

## San Quentin

# The Bitter Guards

By Tim Findley

Carl Umland, a burly bear of a man with emotions that rumble out of him like a threatening storm, was fuming.

"You the reporter?" he said gruffly. "I'll give you a story; I'll give you something to print."

Umland had left the locked-down, yellow walls of San Quentin prison Friday after another ten-hour shift fraught with the tensions and violence of the past two months.

His 17-year-old son had met him inside the walls and, since Umland had an appointment with a reporter, the two traded automobiles.

Umland took his son's sedan, and the youth drove out the east gate in Umland's pickup truck — the one with a yellow star signifying the vehicle of a correctional officer emblazoned on the side.

By the time Umland reached his Marin county home to change clothes, there was a call from his son waiting for him.

"He said two blacks in a car followed him when he left the gate," Umland related.

"He got a little ways from the prison and stopped for a stop sign and one of these guys walks up and puts a .22 pistol in his face and says 'you're the son of a pig, ain't you?' The kid gunned the truck and got out of there.

"I'll tell you something," Umland said, looking hard at the reporter and pointing his finger for emphasis, "if this is a war these people want, god damn it, I'm ready."

Umland's family wants him to quit his job. The first words his son said to him on the telephone Friday, Umland recalled, were, "Dad, why don't you quit that job." Every morning his wife begs him.

"But I'm not quitting," Umland says. "Nobody's going to tell me what to do with

*See Back Page*

From Page 1

my job."

### PISTOL

Umland put a pistol in the glove compartment of his car Friday night though — "that thing's been in my drawer at home five years and I never had a need for it before, but now, I need it."

And Friday night he told his son to use a razor blade and scratch the star off his truck.

Like many other correctional officers in the state prison system, Umland took the job after retiring from the armed forces — 22 years in the Navy, most of them as a bosun's mate.

It's the kind of job that used to be well suited to ex-military men—regimented with ranks and uniforms, structured with orders and clear tasks.

The pay, \$650 a month to start, is too low to attract young fireballs, but a comfortable addition to military retirement. And despite the movie melodramas, up until two or three years ago, it was a fairly safe, even boring, job.

### AGE

But men like Umland, now in their mid 40s with a background of five years or so in corrections, are a fading breed.

New requirements have lowered the age limitations below that of retiring military men and the Department of Corrections is actively giving preference to applicants from minority groups.

They don't like to admit it, but many of the white correctional officers think young black and Chicano applicants for the jobs are giv-

### More San Quentin news on Page 2

en too many breaks—"Nobody held my hand," one officer said.

A lot of the men don't pretend to understand the kind of hate they're up against with some inmates these days. They figure the "radicals" are behind most of it.

## FEAR

But most of the officers, like Umland, will tell you "90 percent of the men in there are good people, just like 90 percent out here. The other 10 percent, in there or out here, are knotheads."

These days, however, a large percentage of the officers think things have gone too far inside prison. Some of the officers are scared. More

of them are just plain angry — not so much at the inmates, but at the prison administration for not keeping things "tight" enough.

Umland was working in the troublesome South Block that Saturday afternoon three officers and three inmates died in the bloodiest incident ever at San Quentin.

Ever since Officer Leo Davis was stabbed to death July 21 tension and bitterness had been thick among both inmates and staff — "a balance of terror," one lawyer called it.

It was time for a count — the inmates were to stand in their cells for another of the at least four daily nose counts.

## SHOTS

When the shots were heard in the prison, everybody froze. Shots, "popping a cap" as it is called in "the joint," are not particularly unusual. Usually they are warning rounds fired to break up a fight or remind a reluctant group of inmates about who is in charge.

The procedure when an alarm is sounded and when shots are heard is for all inmates to get in their cells and lock up.

Usually they do so with little problem. But on that Saturday, according to officers,

there was a strange resistance, perhaps a sensing of real trouble.

Shotgun blasts roared down the ringing steel tiers in both the South and East blocks as warnings before the men went in their cells — in some cases as many as five men ended up in one cell in their rush to take cover.

## GURNEYS

Umland recalls that one inmate immediately volunteered to push a gurney from the hospital for the wounded — wherever they were. The inmate waited a time, and finally went into his cell just before the frantic call came up for "gurneys — fast."

They brought the gurneys out of the adjustment center with the bodies of three dead officers and two dead inmates on them, and pushed them toward the hospital.

"Some of the men in the South Block cheered," Umland said.

## HOURS

He spoke readily about it, with a kind of adrenalin-charged spirit. The 15 hours he worked on Saturday, the 16 Sunday, the 14 each Tuesday and Wednesday and the 12 each day since had not caught up with him in fatigue.

Long hours were not unusual last week either for Ser-

geant Al Boynton who got off work in the prison's "tac squad" on riot-ready duty at the gates about 10:30 p.m. Friday. He had gone to work at 6 a.m.

Boynton, a smaller man than Umland, with close cropped and thinning hair, had an orange sports shirt on over his tan working blouse with the Department of Corrections patch on the shoulder.

"My wife's had three threatening phone calls," he said matter-of-factly. "My wife, chee, I've seen my wife maybe one hour a day for the last week, and then it's always the same — always begging me to quit."

## RESIGNATIONS

The first of 13 officers who quit at San Quentin last week was told by his wife that if he went to work Monday, she would not be home when he returned.

All the officers have been working at least 12-hour shifts. All of them are tired, and most of them are angry.

"I'll tell you something," Boynton said. "Anybody who's less than 30 years old and has less than five years experience is crazy if he comes back to work at San Quentin."

Officers see little reason to go beyond a simple denial of charges that adjustment center inmates were beaten, after last Saturday's incident.

Many of the officers will point out, in fact, that they are human beings with human emotions and that what should interest people is not claims that inmates were beaten, but evidence that they were not.

## INMATES

"What a lot of people don't seem to think of is that most of the inmates are pretty fed off about what happened Saturday too," Boynton said.

"They know, or they fear, that the whole world's going to judge them by the actions of a few. They've got to get jobs to get out of here,

they've got to hope people will give them a chance."

Both Boynton and Umland, like most other officers, have carried their jobs home with them in the past — both have managed to encourage friends or acquaintances to hire inmates about to be paroled. Both have stood up under cocktail party inanities about tin cups, and both have heard themselves referred to as "pig."

In an ironic way, they feel themselves being driven into a bitter corner in the same manner as radical inmates and young would-be revolutionaries on the outside.

## LOATHING

Although there is increasing loathing of the other on each side, down at gut level, below the hysteria and the irrational bitterness, there is a point where the words of correctional officers and the words of fierce prison reformers begin to share some common ground.

"San Quentin is 150 years old," Boynton said. "A lot of the procedures we have in there are also 150 years old. We just don't have the security for the men we're getting in there now.

"I don't know, with the type of institution we have, it all just doesn't jive. Maybe there's just no way to make it work."

Neither they, nor the inmates, believe that a prison "rehabilitates" anybody — "a guy does that for himself."

## NEED

But the officers, unlike many radicals, do think there is a need for prisons and a need for men like themselves to act as prison "keepers." And they don't feel they should have to have their throats slit to earn a pay check.

"You know," Boynton said quietly, "my wife says I'm colder these days — you know, not as jovial and all. I've tried to evaluate it and I think she's right. In the last few years I've been able to come home at night after

someone has been killed and  
say 'well, we've got another  
empty bed today!'"

"But Saturday," he said,  
pausing for a moment as it  
ran through his mind again.  
"I've never seen so many  
grown men cry as I did that  
night."