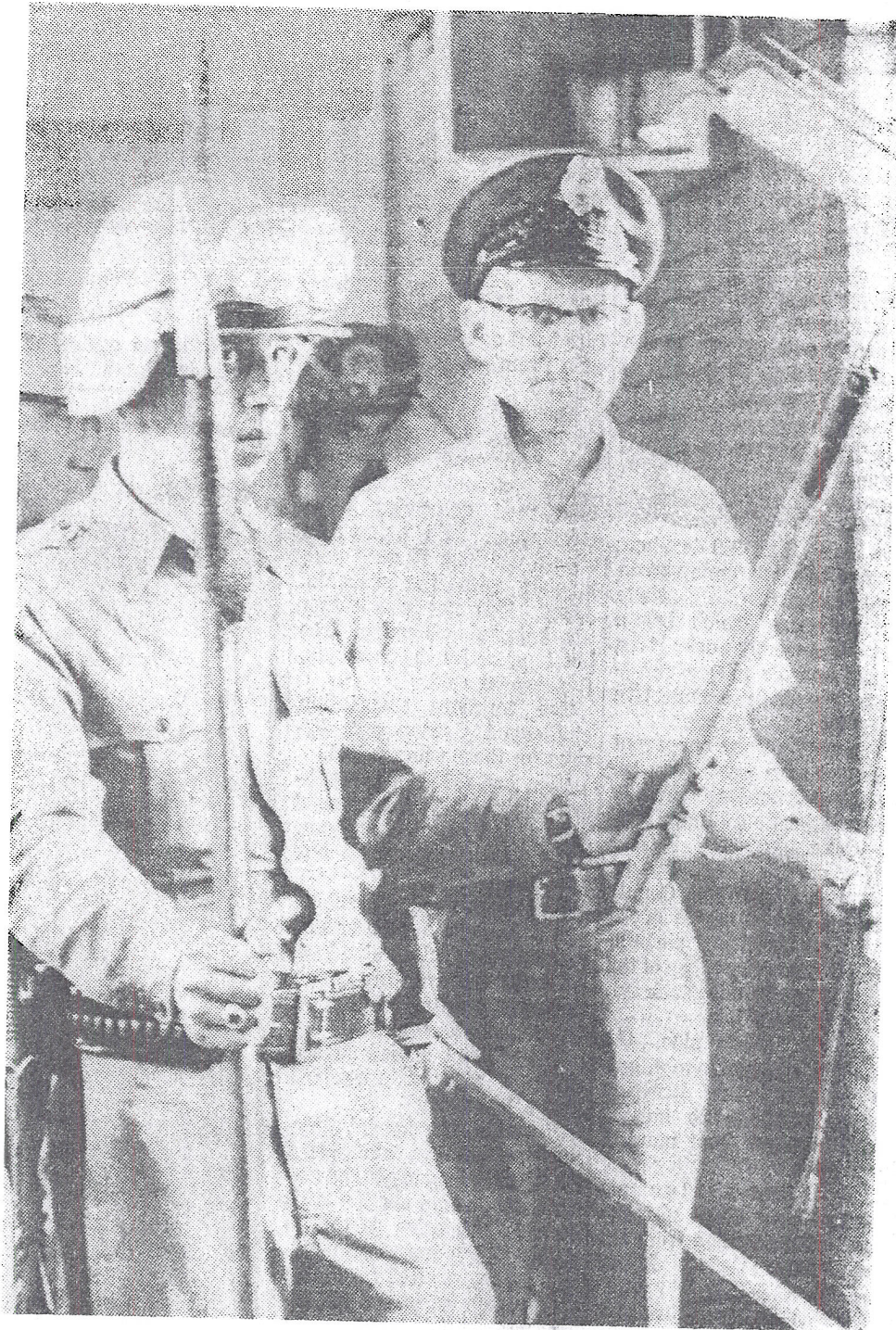
A volunteer medic who worked among the wounded after the assault said the prison's interior "was like a war zone." Standing in front of the prison in a blood-stained white coat, he said many more of the wounded "are likely to die."

Most of the 29 hostages rescued by the invaders and scores of prisoners were treated for wounds and the effects of tear gas dropped into the prison before the assault.

The recapture of the maximum security prison was hampered by trenches dug by the convicts that had been filled with burning gasoline and ignited in cellblock corridors; by electrically wired prison bars separating detention areas; by homemade bombs and booby traps hidden in underground tunnels and conduits; by barricades and by salvos of Molotov cocktails and bursts from captured tear gas guns.

The invasion began about 9:45 a.m. and ended four hours later, as troopers fought hand to hand with stubborn knots of prisoners in the second tier of D cellblock.

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AP Wirephoto

Guards showed some of the sharpened spears used by convicts during their uprising at Attica Prison

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the portion of the prison that the prisoners had completely controlled since the riots on Thursday.

The action was ordered with "extreme reluctance" by state corrections commissioner Russell G. Oswald after consultation with Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller following an ultimatum to the more than 1000 rebellious prisoners that they release the 38 hostages they held and return to their cells. The ultimatum was answered, Oswald said, when the prisoners "callously herded eight hostages within our view with weapons at their throats."

"The armed rebellion of the type we have faced threatens the destruction of our free society," Oswald declared. "Further delay and negotiations would have jeopardized more lives."

Members of the observers' committee, which had been called to Attica by the state at the request of the inmates, were locked in an administration building office inside the prison walls during the assault. Those who cared to speak expressed deep regret that no way had been found to avert what one of them called "a massacre."

LAWYER

William Kunstler, the attorney and one of a group of ten persons who negotiated with the prisoners and acted as agents for Oswald was most bitter. "A bloody mistake," he said, "this will go down in history as a bloody mistake. They sold the lives far too cheaply. I guess they always do."

The assault on the prison followed five days of negotiation in which the convicts won agreements to 28 demands for social, administrative and legal reforms but stubbornly held out for complete amnesty from criminal prosecution and the ouster of the prison superintendent, Vincent R. Mancusi.

The latter two issues were flatly turned down by Oswald as non-negotiable and the amnesty demand was rejected Sunday by Rockefeller as being beyond his constitutional authority.

GAS

The action began at 9:46 with two National Guard CH-34 helicopters dropping canisters of tear gas into D cellblock in the northeast corner of the 55-acre prison compound. The 500-man contingent of state troopers had received orders to gather outside the prison walls by 5 a.m.

Two hundred additional troopers were transported to Attica and 50 National Guard vans with an estimated 600 troops had driven through the night, arriving at Attica before dawn. A dense rain began falling as day broke.

Sheriff's deputies from Wyoming county and 14 surrounding counties arrived in their own automobiles carrying 30-30 deer rifles, pistols, surplus Army carbines and shotguns.

Tear gas canisters were loaded into the two helicopters. Troopers armed with high-powered rifles equipped with sniper scopes were sent up to the guard towers atop

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the prison walls. Squad of troopers, deputies and guards were driven to points around the prison's perimeter armed with tear gas guns. By 8 o'clock the assault force was virtually in position.

RAIN

At 8:30 Gerald Houlihan, an assistant to Oswald, stepped outside into the rain and announced that the commissioner had sent a memorandum to one of the leaders of the rebellious inmates, Richard Clark. Houlihan said Clark told him that the memorandum would be referred to the "people's central committee" in the yard of D cellblock.

The memorandum, the only ultimatum delivered by authorities during the days of tense negotiation, had gone through the bars to Clark at 7:46. It read:

"For four days I have been using every resource available to me to settle peacefully the tragic situation here at Attica.

"We have met with you; we have granted you your requests for food, clothing, bedding and water; for medical aid; for a federal court order against administrative reprisals. We have worked with the special citizens' committee which you requested. We have acceded to 28 major demands which you have made and which the citizens committee has recommended. In spite of these efforts you continue to hold hostages.

SITUATION

"I am anxious to achieve a peaceful resolution of the situation which now prevails here.

"I urgently request you to seriously reconsider my earlier appeal that:

"1. All hostages be released immediately unharmed; and

"2. You join with me in restoring order to the facility.

"I must have your reply to this urgent appeal within the hour.

"I hope and pray your answer will be affirmative."

It was signed by Commissioner Oswald.

The deadline for answering was set for 8:46. At that time the prisoners asked for more time to consider. Oswald gave them until 9 o'clock.

Several minutes later the eight hostages with knives at their throats were paraded before Oswald. But even as this final strain of the negotiations took place, the last preparations for the assault were made.

HOOKS

At 8:30, grappling hooks had been brought in. The two large helicopters and two other state police choppers equipped with public address sound systems warmed up. At 8:55 a van loaded with riot helmets was backed up to the main gate. And at 9 o'clock the state police helicopters took off.

Troopers and deputies atop the prison walls and on the roofs of buildings which surround four cellblocks began

relaying information via walkie-talkie back to the command post set up in the superintendent's office.

As the observer helicopter circled above the yard of D block, the eight prisoners who had been exhibited to Oswald were dropped into a pit filled with gasoline. Then they were taken out and dragged to a trench full of gas, where their feet were thrown in, with their bodies bent backwards so that their throats were exposed to the sky. Prisoners stood over them with knives.

PILOTS

At 9:30 the helicopter pilots spoke to each other. "There's a 200-foot ceiling" one said "the low stuff is coming in from the west. It'll be about 100 feet."

At 9:42 Captain Williams' voice came over the short-wave radio. "All forces in position," he ordered.

At 9:43 he ordered all power in the prison cut off. Only lights powered by portable generators stayed lighted.

At 9:44 he ordered all high-powered hoses connected. At the same time an order was sent out calling for all available county ambulances to come to the truck gate of the prison.

At 9:45 Williams ordered, "Zero in on targets. Do not take action until the drop."

A voice answered, "The drop has been made. Jackpot one has made the drop," indicating that CS gas was flooding the yard of cellblock D.

At 9:46 Williams shouted, "Move in. Move in. The drop has been made."

Standing outside silently huddled in the rain were the relatives of the hostages, most of whom had stood vigil since Thursday night. Some sobbed openly in parked cars.

Troopers were deployed in front of the gate and nobody was allowed to even walk across a street.

SYSTEM

The observer helicopter circled the yard. Coming from its sound system continually was this order:

"Place your hands on top of your heads and move to the outside of B and D blocks. Do not harm the hostages. Surrender peacefully. Sit or lie down. You will not be harmed. Repeat. You will not be harmed."

But by this time the hostages were dead.

At 9:57 a call came, "I need a stretcher, for God's sake a stretcher," and a minute later, "clear the door in D. yard. They're trying to get out. Jam that door up. Jam it up." At 10 o'clock "force them into B yard."

One minute later William's voice came on: "Anything that's interfering with the herding of the prisoners, clear it away. You need more assistance in the yard?"

"Yeah, in D where the negotiations were going on."

"Should I commit the reserve to join you in the yard?"

"Send in help, I need help to clean up that tent city area."

At 10:16 the helicopters were ordered down. "Ground your birds. Just be ready. Stand by for evacuations."

At 10:18, "are you rushing in on them?"

"There's three state police in ambulances."

TOWERS

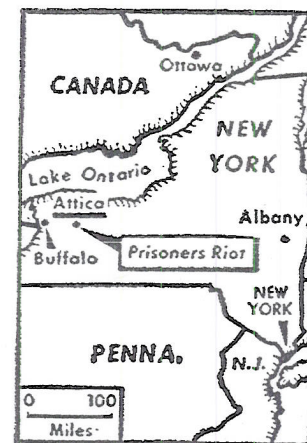
At 10:22 snipers on the guard towers began firing into the yard.

At 10:25 Oswald came out of the front gate. He was trembling but in control of himself. As he spoke the pops of tear gas guns and the sharper cracks of rifle shots could be heard over the wall.

"For the past four days," he said, "I have been doing everything humanly possible to ring this tragic situation to a peaceful conclusion."

The commissioner repeated the chronology of negotiations and the concessions he had made and said: "In spite of all these efforts the inmates have steadfastly refused to release hostages and to enter meaningful negotiations. Situation has rapidly deteriorated. It became clear that the prisoners were not going to participate in reasonable negotiations."

He said that tensions had run high when it was learned



Site of Attica prison riots in New York

that a guard, William Quinn, who had been held hostage, had died Saturday night of injuries suffered after he was reportedly thrown from a cellblock window. He said also that one inmate had stabbed another during the night.

Another observer reported that Sunday night Kunstler had told inmates that "Third World Nations" were across the street from the prison "ready to help you. Are you ready to go?" There were shouts of "Yeah," the observer said.

"They continued to make weapons," Oswald said, "spread gasoline, make booby traps and electrical traps. I extended the deadline. They asked for more time. This was only a delaying tactic." He then described the prisoners who had held knives at the throats of hostages.

"We hope to protect the lives of the hostages if possible. I pray to God that this works out to the best interests of all of us."

RADIO

Even as Oswald spoke Williams' voice continued to bark over the radio. "There's 30 out. We got 30 out."

A raincoated guard at the main entrance began shouting names to the relatives huddled in the rain. "They're out!" he yelled. He shouted nine names. Several women cried, and two of them embraced.

"Steve Wright" the guard yelled. "Miller." "Walker's out."

One released hostage ran out the door shouting "white power!"

Standing behind the relatives was another observer, Clarence Jones, publisher of the Amsterdam News. "Time was all we asked for," he said quietly. "Time." His head was bowed.

At 10:40 a voice came over the radio. "How much of D block is secure to us, if any?"

"The first floor side is secured. Get us another radio."

"Get in there in D block and clean it out. Are national guardsmen needed as replacements?"

"No."

"Don't overextend yourselves. We're doing beautifully. Let's not get anyone hurt now."

And also from Williams: "No shooting unless it's absolutely necessary. No more forward progress until everybody's accounted for. Let's get D block mopped up."

GUARD

Outside the gate Kunstler looked at a guard. "You murdering bastards. They're shooting them. They're murdering them."

At 10:55 Williams urged: "Use extreme caution. No gunfire unless absolutely necessary. Utilize gas. We're coming in both ways through B Block . . . I need two men with shotguns at the south end of the administration building. Forthwith."

At 11:15 all power was ordered cut so that electrically wired bars could be deactivated.

For a long while there was no communication as the troopers gradually gained the upper hand. The words "mop up" began coming over the radio.

DEVICES

Then explosive "gas devices" were found in the prison chapel and in the metal machine shop. Demolition crews were ordered to those buildings.

At 12:30 Houlihan came out to announce the first death toll. "There are 37 dead," he said. "Nine of them hostages." He added that the prison is not totally secure "but it almost is."

He said that it had been hoped by Oswald that the gas dropped by the helicopters "would immobilize them quickly. The plan worked well."

Asked to weigh the success of the plan against the lives lost, Houlihan said "no one ever had to make a tougher decision than this."