

Attica Residents Inclined to Doubt Autopsy Finds

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ATTICA, N. Y., Sept. 16—

The shock suffered by residents here over the prison uprising and deaths seems steeped in incredulity as much as grief.

Few people can be found on the rustic roads who accept the Medical Examiner's report that the hostages who died during the state assault on the prison were killed by gunshots—shots that Governor Rockefeller agreed today probably had come from the weapons of state policemen sent in to rescue the hostages.

Frank Hill, a snowmobile salesman and member of the Lions Club, rejected the report from the outset, feeling that the inmates actually slew the guards. At first he could not understand why the state would permit the release of a report that he and so many others here consider fabricated.

But then a reason occurred that, he said today, was quite convincing. The state fears the relatives of the slain prisoners would bring lawsuits, he explained. "But now they can say, 'Look, we killed our own men,'" and so reduce liability to suits.

Strong feelings continue to be stirred over reports that circulated immediately after the assault that some hostages had been castrated. Interviews with doctors who performed the autopsies on hostages and inmates have found the reports without foundation. The stories of mutilation continue to be re-

peated with certainty in Attica, even about hostages who have survived.

"There aren't any cases here," the administrator of one hospital said, "but I'm told that there's a case at another hospital."

An official at that institution said, "No, but I hear it has happened." And he offered still another source that continued the circle of gossip.

"It's really strange," said Tom Palumbo, a 28-year-old gasoline station attendant from nearby Warsaw. "The guys I drink with, before the troopers went in they all kept saying someone ought to go in and get them out. Now I'm hearing the same guys saying maybe they should have waited."

"These guys at the bar, they're blue-collared guys who work around here; they're always talking about how people are coddling prisoners and they want to see them treated tougher. Me, I'm for reforms, but if I ever opened my mouth about it, I guess they'd ram my teeth down my throat."

The front of the Attica institution, facing across a gentle dale where cows have grazed throughout the ordeal, has large gold letters proclaiming: "Attica Correctional Facility."

"See that—you can see where the word 'pison' was taken down last year, when they changed all the names like 'warden' to 'superintendent,'" said David Pope, whose brother-in-law, a hostage, was killed in the assault.

"I still say it's a prison," Mr. Pope said.

A group of black visitors from Buffalo called Attica "Up South"—the other day when they were here trying to find out the fate of their relatives in the prison.

There is an ingratiating plainness about many of the residents of Attica. They often answer questions directly, using racial epithets like "nigger" in contending that the predominantly black and Puerto Rican prison population has been turned over by authorities to black nationalist groups.

Such prejudices did not stop a local newspaper, The Batavia Daily News, from publishing a front-page interview with one of the rescued guards, Philip Watkins, in which he spoke in praise of Black Muslim prisoners.

The Muslims were reasonable during his captivity in D yard, Mr. Watkins said, and protected him from beatings by other prisoners. During the assault by troopers, Mr. Watkins was blindfolded and held by an inmate, whom he asked: "Do I know you?"

When the inmate answered yes, Mr. Watkins said, he thought he recognized a Muslim and knew he had a chance of surviving.

In the few days since the assault, various individuals have drifted in and out of the scene, including correction guards from other institutions in the state and politicians. They pass before the news media, still gathered at the prison's front door.

The guards offer sympathy to their colleagues here, and

a few, under questioning, disclose that they are candidates for statewide office in the guards' union.

Dr. Theodore C. Wenzl, president of the State Civil Service Employees Association, posed for photographs on the steps of the prison.

The Tipperary Restaurant, opposite the great-walled prison, reopened its doors today after suddenly shutting them Sunday despite a crowded bar. A group of black people who had come to find out about their inmate relatives was heading toward the place when the "closed" sign was quickly put in the window and the door was locked.

"We decided to take a little vacation," the proprietor, Mrs. Rose Lyons, explained today, giving a table a swipe with a cloth and smiling at two customers. Asked where she had gone, Mrs. Lyons replied: "We stayed right upstairs."

At the height of the four-day period of negotiation that preceded the Attica assault, the telephone rang inside the prison in the command office of the Commissioner of Corrections, Russell G. Oswald. He picked up the receiver himself, an observer related later, and at the other end was a man calling from Indiana who said he had the solution to the inmates' uprising.

"I have a dog who put down the riot at—the man began, as Mr. Oswald blinked in amazement and wearily handed the phone to an aide who cleared the line.