

Injured Guard Says First Indication of Asserts Riot Is a Result Of Lax Rules in Facility

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL
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RAHWAY, N. J., Nov. 25—
The movie for inmates at the Rahway state prison last night was "Making It." The prisoners seemed to be enjoying it, so Correction Officer Edward J. O'Beirne did not understand why many of them got up and left shortly after the film started in the auditorium.

Today, in bed in Rahway Hospital recovering from a stab wound in the back, the officer looked back on the walkout as the first tipoff of the uprising in which the prison superintendent and five unarmed officers were seized as hostages, and he managed to escape.

It was also, the 42-year-old correction officer asserted, an outgrowth of lax prison practices. Guards, he said, were unarmed, and the prisoners had sharpened spoons and other homemade weapons.

The movie walkout—all 1,143 prisoners are shown movies at least twice a week, Mr. O'Beirne said—apparently began after late arrivals in the auditorium spread word about the impending rebellion. Inmates who wanted to take no part in it walked out.

Chair Is Thrown

Shortly before the end of the film, around 10 P.M., according to Mr. O'Beirne's account, an inmate he knew only as Thomas, a black in his 30's, who apparently exercised a great grip on his fellow prisoners, burst into the auditorium from outside, walked down the aisle and threw a chair at the screen while shouting for attention.

Behind him came several white-hatted officers beseeching him to end his disturbance. But Thomas persisted, shouting what sounded to Mr. O'Beirne like: "... Locking us in like animals at 9:30 ... I'm no little boy. I want to talk to somebody right now. ..."

The lights went on, the movie stopped and the audience—which Mr. O'Beirne said appeared to be all black—stood up.

Then the Superintendent, Vukasin S. Vukceovich, and his chief deputy, Thomas Olden, rushed in. Like the seven correction officers in the auditorium, they were unarmed.

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Prison Uprising

Occurred During Movie

'A Facedown Then

He and the Superintendent then stood together a few minutes. "I can remember the superintendent asking, 'Are all tiers secured?'" Mr. O'Beirne recalled.

"It was like a facedown then," the officer said. "At that moment if two guards would have come in with machine-guns it would have been all over. But they didn't."

Instead, according to the officer's account, Thomas went back to Mr. Vukceovich "and before I knew it was swinging at him."

"I made a run toward him, but before I could ever reach him I got knocked down in a human wave," he said. "I found myself on the floor getting belted with chairs and fists."

"I crawled eight feet to the doorway. My face was as close to the floor as I could get it and so was my belly. I was stabbed somewhere along the route to the door, but with so many things I didn't even feel the stab."

Reaching the auditorium

Goes Onto Stage

The officials, Mr. O'Beirne recalled, tried to reason with Thomas, but the inmate—apparently in command of the loyalties of the audience—got up on the stage and called for a meeting to discuss inmate grievance.

But then Rubin (Hurricane) Carter, a former middleweight boxer serving life sentences for three slayings, got on the stage and tried to talk the inmates into returning quietly to their cells.

He was booed off the stage, Mr. O'Beirne recalled.

Meantime, Thomas and the warden had moved to the side in animated discussion. Officer O'Beirne then saw Thomas break off and walk over to a group of supporters—to discuss a deal with the superintendent, Mr. O'Beirne thought.

door and crawling two feet outside it, Officer O'Beirne said he felt himself grabbed by the wrists and pulled forward by a fellow guard. But his rescuer gave up in a hail of thrown pop bottles, Mr. O'Beirne said, and he had to crawl the rest of the way away by himself.

He next recalled walking dazedly down a prison corridor and hearing another officer shout, "Hey, O'Beirne, hurry up we got the door open." It was heart of the prison, and the officer reached it in time to slip through before the rebellious area was sealed off.

A fellow guard, Richard Madigan, was also stabbed and was in the special-care unit of the hospital tonight. Two more guards were said to be hospitalized and two others were described as having been treated for injuries and released.

Says Weapons Are Carried

Mr. O'Beirne placed part of the blame for the rebellion on what he called lax prison practices that he had complained about by letter several times in vain.

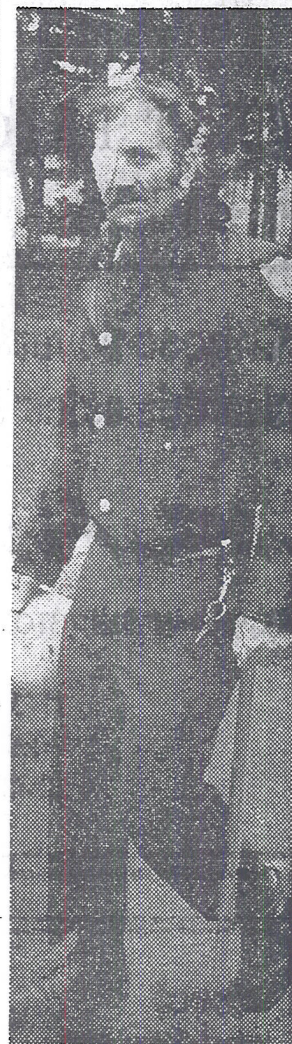
Prisoners travel without required passes, he said, and are known to possess such hand-made weapons as sharpened spoons and hairbrushes, often fashioned in the hobby workshop for defense against other prisoners.

The 10 disciplinary cells have lost their persuasiveness, he said, and prisoners sometimes even ask to be confined there to avoid the prison work schedule.

Mr. O'Beirne, who lives in nearby Howell, is married and has three children. He said that last summer "we came within a hair's-breadth of a riot."

"The administration had the leaders transferred to Trenton," he said. "That broke the back of it."

The inmate he called Thomas—"the ringleader"—had proved troublesome before and had been sent away to other prisons—only to be sent back here each time," he said.



The New York Times

WOUNDED GUARD: William Galasow wearing an eyepatch. He said he had been hit with a bottle.



Ted Cowell

REINFORCEMENTS AT RAHWAY: New Jersey State policemen, carrying shotguns, gas masks and bullet-proof vests, arriving at the Rahway state prison yesterday. Below the dome, rear, is the auditorium where the rebellion began.