

Attica Hostage: 'I Was Scared Silly'

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ATTICA, N. Y., Sept. 13—"I laid there on the floor and knew I was going to bleed to death right there."

As he said this, the only signs that Ron Kozlowski had been one of the hostages whose throats had been slit in the first fierce instants of the assault on the rebellious prisoners here were a small two-inch bandage at the base of his neck and a visible shakiness in his knees.

"They told us, 'As soon as the first shot is fired, you white blankety-blanks have had it.' I was scared silly up there. I really was. I didn't want them to shoot."

Mr. Kozlowski, a 23-year-old accounts clerk at the prison, was one of eight hostages who were led this morning, bound and blindfolded, out of the jerrybuilt pen in the center of the prison yard where all the hostages had been held for four days. The 30 others left in the pen were also bound and blindfolded soon after the ultimatum from State Correctional Commissioner Russell G. Oswald had been delivered.

First, Mr. Kozlowski said, the eight were taken to a pit that was partly filled with gasoline and told they would be burned alive there when the assault began. Then, apparently because their captors felt the pit would

not be sufficiently visible to the helicopters circling the prison, they were dragged and shoved to a trench, which was full of gasoline.

Finally, moments before the two Army helicopters made their first low passes over the yard to drop their freight of stifling CS gas, the eight hostages were led to a parapet atop a catwalk that crosses the yard.

There they were held, each with a stick at his back and a knife at his throat, bent backwards in plain view of the copeters so that there could be no doubt about their fate.

Mr. Kozlowski thought he

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heard machine-gun fire as he collapsed on the parapet. "You could hear the bullets right next to your head on the cement," he said.

Miraculously, barely an hour later, the superficial wound to his throat had been stitched and he was waiting to be discharged from the Wyoming County Hospital. At a glance, the young prison employe looked robust and well-tanned. On closer examination he showed a sickly pallor.

Dr. Warren Hanson, who treated the hostages brought to the hospital, said that at least one other of the eight held on the parapet had survived. That hostage told the doctor that instead of cutting his throat, his captor had cut his bonds and pulled him down to the ground.

Menaced With Knives

As the assault began, the 30 hostages who remained in the pen in the center of the yard

had knives at their throats or backs.

"I didn't feel they were bluffing, not one bit," said Sgt. Gerald Riger, 51, who is in his 21st year as a prison guard. "I knew what they were capable of, and what I heard of their talk over four days convinced me they were very determined."

The hostages had been told from the first that they would be killed as soon as the shooting started. But until the ultimatum, these hostages and others said that they were treated carefully, at times even solicitously.

"The inmates right around us were there to protect our lives till just about the end," said Larry Lyons, a 32-year-old guard who was treated at the Genesee Memorial Hospital in Batavia. They did what they could. I really believe that. We got to eat what they got to eat."

Make-Shift Facilities

Sanitary facilities were fixed up for the prisoners in their pen and mattresses and blankets were distributed, he said.

On the first day, the prisoners had been stripped naked and bound with strips torn from bedsheets. Periodically they were blindfolded. But as the harrowing weekend wore on, their captors dispensed with these restraints for longer periods.

The hostages came to depend increasingly for their safety on their captor guards, fearing the diffuse hostility of the more 1,000 angry prisoners milling about in the yard.

"Some guys started to crack," one of the hostages said. "Quite a few said they were never going back into that prison except to get paid off—if they got out."

When they thought about how it all would end, the hostages indicated they were torn between their fear and their incredulity over the liberal concessions the prisoners seemed to be extracting.

"Let's face it, you're always fighting for survival," Sergeant Riger said. "But I didn't want to see them get all their demands. It would start the same

thing going in prisons all over the United States."

Not all the hostages were ready or able to talk about their experiences in the prison yard. "If you want to know, I'm still too scared," said Dean Wright, a guard.

Freed, the surviving hostages were rushed in ambulances through the placid countryside to the towns of Wyoming and Batavia. By lunch time, at least 15 of them had been discharged.

The rest were still being treated for a variety of knife and bullet wounds, but these were said to be serious in only two cases.

The hospitals also prepared to treat inmates but, instead prison authorities summoned doctors and nurses to the prison to treat the wounded here.

One doctor emerged from the prison in mid-afternoon in a blood-stained gown. The wounded inmates, he said, were being treated in a small room 8 by 10 feet, the floor of which was already covered with blood. "It's the worst thing I've ever seen," he said.



Associated Press

COLLECTING PRISONERS' WEAPONS: Policemen in prison yard picking up baseball bats used during the riot

For the Survivors, a Nightmare of Blood and Terror