

One in a million: tales of everyday terror

by Mike ****

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"...hunting season..."

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Doesn't matter what the situation... how calm or how safe or where I am.

I don't tense up though, I just... keep my eyes open... and my ears... and...

DEVINEY

Off the hook Smoking a cigar See the triumph

I'VE SEEN VERY FEW pictures arouse as much outrage as the picture taken as he left the courthouse.

Was it relief? Does it matter? No, not now.

A little while later, he had a car accident (an intimate moment with a lamp post I think) and dropped off the face of the earth.

WATCH THEM

STOREKEEPER AND HIS wife look him over as he gets a can of pop for the freezer.

A notice was sent throughout the downtown area warning the businesses to beware of black males in their late teens/early twenties since they are more than likely to commit crimes.

GOING TO THE DANCE

HE IS STANDING in a large foyer. The place should be packed. It's not often we get DJs that look like real DJs. He walks over to the water fountain. Gets a drink, then he goes back to the wall. He can feel the music through the walls.

There's barely twenty people here. He recognizes four or five people in the group by the auditorium entrance. This dance is gonna crash. Hang around for ten, twenty minutes... see what happens.

LEAVING THE DANCE

TWO OFFICERS APPROACH him. They ask him: What is he doing there? "Nothing," he replies. "Just waiting," for more people to show up, "friends."

They advise him to wait outside. "Why?" -Aren't they talking to the gang over there? One of the officers steps up to him. He looks at the officer's black boots, then looks up at

The truth behind the carnage at Attica

by Tim Doucette

The Attica State Correctional Facility is a maximum security prison about 35 miles east of Buffalo, New York. In the summer of 1971, Attica held nearly 700 more prisoners than the 1600 it had been designed for.

Fifty-four per cent of all prisoners were Black, the remainder being primarily Hispanics, Native men, and poor whites. All the guards were white, most of them recruited from the rural area around the prison. Racial tension was high, with the widespread censorship of Black magazines and books and the targeting of Black Muslims in particular.

And racial tension was encouraged between prisoners through such techniques as the distribution of jobs based on skin colour (whites given the best jobs while many other prisoners had none). Those who did work were paid an average of \$7.50 a month for boring, nondevelopmental labour. Meals were budgeted at sixty-three cents per prisoner per day and centred around starch and fat, containing few vegetables or fruit, and were high in pork, which Muslims can't eat. Medical care was grossly inadequate, with chronic and serious illnesses routinely shrugged off and left untreated.

The conditions at Attica were truly horrible, but hardly exceptional. Overcrowding, racism, economic exploitation and life-threatening medical don't-care were common features of prisons then as they are now. What was exceptional was the level of resistance of the Attica inmates to their brutal and dehumanizing situation.

Ticking time bombs

On August 22, 1971, the prisoners held a day of mourning for Black revolutionary George Jackson, who had been shot to death the day before



graphic - Leo Campbell



at San Quentin prison in California. Outraged by the media swallowing of the official lie that Jackson had smuggled a large pistol into the prison in his afro, the Attica prisoners wore black armbands and unnerved their warders by silently refusing to eat. The steady ticking of the bomb echoed through the catacombs.

On the night of September 8, a goon squad of prison guards came to give a beating to a man who had been disobedient in the yard earlier that day. On their way in, someone winged an unopened can of soup through his cell bars and hit one of the enforcers in the head. The next morning, guards tried to leave the can-pitcher in his cell while everyone else was marched off to breakfast, but as inmates passed the locking mechanism at the end of the gallery, one of them pulled the lever that opened the man's cell, and the guards didn't dare stop him from joining the others.

Finally, the bomb exploded. On the march back from breakfast, a guard who had pushed an inmate was pushed back and knocked down. Other guards came running to his assistance but were overpowered by mutinous prisoners. Soon after, 1200 insurgent inmates had taken control of Attica, seized 46 prison officials as hostages, and gathered together in D-Yard, demonstrating a level of solidarity and self-organization that cut across the racial divisions fostered by guards and administrators.

The D-Yard Nation

Dubbing themselves "D-Yard Nation," the Attica Brothers set up tents, dug latrine trenches, and gathered hostages together in a circle to protect them from vengeful recalitrants. Those guards who had been seriously injured during the initial uprising were quickly released, and the remaining 39 hostages were given food, clothes, cigarettes and mattresses, in some cases while inmates were sleeping on the floor. Civil rights attorneys, liberal journalists, Black Panthers and others were invited into the prison as observers as well as to document the conditions there.

Meanwhile, State Police from all over New York were rushed to Attica along with guards from other prisons. As troopers rebelled with prison authorities to begin an immediate assault on the rebellious prisoners, liberal reformer Russell Oswald, commissioner of the state correctional system, instead began negotiating with the inmates.

Most inmate demands were centred around basic living conditions and human rights — in fact, many were already enshrined in law and only needed to be put into practice — and so resembled Oswald's own bureaucratic attempts at reforming the brutal New York penal system that he soon agreed to nearly all of them.

On September 11, the death of one of the guards injured during the initial uprising brought negotiations to a halt. Inmates, already asking for guarantees against reprisals, added a demand of amnesty for any crimes committed during the takeover. The state refused: Nelson Rockefeller, the billionaire governor of New York, issued a statement denying the power to grant amnesty, and added that even if he could grant it, he wouldn't.

The stage was being set for a massacre. Hundred of cops of various stripes — all white — congealed around the prison, some shouting threats and racial insults, while others took pellets from shotgun shells and zipped them into the prison yard with slingshots. Police rage was compounded by rumours that hostages had been mutilated, murdered, castrated, and raped, some of them spread by top officials and reported in the media as facts before being proven lurid fictions. Some of the guards were so frenzied that Rockefeller ordered them not to participate in the assault, an order they would disobey.

A classic turkey shoot

Oswald issued his ultimatum at 7:40 a.m. on the rainy, muddy morning of September 13. With bargaining stalled on amnesty, Oswald gave the rebels one hour to surrender their hostages and return to their cells. Knowing that beatings and indictments had followed all the New York prison riots of the previous year, the Brothers refused to give in, and eight hostages were taken up onto a catwalk, blindfolded, and each flanked by a prisoner holding an improvised knife to their throats.

The blitzkrieg began at 9:46 a.m. Seconds after a National Guard helicopter dropped debilitating military riot gas into D-Yard, police snipers opened fire on the catwalk. Although two hostages were injured by the Brothers' makeshift knives, the only killing done that morning was by police bullets: the prisoners had no guns. It was a classic "turkey shoot," like the assault the U.S. military launched on the infamous "Highway of Hell" during the Gulf war.

Other troopers lowered a ladder into the yard and charged towards the hostage circle. When an inmate knocked the lead trooper down with a club, the others opened fire with their shotguns. Hostages and inmates, indistinguishable in their muddied clothes, were shot as they ran or crawled for their lives, or as they lay unconscious, wounded or dead. Troopers sweeping through the yard fired blindly into foxholes and dugouts where men were hiding.

The shooting ended nine minutes later. More than 1500 men, all of them white, had taken part in the carnage. 10 hostages and 29 inmates had been assassinated. Three more hostages, 85 inmates and one trooper had been injured, in the largest massacre within the United States since Wounded Knee in 1890. At first, the state tried to blame the deaths on the prisoners and 61 were indicted, although all criminal proceedings were dropped in 1976.

For the past 17 years, a \$2.8 billion civil lawsuit on behalf of the 1281 inmates who were in the yard at the time of the blitz has been inching its way through the U.S. court system, and finally went to trial last September. Sometime this month, a decision will come down on whether four former state officials, including Oswald, will be held legally responsible for the deaths and injuries that occurred twenty years ago.

The decision was supposed to pass last month, but the judge, who initially refused to hear the case and sometimes took two years to rule on pretrial motions, went on his annual holiday to Barbados before the jury could return its verdict. This decision, of course, will only decide whether the men can be held accountable; reparations would have to be addressed in another trial.

The torture afterwards

Although a legal victory for the Attica Brothers is by no means assured, perhaps the most interesting news to come out of the trial is the testimony, which includes details not only of atrocities committed during the retaking, but of the torture that took place afterwards.

Although the state had the forethought to send priests in to give hostages their last rites before the assault, at the time it was launched the only medics available were the prison's two doctors, two local veterinarians and several school nurses. They lacked medical supplies, blood and plasma and had to stand by as inmates bled to death. The few waiting ambulances were used to transport injured guards to area hospitals.

One former inmate, Oji Chris Reed, was left untreated for hours in a prison hospital, only to have a plaster cast put over an open gunshot wound on his leg. Two days later, the leg was amputated. Other prisoners were forced to run or crawl through a gauntlet of club-swinging guards, burned with cigarettes and shell cases heated in fire, dumped from stretchers and beaten with nightsticks, had IV tubes pulled out of their arms and blankets pulled off of their bodies, had gun butts and nightsticks jammed into their wounds and screwdrivers and guns shoved up their anuses. Medics testified to treating prisoners only to have them sent back later with different injuries.

Perhaps the most revealing testimony came from former National Guard medic Mark L. Futterman, who testified that as he was preparing to testify before a state panel that was investigating the Attica rebellion and its aftermath, he was visited by two state police investigators:

"They told me (that) I could testify to any events I witnessed, but (that) if it came to the point of identifying any uniforms or specific individuals, if I did that me and my family 'would have an accident on a dark road' — they would investigate (the accident), and that would be it."

Take whatever lessons you want to out of the Attica uprising and the state's response to it. *Excalibur* will carry news of the jury's decision in a future issue.

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the officer; the officer looks a foot taller than he is. He is aware that people have started staring at him. He feels a burning sensation in the back of his neck.

He leaves.

DON'T LIE

"WE'VE HAD A SHOOTING..."

"...don't lie."

car door open and a body lying on the ground eyes open

"...one wounded..."

"...don't lie."

TINY TOONS

A CARTOON DEPICTION. Okay, two policeman corner a black robbery suspect...

"Okay, you got me"

and shoot him. There's some initial panic, but his partner says don't worry about it: we'll say you tripped, you'll be suspended with pay, the courts, the judges are on our side:

"K-k-k court..."

His partner pats him on the back and they walk into the sunset

The dead body is bleeding on the ground while this conversation is going on...

A wicked grin. Of course, I was smiling when that guy was machine gunning civvies in "Full Metal Jacket."

HOLE IN THE HEAD

CAR ROARING DOWN the road, two officers shooting

two holes

Robbery suspects apprehended, a gun discharges

one hole

THE HOLE STORY

I REMEMBER RUNNING across some background info on Donaldson. It says: he was shot before; the peculiar bit is he was trying to get into his place of work. There were stories of him turning on or off the lights at the place he lived, much to the discontent of the people he lived with. Also heard he owned some houses. Heard stories that getting shot and the problems that followed him after that pushed him over the edge. Another line says that he could barely walk; a nurse was visiting him, giving him therapy.

To the shooting: there were five officers? Another shard of info says they had him under a mattress at one point to pacify him. He lunges at one of the officers with a knife... another one shoots him.

LAWSON DROVE LIKE a bat out of hell. I hear police only draw their guns when their lives are endangered (or when, naturally, the lives of the public are endangered) — so Lawson is fleeing, so they try to shoot out the tires... they miss.

Hell of a miss: shot him in the head. One of the other occupants is apprehended. Car stolen? How did they get it?

Accomplice, unwitting or whatever, he was fleeing.

Hole in the stomach

"Why'd you run?"

Hole in the back

"...paralyzed"

SOPHIA COOK IN NORTH YORK, paralyzed, she was one of three occupants of a car. She was offered a ride by friends. The group was stopped by police. The officer who was keeping an eye on her shot her in the back. I don't remember hearing anything about the struggle.

BUS TICKETS

WE WERE WALKING home in the rain. He asks me if I read about what happened in the neighbourhood. Some high school girl, he found out, was being repeatedly sexually assaulted by a bunch of guys for lunch money for bus tickets, I won't go on...

rough cut: "why do Black people keep..."

I dunno. Why are we all being branded because of a bunch of assholes?

BOUNCING OFF A CAR

TRIED TO SIDESTEP but he wasn't fast enough: leg off the hood, rest of him off the windshield.

He's sitting in the emergency ward now. A police officer walks in and calls his name. He answers and the officer takes a seat beside him and asks him his view of the accident. He tells the officer. The next question the officer asks is if the accident was intentional.

"...you can tell me."

TAKING OUT THE LAUNDRY

HE'S WALKING DOWN the street with a green garbage bag. A horn sounds off behind him; it's a yellow police cruiser. The officer in the passenger side calls him over. Asks him what's in the garbage bag.

"Clothes."

He unties the knot and opens the bag and sees (I can see his eyebrows climb a mile up his face):

"...wet clothes."

HOLIER THAN THOU

OFFICERS RUN INTO a church during service. They never been much for religion... "but I sorta just fell down on my knees" (B.Cummings...a joke).

The officers take away some of the younger people in the service. They look like some people who committed a crime earlier that day.

"They made them take off their clothes?"

Yup, fruit-of-the-looms. You want better jokes, don't you? The officers were in error. So they apologized a little while later.

"How much is a little while later?"

A little while.

REMEMBER THAT INQUIRY into racism on the force? They remembered that notice sent to downtown stores.

"It was fun watching J.R. get toasted"

Now she's mayor.

"Oh, bite me now..."

WANNA HEAR ANOTHER drop-your-pants story? He rolls his eyes. This one happened in Peel — Mississauga I think. Officer pulls this guy over and searches him. Then he tells him to drop his pants, drop his drawers, to his knees. Meanwhile, his girlfriend is watching all of this from a window and traffic is passing by, getting a free show...

"...over the barricades."

next time
"...Peel protesting the shooting of..."
we're going
"...McCormack has met with members of the Black community..."
over the
"...an officer then came out, shaken..."
barricades
"...I'm the one who did it."
NO, IT'S GOING TO TAKE something more to push'em over the edge. I think I've finally figured it out.

ART LYMER ADMITS the force isn't perfect, but that the chances of a racist officer are:

"...one in a million."

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RIGHT

Sure it's not right. You're giving in to the hysteria. Letting your emotions be run by others.

"...local minority..."

"...one in a million"

Which ones?

RISK

WE ARE LOST downtown. He looks at me and shakes his head. There's a cruiser at the corner. He mentions it: we could ask him for directions. "Sure, what's he going to do? Shoot us?"

He stiffens, then continues walking. I see something interesting here. I wanna try something.

"They frisk you when you take out the laundry..."
He keeps walking.
"If he says 'drop your pants' I'm outta here."

Lesser people have received the withering stare he gives me... and died. He shakes his head.

I go for directions.