

Walla Walla inmates request federal investigation

by Ronald Hall

For the first time since lockdown in July, inmates of the Walla Walla State Penitentiary met the press and told their story to the outside world. Although the inmates had been assured by the Acting Superintendent that there would be no time limit, shortly before the meeting he announced that time would be restricted to 45 minutes and that representatives from isolation would not be allowed to participate.

and they locked us up in a closet naked. As we were waiting in there, an hour elapsed. We were taken back to our cells and there was nothing in there but the bunks -- the bunk, a mattress and a blanket. "As I stood at the cell bars to look at the things that were removed all in the tier, I saw pictures of my daughter, of me, of my wife torn up and some pictures just on the floor. I saw my radio. The members of the squad who were shaking the tier down were loading them into barrels

to our cell. We were all standing there waiting for them. I was in front; I had my hands on my head. "So they yelled and said, OK Who are the blanket asses. There are two Indians living in the cell, myself and my brother-in-law. One of the guards said that one and I know who the other one is. I was told to step out. When I proceeded to do it, I was punched in the gut. I had glasses on and my glasses were smashed in my face. I was beat the length of the tier. At the end of the tier I was turned

toilets like they use on construction sites. They cut the top off so they could see in at all times. They had them pumped out twice a week. Then they started giving us food roughage to make us go to the bathroom easier. Guys had to move porta-potties to the front gate to get them pumped out."

For the future

David Baily spoke about administration promises to discipline offending guards. "Over 300 are doing life -- for forgery and burglary. They see guards beat prisoners and try to kill them. Then you expect them to sit back and be guarded by these same guards for the next 13 years. It doesn't make much sense.

"The situation is comparable to being in a pit with rattlesnakes and no way out. You can't cut off a couple of rattlers. It won't do no good. You have to cut off the head the poison will kill you.

"This is the situation for 1400 persons who had no part in the killing of Officer Cross. Also the 230 men in A Wing who were beaten but had nothing to do with killing Officer Cross. The six men in segregation who were beaten handcuffed to their cell bars, maced and re-beaten, then brought into admissions and beaten again and put into illegal strip cells.

They did not have anything to do with killing Cross.

"Firing five guards and verbally spanking seven others does not eliminate or rectify the problems that have been created or the responsibilities for the criminal acts. Some of these crimes are of a more serious nature than the people here have committed and are presently serving life sentences for.

"Now the administration feels that they can give up 5 sacrificial goats and call it justice."

Baily stated that he has advised prison and state officials of his desire to present evidence against the thirteen guards who participated in the beating of the six men in isolation, but his letters have not been answered.

Ray Sperber said the institution has had four wardens and three Directors of Corrections in three years. "Reflecting back, it's obvious all these things came to a head under Dixie."

He charged that the prison has inadequate staff -- too few guards and guards that are not competent. There is no confidence in the staff or the administration by the residents or the guards. "They say one thing and do or mean another. It is hard to show or have any respect for law or authority when those of the law and

authority don't obey it or show no respect for anyone's rights."

He said the administration is playing a "numbers" game, moving bodies from one facility to another and not alleviating the overcrowding.

"Too many men are in maximum custody who should be on medium or minimum and given a chance to show if they are responsible. There is violent/radical guards just like there are some residents who are hard to control."

Citing many of the prison's ongoing problems, Ray Sperber asked that the prisoners who want to do their time from those who don't; the violent from the non-violent; first timers from losers; multiple lifers or long termers from short-term younger, more mellow individuals.

Prison reform is "just like putting up a stop sign or cutting down a tree at a blind intersection. It takes a death or two -- then a costly survey -- then months for an ok. Then ten men in four state trucks to put up one sign or cut down one tree!"

The inmates of Walla Walla State Penitentiary requested an investigation by the U.S. Justice Department. And they asked that the press watch for the expected retaliation.



Walla Walla inmates meet the press

Julius Gilesie gave a brief description of events leading up to the July violence.

"The present administration has condoned repeated acts of guard harassment of inmates -- beatings, etc. The administration is openly disrespected by corrections officers and memorandums that are issued by them are looked over. During the months of April, May and June of this year a battle for control of Washington State Penitentiary emerged between the guard's union and the administration. Corrections officers deferred order of the administration when given and purposely engaged in harassment against inmates, inmate clubs and inmate programs in an effort to create negative reactions from inmates to better enact their plan for control of the penitentiary."

Gilesie charged that during April, May and June the inmate population was pushed to the limit by corrections officers. "Visitors were overly harassed and we were being subjected to skin searches two or three times daily. Fictitious infractions were written on inmates and the major hearings committee imposed sanctions on inmates on the officers' report alone."

On June 12th an Indian inmate was fatally stabbed in the resident council office. Meetings were held between representatives of the Chicano Center and the Indian Brotherhood and an agreement reached that there would be no reprisals. That afternoon an agreement was reached and, according to Gilesie who was at the meeting, the Captain agreed to pull his officers back and have no further shake downs that day.

Three days later Sgt. Cross was fatally stabbed.

Shakedown

David Riviera described the first days of lockdown which began after the Cross killing:

"For the first three and one-half weeks we were locked in cells without showers. We were constantly told showers were coming the next day. The attitude of the guards had deteriorated to the point where they weren't even speaking to the men -- they weren't even seen. The only way you knew they were there was when they brought the cold TV dinners around. At that point the mail slowed and it virtually stopped. We were ignored completely -- our cries for showers, and I say cries because the weather was very hot, were ignored."

Riviera said the men were looking forward to the shakedown because they had been assured that after it occurred things would return to normal. The killing of the guard was an isolated incident. The administration did not say at that time that the lockdown was the result of Chicano-Indian fighting.

"At the time a memo was issued on the items listed that would be taken out of our cells and the things we could keep. That was totally disregarded. Everything was taken out of our cells. When they came to my cell they took the four of us out,

and members of the same squad were also driving them out of the institution. Hence so many missing items, so many personal belongings.

Riviera described the fate of those who are transferred to other prisons. "You don't know if they're going to come in your cell in the morning and take you out naked like they're doing and beat people when they transfer them. Throw them on a bus and send them to who knows where. They are starting to follow the California system and are making it necessary for the evolution of gangs such as the Aryan Brotherhood, the Mexican Mafia and the Black Guerilla Family.

"They are going to make it necessary because they have eliminated what they call our turf, which actually wasn't like that. A lot of positive things were happening here. We were having good criminology classes and a lot of positive things were coming out of them. All that now has virtually been eliminated."

Night of Violence

John Wait described the night of violence in Eight Wing:

"On July 7th, after shakedown, there was a promise of showers. There has been a lot written in the news media, about that was the reason we went off at Eight Wing and became destructive. That is not true. We went off in Eight Wing because of the way they brutalized us and our personal possessions -- the only things that we were allowed to have that had meaning to us, that kept us in contact with people on the streets.

"At approximately 10:00 in the evening of July 7th, guards came in to the wing, fired off a round from a shot gun. They proceeded to F Tier, proceeded to take people out of their cells, one cell at a time. There were approximately 15 or 20 in the wing in full riot gear. The guards at the bottom of the wing by the main gate had weapons. People were taken out -- 2,3 or however many people lived in the cell. They were beaten, knocked to the ground. They were stamped on, handcuffed with their hands behind their backs. I live on the last cell on the tier. I listened to all of this coming down. They took all of F tier out, then they proceeded to E tier, took all of E tier out, then to C tier, took all of C tier out. Then they began on D tier.

"When they began on D tier I observed the process with a mirror that I stuck out the bars of my cell. As each cell was brought out the inmates were brought out one at a time with their hands on their head. They were kicked, punched and taken down to the front of the tier. There they were turned over to another cadre of guards. They were cuffed behind the back with a specific type of a cuff. It is a plastic cuff with a wire that runs through it so it can be cinched up tight. They were slammed into walls. I observed these things with my own eyes when they hit my tier.

"I was on the last tier so you can see how I felt, knowing they were getting closer to our cell. They came

loose. An officer slammed me into the wall face first after I was cuffed and ripped my watch off my arm.

"I was taken down in front of the wing. I was thrown in the dirt in front of the wing, on my face. My feet were put in back of my head; my face was pushed into the dirt so I couldn't breathe. Everytime I moved to try to get breath I was stepped on and kicked. I was taken there with a group of 50 or 60."

Life in the Yard

Jim Koepenick described life in the big yard, where the inmates of Eight Wing lived from July 7th until present.

"While lying in the dirt, there was construction going on at the time, there was no concrete or grass, just dirt. While we were there, there were officers on the wall who would urinate on the inmates who were lying on the ground."

Koepenick said the deputy director and other members of the administration witnessed these acts.

Koepenick accused the guards with drunkenness. "There were even comments among the guards jokingly that as soon as they get this crew in the yard they would have something else to drink."

The men were herded into the big yard. "All we had on when we went in the yard was a pair of pants -- no shoes or socks. The grass had been thoroughly saturated, it was wet and it was cold that night. People were herded into rows, had to sit down in rows, and put your head on your knees. Orders were given to shoot anyone who moved, at that time the yard was secured.

"One resident informed the Nine Tower Control Area that he was going to get up and use the toilet facility -- it was approximately 25 yards. A shot was fired from Nine Tower as the resident went to use the toilet facilities."

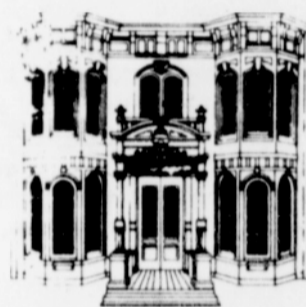
The men stayed in the yard. "Everybody was beat, in different degrees. Toilet facilities in the yard didn't work. After a day, there was human waste on a slab 30 feet from where they were serving food. I can't begin to explain what it was like. Sunburns were so bad people's eyes were swollen shut. People's feet were burned so they couldn't walk on them; if they did it would split them and they'd start bleeding.

"Periodically, for further harassment, they would run the "Cyclons" in the riot gear and line us up against the wall and remove things in the yard. On a couple of occasions shots were fired. They finally brought blankets and we used TV dinner trays to make tents. There was not even a comb in the yard for a week; toothbrushes they finally gave to us.

"Sickness, constipation -- it was a real bad problem. After 4 or 5 days they finally let us get a letter out. It was censored and mailed two weeks later. Mail was very sporadic.

"I can't begin to express the conditions we lived under in the big yard. Bugs, flies, no sanitation. They finally brought in some portable

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If you have a problem that is not covered in this list, please call and ask whether we can help. Chances are, we can. If not, we can recommend someone else for you to call. One way or the other, we want to see you get the kind of professional legal counsel you're entitled to.

The best time to call us, or any attorney, is before you are embroiled in a legal problem. This is called preventative law and it makes a lot of sense.

Regardless, when you call us we will arrange for an initial consultation at your convenience. Cost: \$20. We probably can't solve anything in this meeting, but it is a chance for you to explain your particular problem and for us to give you some idea of what it'll take to reach a solution. If you want us to proceed, we'll give you an estimate of the fees you should plan on. In writing.

