

# The Quentin Violence

## --First Inside Account

### What Happened During The Bloody Incident --Officials' Story

By Tim Findley

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San Quentin authorities believe George Jackson decided in a desperate instant Saturday to alter an elaborate plan for a mass escape from the prison's adjustment center.

"We've got to do it now!" reliable sources yesterday reported Jackson as shouting to the other inmates seconds after he pulled a small gun from his hair and got the drop on three correctional officers.

Detailed information on the bloody incident came to light yesterday as The Chronicle was able to compile the first complete version of what happened according to prison officials.

#### GUN

The gun used in it, a 9-mm. automatic with its grip handles removed, was believed to have been smuggled in to Jackson in a hollowed-out tape recorder.

The Chronicle also learned yesterday that a bottle containing a small quantity of explosive substance was found on Jackson's body and that more of the explosive as well as a small variety of bullets were found hidden in adjustment center cells.

A search had been on for Berkeley attorney Stephen Bingham, whom authorities wish to question about circumstances surrounding delivery of the weapon. Early

Sunday, however, an all-points bulletin for his detention was canceled because he may have already contacted Marin county authorities.

Bingham, prison officials said, arrived at San Quentin about 2 p.m. Saturday with a young woman assistant who was carrying a briefcase.

#### DETECTOR

The young woman, told she could not go into the closely watched separate visiting room used for "dangerous" inmates, handed the briefcase to Bingham.

As the young attorney went through a metal detector, the machine registered — apparently from some metal in the briefcase.

An officer opened the briefcase and found a portable cassette tape recorder, a tool that attorneys frequently use in interviewing clients.

As is customary procedure, the officer opened the battery case of the tape recorder to determine if it was functional.

All seemed normal, but authorities believe working parts had been taken out of the machine, and the gun concealed in the body of the case itself.

Jackson had, as usual, been

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"skin searched" before he was escorted out of the adjustment center and across a mall to the visiting room near the main gate.

The search, done while the inmate is nude, is a meticulous examination that includes inspection of genitals and hair. Jackson had been through it many times.

The visiting room itself was formerly used for visiting families of death row inmates.

When potentially dangerous inmates are in the room a correctional officer stands outside and frequently peers in through a barred window — a procedure that has brought complaints from inmates and their visitors in the past.

Prison officials said Jackson had recently taken to wearing a black knit watch cap pulled tight on the back of his moderate-length "natural" hair style.

By procedure, the correctional officer would signal to Jackson and his visitor when their time was up — a half an hour or an hour.

#### CONCEALMENT

Sometime during the interview, authorities are speculating, the gun was slipped to Jackson, who either put it beneath his watch cap on his head or concealed it in his hair — probably a combination of both.

The officer came in about 2:35 p.m. and waited for Jackson to rise from the interview table.

Then Jackson preceded him out through an iron door leading from the main gate into a landscaped mall that often serves as a showcase for prison visitors.

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The two walked across the mall on a diagonal to the left, headed for the entrance to the adjustment center, a grey flat-roofed building that is newer than most of those at San Quentin and stands out prominently among the aging yellow stones.

#### FULL

Adjustment centers are little prisons within prison — reserved for inmates who commit crimes while they are behind the walls. San Quentin's adjustment center was nearly full, and one tier of it had been taken up by overflow of death row inmates.

On the first tier were some of the most notorious of California convicts — including Jackson and the two other "Soledad Brothers," Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette. (Clutchette himself was in the visiting room with his mother, according to authorities, and apparently returned to the adjustment center soon after the action started.)

Ruchell McGee, accused in the Marin county Civic Center escape attempt and gun battle a year ago, was also on the first tier. So was Hugo Pinell, an inmate not well known on the outside, but known at both San Quentin and Soledad for his furious temper. He is accused of killing a correctional officer at Soledad and is suspected of a series of other assaults on officers and inmates.

#### PROCEDURES

There are procedures for entering the adjustment center. At night, the building's single door is locked from

the outside — officers and inmates alike inside cannot get out unless the door is unlocked from outside. But authorities said that during daytime an officer with keys may be inside the building.

On Saturday, officer Frank P. DeLeon used his key for the door and followed Jackson inside. They went into a hallway and through another locked door into a long narrow room occupied by officers.

That room is caged from the actual row cells by an iron-barred sally port. And beyond that, adjustment center inmates are customarily locked in their cells 23 hours a day — two or three may be out on the tier taking their hour of exercise.

Jackson was to undergo the usual skin search before going back to his cell. Officer DeLeon stood back and another unidentified officer began the search.

Sources told The Chronicle the officer spotted what at first looked to be a pencil in Jackson's hair, and asked the inmate about it.

Suddenly, Jackson pulled the pistol from his hair, sources told The Chronicle, and leveled it at the officers.

From versions of the story learned by The Chronicle it appears that at that moment the gun was not loaded. Jackson apparently slapped in one of two ammunition clips as the surprised officers stood helpless.

At that moment, another officer escorting another inmate (possibly Clutchette) entered the small room.

"This is it!" Jackson reportedly shouted, and ordered an officer to turn the big lever that would open all 30 cells on the tier. Twenty-five inmates came out. Two

strapped their cell doors shut and stayed put.

Details are unclear, but within minutes, two officers and two inmates — both white tier tenders — were murdered. There was speculation that the tier tenders, inmates who serve food and pick up laundry in the adjustment center and thus have some degree of freedom, were murdered because of bitterness among some on the tier that there were no black tenders.

#### WEAPON

The primary murder weapon was a razor blade attached to a toothbrush. But the cuts were crude and gory.

Officer Charles Breckenridge, 21, had his throat slashed. He was apparently dragged to Jackson's cell and thrown in — left to die.

The bodies of the two other officers and the inmates were thrown in on top of him. Inmates did not notice that, although critically injured, Breckenridge was still alive.

It was 2:50 p.m. Sergeant Jere Graham arrived at the adjustment center to pick up DeLeon for another escort assignment. At the door, he was met by the inmates and also murdered.

#### NOISES

It had been less than a half hour since Jackson left the visiting room. Officers outside the adjustment center were curious about flashes of movement inside. On the second floor of the adjustment center, an officer thought he heard some strange noises.

An unidentified officer went into the adjustment center and peered through a window in the door.

Instantly a shot ripped past him, miraculously missing.

On the second tier, an officer was now sure he heard something strange. His alarm went in almost simultaneously with that of the other officer.

#### ALARMS

It was only minutes, perhaps seconds, after the alarms went off, according to authorities, that Jackson and John Larry Spain, 22, an inmate recently transferred to San Quentin from Soledad, burst out of the door to the adjustment center and raced for a 20-foot stone wall topped with barbed wire at the end of an alleyway about 75 yards from the door.

Guards on two towers opened fire. Jackson was hit twice — once in the foot, and once, fatally in the top of the head. It was 2:55 p.m.

Inside the adjustment center, the inmates still had two officers as hostages — both were bleeding from cuts on their necks. Sources said the dull razor blade at one point was exchanged for a finger nail clipper which an inmate used to jab and probe for one officer's jugular vein.

#### APPEALS

By this time, Associate Warden James Park had issued emergency appeals for county and area help. Guns ringed the prison.

A force of armed officers rushed into the adjustment center.

"We've got hostages," an inmate screamed from the back wall where the inmates were crowded.

"That doesn't matter," an officer shouted back.

Two shots were fired by the officers down the tier. The two hostages broke free and ran desperately for the other end and waiting officers.

#### RUMORS

It was 3:20 p.m. The adjustment center inmates were shoved out onto the grassy mall and told to lie face down. There were still rumors of another gun. One inmate started to stand up. A shot grazed his leg.

In the hours that followed, all the inmates were given short haircuts and searched again and again. Then, as night fell, they were locked in cells on the second tier as a search began of the blood-smeared first tier.

Found hidden in a square of cheese was a shotgun shell. In a bar of soap, a .38-caliber bullet. At least one other bullet was found hidden elsewhere, along with a small amount of explosive substance similar to so-called plastique. A bottle containing identical explosive material was found on George Jackson's body.