

**He came to comfort the convicts;
instead, he became a prisoner of mutineers who
were ready to kill—and did**

sentences for robbery and armed assault.

The office was hardly big enough for three persons, yet for the next agonizing hours 10 of us would face life and death in this room. The prisoners' moods ranged from black rage to sympathy for our plight. Fenton was clutching my arm in a viselike grip. With his other hand, he pressed a blade of shears against my ribs.

I admit I felt fear but, strangely, not for my own safety. I kept wondering what would happen to my wife and children without me. I turned to Fenton: "If you have to cut me, I hope you will maim me rather than kill me. I have a family. They need me."

Fenton chuckled. There was no humor in it, though.

Vaughn, I noticed, had a crude knife. I believe Maher had been armed but had dropped his weapon on the platform. Now, however, he smashed a table and re-armed himself with a splintered leg.

Vaughn was starting to close the office door when I saw a guard, Albert Valley, sidle along a wall toward us. He was armed only with a billy but obviously planned to rush our captors. I watched his every move—but before he could spring, the convicts spotted him.

"Don't do anything, Valley," one shouted. "We'll knife 'em if you do."

Valley hesitated. "Get Moriarity," was the next command from the rebels. Capt. James Moriarity was well-liked by most inmates; the mutineers would try to bargain with him. Valley left reluctantly.

The room was tense and hot. There were only three chairs, so most of us stood. I called Fenton's attention to the fact that his hand was bleeding. Several of us offered handkerchiefs to bind the wound. He accepted gratefully, and for a moment, tension eased.

WHEN MORIARITY arrived, the mutineers laid down their ultimatum. They wanted a getaway car, with a police escort in front and behind. They would take some of us with them as hostages. The gates were to be opened, and the escort would take them to the main highway. There the hostages would be released.

"You know I can't do that," Moriarity protested. "Not even the warden can."

"Well, get somebody who can!" Maher screamed. He had become increasingly nervous, and I thought how lucky we were that he had lost his knife in the scuffle with Becker. He might have used it right then. He grabbed the telephone. "Give me a line to the governor," he screamed wildly.

But the telephone was dead. "You'll just have to wait," Moriarity told the desperate men. To the hostages, that sounded like a death sentence.

At one point in the long wait I asked Fenton what made a man turn to crime. "I guess a criminal mind," he replied laconically. "As for freedom—well, that's relative."

I agreed readily. "Christ is the universal freedom giver," I said. "Freedom is in the minds and souls of men. I have a father-in-law who spent months in a Communist concentration camp, and he said he was free even then."

Krake spoke up. "Christ can give you freedom even while you are in prison—true freedom such as no man or government can give. He said: 'Whomsoever the Son sets free shall be free, indeed.'"

"I tried that stuff for a while, but it didn't work," Fenton replied. Maher peered sullenly out the broken window. Vaughn remained in deep silence.

Bargaining continued but to no avail. Assistant Warden Walter Craven even laid down the most courageous of offers. "Boys," he pleaded, "let me come in there in place of those hostages. They haven't done you any harm."

They howled down the suggestion. But Craven never left his post outside the door after that, and he remained a symbol to us that we were not alone in our danger, that brave men were helping us.

BUT NOW fear began to grow in the arrogant menace of the mutineers. It was obvious that prison authorities would not bow; that they were preparing to rush the chapel. Still another thought haunted the convicts: had they murdered Becker? They would accept only the word of the Catholic chaplain, so Father Roman Brenner left the bargaining group and went to the hospital.

When he returned, his face was set in grim lines. "I am sorry," he said. "Becker is dead." Singing a hymn, Becker had been carried to the hospital; he died 30 minutes later.

We hostages exchanged quick, fearful glances. The mutineers had committed the ultimate crime, murder, and now had nothing to lose in their gamble for freedom. Our lives were insignificant now.

But Fenton's keen mind saw another possibility. He called for Richard A. McGee, director of the penal system, who had rushed to the scene. "What about Section 4500?" Fenton asked. This section of the California penal code makes death mandatory for a lifer who commits murder. Warden Robert Heinze brought the besieged men a copy of Section 4500 to study.

Our lives depended upon McGee's decision. If he promised not to prosecute under this section, the mutineers could at least escape the gas chamber; if McGee refused—well, nobody could guess. Maher crouched on the desk like a tiger at bay. Vaughn stood anxiously at the door. Fenton waited, with me at his side.

"I will recommend to the district attorney," said McGee, "that you not be prosecuted under Section 4500. But nothing more."

"Well, fellows?" Fenton said quietly. He himself reversed his shears and tapped the blade on the palm of his hand. A vote to give up! Maher hesitated. After a moment, Fenton reached out and took Vaughn's knife. Then Maher handed over his table leg. After 3½ hours, the chapel siege ended wordlessly.

Reporters asked us later if we would go back to Folsom. Certainly we will. For even in prison, men can find freedom. The only truly imprisoned men are those who have not found the freedom of Christ, and this is the freedom we can offer, the greatest of all freedoms.

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