

A Militant Handful Blamed For Rikers Prison Revolt

*Evidence of Careful Inmate Planning
Cited by Commissioner Malcolm—
Tally of Injured Revised to 95*

By MICHAEL T. KAUFMAN

Benjamin Malcolm, the city's Commissioner of Correction, said yesterday that he believed Sunday's riot by inmates of the Adolescent Remand Shelter on Rikers Island had been organized by a "handful of hardcore militants."

"We do know there was planning; it was not spontaneous," the Commissioner said at a news conference in which he discussed the revolt and retaking of cellblock 7.

Twenty correction officers and 75 inmates were injured, Mr. Malcolm reported in a revised tally. Sunday night, after the rebellion had been put down the Commissioner said that 78 inmates and 28 correction officers had been injured.

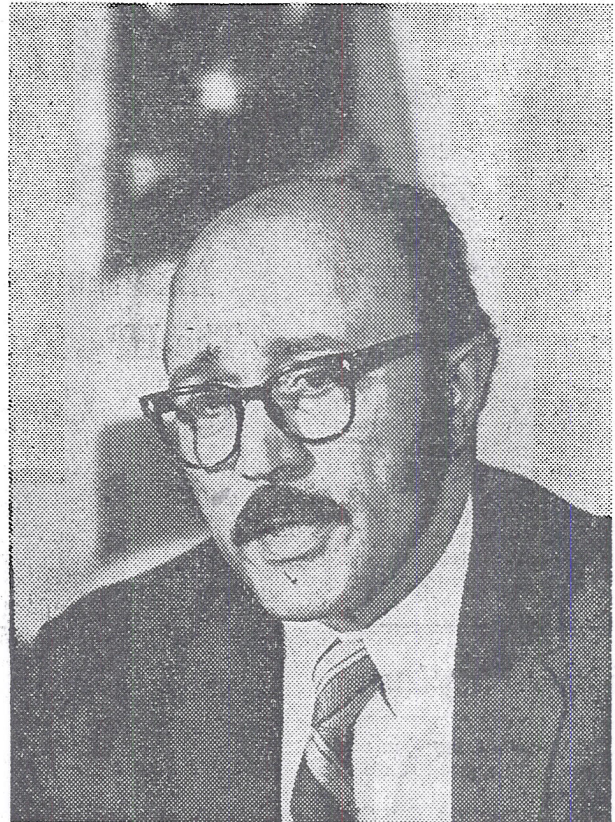
Careful Planning Noted

Mr. Malcolm said that during the three hours that the 315 inmates, mostly black and Puerto Rican, held the three-tiered gallery of 240 cells, some inmates were assigned to guard the five hostages seized. Others, he said, were delegated to retrieve and throw back tear-gas grenades, and a third contingent to resist the advance of an assault force of correction guards in hand-to-hand fighting.

Mr. Malcolm said that during the take-over by the inmates nooses made of bedsheets had been placed around the necks of three of the hostages. He himself, the Commissioner said, heard an inmate spokesman say over a loudspeaker that the hostages would be killed if correction officers rushed the area.

One hostage, Capt. Roy Caldwell, was injured, but did not require hospitalization.

Burton B. Roberts, the District Attorney of the Bronx, said yesterday that four detectives from his staff were investigating the riot and that he hoped they would have evidence to present to a grand jury by Thursday.



The New York Times/Tyrone Dukes

SAYS RIOT WAS PLANNED: Benjamin Malcolm, Correction Commissioner, discussing violence at Rikers Island.

Jury Findings Awaited

"The jury will determine whether or not the crimes of attempted murder, assault and possession of dangerous weapons were committed, and if so, who committed them," Mr. Roberts said.

Last Wednesday Mr. Roberts announced the indictment of seven men at the Remand Shelter for possession of weapons found during a shake-down search three weeks ago.

While Deputy Mayor Edward K. Hamilton said at his own press conference yesterday that court congestion and inadequate facilities had led to the uprising, Mr. Malcolm said he believed overcrowding had nothing to do with it.

The remand shelter is at 98 per cent of its capacity, he said, one of the very few city institutions that, statistically at least, has vacancies.

"I don't think the inmates have any bona fide grievances," the Commissioner said. "They are making excuses. Two weeks ago they objected to having to take their meals at tables set up in the day rooms, which is

what is done in every cellblock, since it cuts down feeding time by one-third."

The inmates in Cellblock 7 went on a rampage two weeks ago, breaking toilets and tearing mattresses. After that outbreak, correction officials said, numerous discussions were held in the cellblock with inmates.

According to Algenor Castro, public relations spokesman for the Correction Department, the hostages were seized Sunday during just such a discussion. Captain Caldwell, a black officer who is reported to be popular with many inmates, had gone to the cellblock to explain that two inmates, regarded as leaders, were to be removed to other quarters.

This move, Commissioner Malcolm said, was not a disciplinary move but was taken to facilitate the appearance of the two men at scheduled court appearances.

Inmates Overpower 5

It was 3:15 Sunday afternoon, and the men at that time were free to roam the gallery. Captain Caldwell was reportedly trying to talk with a group of inmates when he and four guards, all of them unarmed, were overpowered. They were taken to cells on the third tier.

At 4:30 P.M., Mayor Lindsay was alerted as he arrived to campaign at the Parker Plaza apartment complex in Hallendale, Fla. From an office there, he called Mr. Hamilton at the remand shelter. The decision to free the hostages by force was made by the Mayor after consultation with Mr. Malcolm and Mr. Hamilton.

Meanwhile, the Commissioner was communicating with a spokesman for the inmates through a public-address system. The Commissioner demanded the release of hostages as a condition for talks. The inmates, he said refused.

Instead, he said, the inmates demanded to speak with "representatives from the Young Lords, the Muslims and the Black Liberation Army." They also reportedly asked for representatives from the news media. During this time, and yesterday as well, newsmen were not permitted on the island.

Assault Force Enters

Mr. Malcolm said that just after 5 P.M. on Sunday "I gave the order for the cellblock to be taken."

"At 5:05," he went on, "several rounds of tear gas were fired through the windows. At this time we could hear a great deal of confusion through the loudspeakers."

At 5:45, Mr. Malcolm said, the inmate spokesman said that Captain Caldwell would be released if the tear-gas barrage ceased. The Commissioner agreed, and the captain was let out through a small side door.

Meanwhile, Mr. Malcolm said, the bulk of a 150-man correction guard assault force was trying to break through the main gate, which had been

barricaded with a heavy platform, tables and chairs.

A small detail, however, broke through a door leading to the day room in the corridor. The Commissioner said this group, armed with nightsticks, fought for 10 minutes with inmates and eventually cleared the barricade, allowing the greater force to enter.

Leo Zeferetti, the president of the Correction Guards Benevolent Association, who entered the gallery with Mr. Hamilton, praised the handling of the situation but lamented shortages of equipment.

"There were not enough gas masks and walkie-talkies," he said. "Mr. Hamilton went in without a mask."

Most Treated IN Infirmary

Mr. Malcolm said that a number of improvised prisoner weapons had been found and that the cellblock had been severely damaged, with mattresses, toilets and tables destroyed. He said that provisional clean-up was made Sunday evening and that most of the 315 inmates were returned to their cells in the gallery.

Of the injured, most were treated at the infirmary. Fifteen inmates and one officer were treated at Bellevue Hospital, and 20 inmates and 19 officers at the City Hospital Center Elmhurst, Queens.

One guard and one inmate reportedly were the only ones to be admitted to hospitals. These men, whose names were not released, reportedly both suffered head wounds.

David Rothenburg, director of the Foortune Socitey, a group dedicated to prison reform, said yesterday that he had learned from "a staff person at Rikers Island that after the riot was over, inmates were beaten and run through a gantlet."

This was denied by Mr. Castro.

The men were stripped and lined up in the main corridor," he said. "The officers were kept away from the inmates, who were put up against the wall. The Commissioner was there. I was there. It couldn't have happened. There was no stick-waving gantlet."

Joseph Kaplan, director of

the Bronx appellate division of the Legal Aid Society, said he also had spoken to a witness who reported inmates beaten in a gauntlet. Like Mr. Rothenburg, he refused to name his source.

Mr. Kpalan went to Rikers Island yesterday with 10 Legal Aid lawyers in an attempt to interview inmates in Cellblock 7. He said officials there had prevented him from seeing the men.

Mr. Kaplan said he would go to court today to obtain an order forcing correction officials to produce his clients.