

hole. If a man were to rebel strenuously—write writs, denounce the system, refuse to work, get into physical clashes, flout the rules—he would be locked away permanently in the adjustment center. There his remaining humanity would be quickly eroded and he would become a living bomb of rage, hatred, and bitterness. And if he should, in addition, hold and speak radical or revolutionary views, he would be labeled a “dangerous racial agitator” and be accorded special isolating treatment.

It is perfectly clear to me now that the roots of violence at Soledad and other prisons reach deeply into the prison system itself. It is a system which renders a man impotent, denies his individuality, destroys his identity, and grinds him ceaselessly under a heavy yoke of uncertainty and injustice. Such a system generates rage and bitterness which in some men will be turned upon others, whether tormentors or brothers. Prisons, then, are generating the very behavior which they are ostensibly designed to eliminate. They are destroying rather than rehabilitating men. They are promoting violence rather than controlling it.

CHAPTER 9

A Chronicle of Three Years in the Hole¹

• *by Thomas Lopez Meneweather*

In 1965 I was transferred to San Quentin and associated briefly with several Black Nationalist groups. Guards accused me of being hostile because of my refusal to declare myself a member of any one group. I terminated all these associations when the Adult Authority stated that they would consider me for parole if I entered the prison school program, which I did.

On July 31, 1967, while returning to my cell to get my school books for morning classes, I was arrested by guards and accused of killing a Caucasian inmate who was thought to have stabbed a black. I knew nothing about this incident and told them so. The county prosecutor's office refused to prosecute me, stating that there was no evidence that I had committed the offense or participated in its commission; nevertheless, the prison insisted that I was guilty. The disciplinary committee told me that I would not be let out of prison until I had served my maximum term. They added that I should not plan on getting out even then because I would probably find myself going before an outside court for possession of a weapon, which would increase my maximum term to life. Or I could be killed by friends of the

1. This chapter was made available by the Prison Law Project of Oakland, California.

dead inmate or other Caucasian inmates who just "wouldn't let a nigger get away with killing a white man." Or I would end up in the gas chamber for defending myself against inmates attempting to take my life, because they, the officials, would see that "the word got in the right places." Pictures of the body of the dead inmate were placed in my central file along with the write-up accusing me of the offense and the findings of the committee of prison officials.

In April of 1968, I was transferred to Soledad from San Quentin and placed on the first floor of O wing, commonly known as Max Row. Upon my arrival I was confronted with extremely hostile prison officials who made no effort to conceal their racial hatred of blacks in general and of me in particular. One guard pointed in my face and remarked to another that San Quentin had sent them one of the niggers involved in the July killing and that the inmate who was killed was a fine fellow because he hated niggers.

While waiting to be taken to the classification committee, I watched a black inmate, Clarence Causey (nicknamed Dopey Dan), be set up and cold-bloodedly murdered. He had been assigned to a work group of consolidated Caucasian and Mexican American inmates who both identify themselves and are known around the prison as Nazis. He was the only black. He was immediately set upon with knives and stabbed to death while three guards, including the one who had made the remarks to me referred to above, stood by indifferently and watched until he fell on his face in a puddle of his own blood. Then the guards shot tear gas onto the tier, ordered the inmates back to their cells, and removed the mortally wounded black inmate from the tier. Approximately half an hour later they took him to the prison hospital. After repeated inquiries, we were finally informed that night that the black inmate was dead. No search was made of the prisoners who did the killing until after they had been returned to their cells and given more than ample time to hide or get rid of the murder weapons.

I wrote numerous letters to Mr. Leonard Carter, regional director of the NAACP, Region I, in San Francisco, concerning this matter, but none of the letters were permitted to leave the institution. I received a warning about "trying to make trouble for the prison personnel" which I ignored and was promptly punished by being placed in a "quiet cell" and put on restricted diet for fifteen days. This meant that one slice of some kind of loaf (without meat), served three times daily, was all I was given to eat.

I then wrote letters to George B. Harris, then Chief Justice of the United States District Court, Northern District of California, concerning this matter as well as my personal experience beginning at San Quentin on July 31, 1967. But through the United States Probation Office I was advised that he couldn't intervene. After the family of the dead black inmate started asking questions, three of the inmates involved in the murder were charged. When the trial was in progress the inmates involved would return from court laughing and making racial jokes about how the prison officials hated blacks. They said the guards were going to testify that the black inmate, who was roughly 5 feet 3 inches and about 105 pounds, attacked the inmates with an inkpen and that they overpowered him, took away the pen, and stabbed him to death with it. Having witnessed the beginning of the assault on Clarence Causey and having seen the size and length of the weapons that he was murdered with, I did not take their bragging seriously because I knew that an autopsy would disclose what kind of weapons caused his death and that the knives used to murder him could not be passed off as inkpens.

The prison guards who set up the killing and stood indifferently by were Sergeant Matson, Officer Stone, and Officer Johnson.² When I use the expression "setup" I am referring to the process by which a guard or guards select an inmate, virtually

2. The names of all guards have been changed throughout this chapter.

always a black, unlock his door, and lead him to believe that it is his turn to come out of his cell for exercise with members of his own race (this is the usual practice in O Wing because of the racial hostility and violence between black and nonblack prisoners). But instead of coming out with members of his own race, the black inmate finds himself outside his cell on the tier with four or more antiblack inmates who are always armed with knives provided by racist prison officials. The guard locks the door to the black inmate's cell to prevent him from going back in. The antiblack inmates immediately ratpack him and stab him, sometimes fatally, depending on his ability to fight off his attackers.

The killing of Dopey Dan occurred on April 23, 1968. The following day, a black inmate purchased a knife from a Caucasian inmate who was an outcast from his own ethnic group because he had associated with blacks here on the mainline. Following the purchase of the knife, in an effort to avenge the murder of Dopey Dan, certain black inmates attacked and seriously wounded a Caucasian inmate who had been instrumental in Dopey Dan's murder. The guards, enraged by the stabbing of the Caucasian inmate, selected at random a black inmate living on the tier and railroaded him for the stabbing.

The officials knew that the security policies on O Wing made it impossible for black inmates to get possession of a knife except through the Caucasian inmate who was being shunned by his own ethnic group. The officials immediately went to that man's cell and demanded the knife they had provided him prior to his conflict with his own ethnic group. He claimed to have lost the weapon, and was set upon and beaten by Sergeant Matson and four other guards. He was then transferred to X Wing and never heard from again.

After a thorough search of the first floor of O Wing failed to produce the knife, the officials physically segregated the blacks from the Caucasians and Mexican Americans, allegedly to prevent further bloodshed. Over a period of three months the

officials on O Wing reduced the number of blacks confined on the east side of the first floor to four, never thereafter to exceed six, and made it a point to keep the remaining eighteen cells occupied with antiblack inmates. The antiblack inmates derived a sense of security from their superior numbers and their open alliance with the most sadistic, racist prison officials (the entire staff of O Wing, without an exception) I have ever encountered during my six and a half years of incarceration. These inmates sank to a complete animal level in their daily obsession with hurling obscenities and racial slurs at us.

After six months without making any verbal responses, and being physically prevented from getting at the racist inmates, we approached the O Wing officials and demanded total segregation. We were laughed at by Sergeant Matson, program administrator Mr. Smith, and other officials in both civilian clothes and guard uniforms. We were first asked, "What's the matter, can't you take it?" and then told they couldn't understand "why niggers sit in and demonstrate to get integrated and when things get a little rough they want to be segregated." They further advised us that they could not segregate us as we had requested because it was against the law, so we should just sit back and enjoy our hard-won right to live next to Caucasians.

The daily verbal abuse continued and was participated in by prison guards, Sergeant Matson, and a host of others. It was punctuated by the throwing of spit, urine, human feces, and any other filth these inmates could get their hands on into our cells and on our persons, bedding, and personal effects every time they came out of their cells. The guards regarded this as an ideal source of amusement and shouted encouragement to them. We used our blankets from our beds to cover our personal properties and held them in front of us while standing at the bars of our cells trying to keep out as much of this filth as possible. Because of the guards' refusal to provide us with clean coveralls and bedding every day, and their refusal to prevent these inmates from throwing filth into our cells, we found ourselves

with the daily task of cleaning out our cells and washing our blankets, coveralls, and sheets in our face bowls. We then had to sleep in only partially dry or completely wet bed clothing.

After the trial of the inmates who had murdered Dopey Dan, in which they were convicted of a lesser offense, all three of them came back from court bragging about how Sergeant Matson, Officer Johnson, and Officer Stone had testified that Dopey Dan attacked them with an inkpen and they had overpowered him, taken it away from him, and stabbed him to death with it. They said they could hardly wait for another one to be set up.

At this point I began to think seriously about the threat the officials had made about condemning me to death "by seeing that word got in the right places." I began to condition myself for whatever lay in front of me here at Soledad.

Approximately eight months following the murder of inmate Dopey Dan, a black inmate housed on the second floor of O Wing, known to me only by his surname, Powell, and whom everybody knew to be suffering from mental illness, was tear gassed by Sergeant Matson, Lieutenant Knox, and Officer Cook and left in his cell until he passed out. He was then dragged from his cell all the way downstairs to the first floor where he was left lying on the floor in the officers' area. When he started to regain consciousness he was set upon by these officers with billy clubs, gas guns shaped like a billy club (that shoot twelve-gauge shotgun-shell gas pellets), and five-cell flashlights and beaten to death while inmates Lane, Scranton, and Arthur Anderson and I stood by in horror, hearing the agonized moans and cries for mercy by this inmate.

This killing took place somewhere around November or December of 1968. My cell was not close enough to the front of the building to allow me to witness the killing with my eyes, but there was no way I could avoid hearing the scuffling and agonized moans and screams of the inmate while he was being beaten to death. I asked inmates Scranton and Anderson to write down on paper what they had seen and heard, and to

make three copies of it, which they did. I sent one to the Chief Justice of the United States District Court for the Northern District of California, and one to Mr. Leonard Carter of the NAACP in San Francisco. Neither copy was allowed to leave the institution. The remaining two copies I secreted in my collection of legal material. One was later discovered by the officials during shakedown, confiscated, and presumably destroyed. The remaining copy escaped discovery and I managed to turn it over to the County District Attorney when he was here in 1970 with the grand jury covering up the murders perpetrated on January 13, 1970. But nothing was ever heard about it again, so I presume that he either destroyed it or turned it over to the prison guards for disposition. The death of inmate Powell was passed off as a heart attack.

Up until this wanton murder, I still felt that perhaps the savage and rampant racism directed against blacks here at Soledad, O and X wings in particular, was confined to the lowest administrative levels of prison personnel, or consisted of isolated individual beliefs and attitudes. But now I realized that in fact these acts had been concertedly done to terrorize and dehumanize us, before the death blows of selected genocide are finally delivered by either the nonblack inmates or the prison guards themselves.

Immediately following the rigid segregation of black inmates from nonblacks in the manner already described, the guards started serving all of the foods to be consumed by the prisoners on the first floor of O Wing. Later they abandoned this policy and assigned this function exclusively to nonblack inmates, who immediately started putting all of the filth in our food that they had been daily throwing in our cells. They also broke up light bulbs provided by the guards and secreted particles of glass in our food whenever they thought there was a chance of our consuming it without detecting it. After countless requests that the guards serve our meals, which they refused to do, all of the black prisoners in protest just refused the trays of inedible food

altogether and started complaining to their families. At this point the guards who censored our outgoing mail discovered these complaints and always returned the letters to the inmates. Thus, few letters if any ever got out of the prison. However, they did have the effect of causing the guards to either bring our meals themselves or force the nonblack porters to stop their activities until the guards could think of some way to avoid the inquiries of family members and other concerned persons.

Presumably out of laziness or sheer hatred, the guards quit serving our food after about three weeks and agreed to rotate the porter job and give blacks a chance to be porters. Before, the job had been completely forbidden us. Upon learning of this, the nonblacks, probably out of fear that they would receive the same treatment at the hands of the black porters that they had so ardently bestowed upon us, refused their meals and threw their metal trays and bowls at the black porters and at the guards. After four or five days of this the guards persuaded them to go along with a program that would divide the porter job into half-day shifts, in which a nonblack would work from 6 A.M. to 1 P.M. and a black would then work from 1 P.M. to 4 P.M., to be alternated on a weekly basis. This was eventually acceptable to everyone, and the food problem was thus solved.

It was solved, that is, until Officer Haste was replaced on O Wing by Officer Drake, who was equal to if not more extreme than Sergeant Matson in his relentless racial harassment of blacks. Drake became very angry with the other guards for instituting the new meal service system. He vowed to see that the system was disbanded by seeing to it that no blacks would want the job. He began by assigning all the work to the black porters' shift.

This was effective with one porter; Drake replaced him with an inmate named Madison Flowers, who at that particular time was not educated in the art of defending himself from the attacks of knife-wielding inmates. A few days after being assigned to the porter job, Flowers was set up by Officer Drake

with a nonblack inmate he had selected for the shift and provided with a knife. The inmate attacked Flowers but only managed to stab his hands. At this point the guards decided that the knife the blacks had acquired from the Caucasian inmate a few months earlier in retaliation for the Causey incident had either been destroyed or lost, since Flowers was unarmed when attacked. Thus, the setups became more regular. However, since only the stronger and more experienced blacks remained, none of the setups terminated in death or serious injury.

The incident that resulted in the removal of Officer Haste from O Wing to another area of the institution began when he secreted a knife in the cell of a black inmate named Willard Walker while this inmate was out of his cell. Haste then went to court and testified that he had found the weapon in the inmate's possession. Walker was convicted. While he was in the process of going back and forth to court, Officer Haste again entered the inmate's cell and allegedly found another knife. All the black prisoners knew this was a lie because none of us had any knives or any way to get one. The other guards also knew that the inmate was innocent both times. He was going to be convicted of the first frame-up, and the Adult Authority and the Department of Corrections would be given unlimited jurisdiction as to how long they could keep him, since he had a life top. Therefore there was no need to frame him a second time. Upon learning of this second frame-up by Officer Haste, Walker became extremely upset and exchanged a few heated words with Haste. He was then attacked by Officer Haste with a gas-gun billy club and beaten about the head while he was handcuffed and held by Officer Berger. After his head was stitched up, inmate Walker was rushed to Folsom prison. Officers Haste and Berger were removed from O Wing and replaced by Officer Drake.

Several nonblack inmates welcomed Officer Drake's arrival on O Wing with whistles and applause and commented that they had known him from his old job on the mainline. They said

he was all right, just like Haste. While being a wing officer on the mainline, he had unlocked the cells of numerous black inmates and assisted in cell robberies. (This meant waiting until the inmates left their cells for work call or some other reason, then unlocking the cells of black prisoners and helping the Caucasian inmates steal such items as cigarettes, pastries, candy, cigars, shoes, watches.)

When he came on O Wing, Officer Drake proceeded down the tier, pausing at the cells of all the nonblack inmates for introductions and to talk over old times with those he had known on the mainline. There were comments about his participation in cell robberies and about how he had caught some of them with weapons, cash money, and other contraband and not reported them or written them up for it. When the subject of blacks came up, he started bragging about how he was a true southerner and had given the blacks bum beefs so the board would deny them parole. He said he hoped they would all be put into concentration camps and killed.

He then asked if Nolen was in X Wing or there on O Wing. Nolen had fought with guards at the various prisons he had been in, and Drake said he had been scheduled to be killed by Nazi sympathizers, but someone had tipped him off. Now he was trying to get some clean time, a parole, and get home. So he had left the mainline and gone to X Wing to avoid trouble and keep his record clean. But they had some of the right boys in X Wing, Drake said, who would do the job.

Having met Nolen at Tracy in 1962, and having seen him later at San Quentin, I of course knew whom Drake was referring to. I was able to listen to the conversation without difficulty because the inmate he was talking to lived next door to me. Following this conversation the officer passed my cell on his way to the end of the tier, but observing me standing at the bars he knew I had overheard all that was said. He stopped and gave me a dirty look, which I returned. He asked me if my name was Meneweather and I replied that it was. He then asked me if I

had come down from San Quentin and whether or not I was a "writ writer." To this I did not reply. He remarked that he had already read my jacket and knew all he needed to know about me, and went on down the tier. During a brief conversation he had with the Caucasian inmate in the next cell, I again heard Nolen's name mentioned. This inmate remarked that Nolen was on the other side of the tier in isolation because he had been attacked in X Wing by Caucasian inmates with knives and a pipe. Nolen would be moved to Max Row some time during the following month (December, 1968) when his isolation time had expired. Upon hearing this, I began to worry about Nolen's safety and decided to warn him as soon as possible.

In December Nolen was moved to Max Row, and I immediately explained to him all that I had heard. He informed me that he had indeed been set up in X Wing, attacked by three Caucasian inmates with knives and something that resembled a metal pipe. He had suffered a minor knife wound in his head, which was stitched up, as well as a couple of similar wounds inflicted by the pipelike object. After Nolen knocked one of his assailants to the ground the other two had taken to their heels and fled, abandoning the attack. The one he had knocked to the ground got up and followed his companions, thus terminating the altercation.

This so angered and outraged the officials that they wrote Nolen up. They told him at disciplinary committee that in their opinion the attack on him had been provoked by an altercation he had had at Folsom prison with a friend of the inmates who attacked him. Subsequently they found him guilty as charged in the write-up. They accused him of being violent and advised him to let the matter drop and be thankful that he had survived the attack. He would be placed in isolation, they said, and thereafter, for the protection of himself and his enemies, transferred to Max Row, also located on the first floor of O Wing. Because he had threatened them with a federal civil rights action in connection with the incident, they told him he would probably

be a long-time resident of Max Row. However, since preparations were being made to open the Max Row yard in the near future, life on Max Row would probably not be so bad after all.

A few days after he was placed in isolation, prison guards set Nolen up with a Caucasian inmate who, as rumor had it, was credited with five assaults on unsuspecting blacks by command of prison officials. However, knowing that Nolen was "exceptionally good with his hands," the Caucasian inmate, though armed with a knife provided him by prison guards, could do no more than stand at a distance and try to taunt Nolen into attacking him. This Nolen refused to do, and braced himself for the expected attack. The attack never came, and the incident terminated in a stand-off.

In December, 1968, Nolen was moved from isolation to Max Row and about a month later was assigned to the porter job for the half-day allotted to the black inmates. Nolen was set up by Drake two times during the next three months; both incidents terminated without injury to Nolen.

At this point, the guards decided that none of the antiblack inmates on Max Row were firm enough in their feelings, even with the encouragement and weapons offered by the guards, to risk further attacks on Nolen. So they fired him from the porter job.

Eventually, I was assigned the job of half-day porter for the black inmates and was set up several times. With the exception of two times, however, none of the Caucasian inmates would come out of their cells to attack me, being forewarned by guards and inmates alike of my knowledge of karate.

The two exceptions came in August, 1969. Two Caucasian inmates came out of their cells with knives and stood looking at me. One finally came toward me. When I rapidly disarmed him, he and his companion ran back to their cells. I was then ordered to return to my cell by the relief officer. Before doing so, I picked up the knife from the tier. In my cell, I bent it so it would fit into my commode and flushed it down. The guard

became very upset and demanded that I either give him the knife, return it to its owner, or destroy it in his presence. I explained that it had already been destroyed, which he refused to believe. He told me that I was fired and no other black inmate would be assigned to the porter job until the knife was produced.

I wrote Officer Drake a letter requesting that another black be assigned the job of half-day porter. He advised me that no blacks would be given the porter job and that he would not serve us our meals but would leave this to the nonblack porter. I protested that I had indeed destroyed the weapon, but they chose to believe that I had given it to other black inmates. Immediately after being told by Officer Drake that there would be no more black porters, the nonblack inmates resumed putting urine, feces, spit, and whatever other filth they could get into our foods.

At this point I prepared and filed a federal civil rights complaint against Officer Drake which was signed by all of the blacks on Max Row who were not frightened by his threats of retaliation. In October, 1969, the blacks who did not sign the complaint were moved off Max Row. In addition all of the nonblack prisoners, with the exception of nine, were moved out. Immediately thereafter, Hugo Pinell, Edward Whiteside, and Eugene Grady were transferred from Folsom to Max Row under circumstances similar to those in which I was transferred here from San Quentin. Each was marked for death by the officials at Folsom in the manner planned for me by the officials at San Quentin.

During the first weeks of November, Nolen was attacked by Officer Drake and other guards who had entered Max Row under pretense of making a security check (shakedown) of all of the cells in the section. The attack occurred after Nolen had been securely handcuffed and surrounded by a group of guards. Cleveland Edwards, Hugo Pinell, and I protested the attack by throwing liquids on Officer Drake whenever he came on the

tier. After being tear-gassed virtually into unconsciousness, we were handcuffed and transferred from our cells to isolation, written up, and sentenced to 29 days of isolation, with 15 on restricted diet ("SID").

Prior to appearing before the disciplinary committee and being placed on SID, we were allowed our regular full meal. After consuming a small portion of the food, I discovered that tear gas in powdery form was mixed with the powdered potatoes. I immediately warned Pinell and Edwards who also discovered it and didn't eat the food. A few minutes later my stomach felt like I had consumed fire. I requested that I be taken to the hospital or that the prison doctor be informed of my condition and bring me something to relieve the pain. The guards all laughed, and told me to lie down and be quiet, and I would soon feel better.

The following morning we were taken before the disciplinary committee. Having saved the tear gas filled food for the occasion, I carried it to the committee with me and explained everything to the program administrator and other prison officials. I offered the food as proof. They sniffed it and acknowledged the presence of tear gas but insisted that no guard would do such a thing and advised me to forget the whole matter. At my first opportunity to secure stationery, I wrote to attorneys informing them of the matter and requesting assistance. For this I received a write-up for defaming the reputation of prison guards and falsely accusing the institution. When I appeared before the prison disciplinary committee on this write-up, they warned me and threatened me with retaliation.

After completing the 29 days in isolation, we were all returned to Max Row in December, 1969. While on isolation, we had learned that Alvin Miller, G. W. Randolph, Earl Satcher, and a prisoner named Nance were serving time in isolation stemming from a racial fight on the second floor of O Wing. They were to be sent to Max Row, raising the number of blacks

there to eight for the first time since the weeks following the murder of Clarence Causey.

Immediately following our return to Max Row from isolation, a group of prison guards appeared at Nolen's cell and told him the committee wanted to see him. Approximately fifteen minutes later he was returned, and two nonblacks were taken from their cells in the same manner and returned approximately thirty-five to forty minutes later. Nolen was then permitted to leave his cell and visit the cells of all the black prisoners on Max Row. He told us that upon entering the committee room he asked why he was being brought back to the committee. They told him that they knew him to be a very intelligent individual, and noted that he had been in frequent communication with a black guard, known to us as Officer Williams, who was then conducting an Afro-American study class that used books by Eldridge Cleaver, Malcom X, G. A. Rodgers, and a host of other black writers, historians, and contemporary leaders.

They also expressed their belief that the black inmates of Max Row regarded him as their leader and, judging from the respect and brotherly affection given him, his opinions and advice would be accepted by all the black inmates on Max Row. They went on to say that they were aware of the treatment we had suffered since April of 1968 at the hands of the nonblack prisoners and some guards who were a little overemotional when blacks and Caucasians were in conflict. They knew that all the blacks were waiting for a chance to get the nonblacks physically. They felt certain that if Nolen went to the yard, which they thought would be opened on December 30, 1969, he could control the blacks and prevent them from fighting.

They asked him what he was going to do on the yard. Nolen replied that he did not consider himself anybody's leader or spokesman and did not aspire to be. He planned only to exercise when he went to the yard, and all the brothers were men and made their own decisions. The respect and affection afforded

him, he said, was a mutual feeling among all of us. At this point the conversation was directed solely to the issue of making sure that Nolen was going to the yard and what he would do if a fight broke out. He told them that he was going to the yard and would not start any trouble but would defend himself if attacked.

Thereafter, Officer Drake and Sergeant Matson in particular made it a point each day to ask Nolen, myself, and all the other black inmates if we were going to go to the yard like men or stay in our cells. With knowing smirks on their faces, they commented that they would like to see some action. On the morning of January 13, 1970, Sergeant Matson came on the tier and walked directly to the cells of every black and challenged us to go to the yard. Then he remarked to another guard that "it looks like the hammers (niggers) are going to come out after all and get what's coming to them." Knowing that he was under the illusion that we would lose the fight if one occurred, I didn't mention the remark to any of the brothers, although others had heard it too.

Matson ordered everyone to strip down to shorts and T-shirts and carry only towels and soap to the yard. The release process began, which consisted of letting out all the inmates one at a time: one Caucasian, one black, one Mexican. When my turn came to be released, I observed upon leaving my cell that the corridor was congested with prison officials of all ranks, numbering approximately thirty-five. All were armed with an assortment of tear-gas guns and containers, billy clubs, five-cell flashlights, and handcuffs. They wore an assortment of expressions from sneers, smirks, and nervous expectation to outright malicious smiles. I proceeded to the cage known as the sally port, where I was ordered to remove my socks, shower thongs, shorts, and T-shirt and hand these items to a prison guard. He searched them for weapons or other contraband while another guard inspected my person: mouth, ears, underarms, hands, bottoms

of feet, beneath my privates. I was then cleared to proceed to the yard.

Upon passing through the door leading to the yard, I automatically looked up at the gun tower and found myself looking into the barrel of a carbine (automatic rifle) which was loosely pointed at me by a guard leaning out of the window of the tower. He yelled that I should go to the other end of the yard, where the rest of the blacks were located in the area of the handball court. After arriving there and greeting brothers Nolen, Whiteside, Randolph, and Satcher, I remained to play a game of handball with Randolph while the others engaged in conversation or drifted to the punching bag or the pull-up bar. After losing interest in the handball game, I joined Nolen, and we started walking toward the large punching bag located in the front of the yard just across from the basketball goal. We were discussing his court case, which I helped him prepare, and were speculating on his chances for getting a motion for bail granted.

At the punching bag, Nolen started punching on it. While he was resting, I punched the bag a few times and started for the chin-up bar to do a few chin-ups. Satcher passed me then, headed in the direction of Nolen and the punching bag up front. After doing a few chin-ups I paused to rest, facing slightly toward the hospital side of the yard where the nonblacks were congregated and slightly toward the front of the yard where Nolen and Satcher were located. I noticed a nonblack inmate who had just been released from Max Row to the yard. The night before, he had shouted racial slurs and threats to Nolen.

Immediately, a flash of movement caught the corner of my eye and I turned to fully face Nolen where he and this inmate had started fighting. After two or three punches were thrown, a shot rang out, and Nolen fell to the ground. As I started toward Nolen to see if he was badly hit, and to protect him from being attacked while he was on the ground, a voice rang out to me to "watch it." I looked to see two Caucasian inmates running to-

ward me. Edwards told me as he ran by me that he would take care of Nolen. I then shifted my position to face the Caucasian inmates running toward me. Immediately another shot was fired, and Edwards, running toward Nolen, slumped to the ground holding his stomach. At this point I became temporarily preoccupied with the two Caucasian inmates who had run toward me. I knocked the first one to the ground and shifted my position to face and dispose of the remaining attacker, leaving the one I had knocked to the ground at my back. Miller warned me that the inmate was getting up from the ground and that he would take care of him. Miller started toward us, but before he had gone more than four steps another shot rang out and he fell to the ground holding his chest. Another shot was fired, and the Caucasian inmate whom I had knocked to the ground, having gotten back on his feet, fell back in a sitting position. Another shot brought blood squirting from one of the fingers on my left hand, which I was using to block punches directed at me by the inmate with whom I was still fighting. He backed off, terminating the fight.

I looked at my bleeding hand, put it in the pocket of my coveralls, and started to survey the situation. I heard Randolph yell to Satcher to come and help carry Miller from the yard to the prison hospital. Satcher declined, then yelled to me to go to Miller. After responding that I would, I looked up at the guard in the gun tower and pointed to myself and then to Miller and started to move slowly toward where Randolph was kneeling. The guard raised his carbine as if to fire at me but must have changed his mind because he didn't fire.

After Randolph placed Miller on my shoulder I started in the direction of the emergency exit to the prison hospital, looking at the guard in the gun tower. He again pointed the gun at me and shook his head in denial. At this point some guards started yelling out the Max Row windows from the catwalk inside the building. Approximately five to seven minutes later a guard appeared on the yard armed with a tear-gas gun, pointed in the

direction of the inmates. I started to walk very slowly toward the door leading from the yard back onto Max Row, with Miller still on my shoulder. The guard in the gun tower again pointed the gun at me and told me to stop or he would drop me. I paused a moment to reflect on his threat and decided that he probably wouldn't shoot me with an injured man on my shoulder. As I started to move again in the direction of the door leading from the yard, the guard with the tear-gas gun in his hand (presumably because of the shouts and curses and pleadings of some of the uninjured inmates from both sides that we be allowed to remove the wounded to the prison hospital) waved the guard in the gun tower off. Eventually I was allowed to leave the yard with Miller on my shoulder.

When I arrived in the sally port, I found myself surrounded by a large crowd of prison officials who ordered me to lay Miller down on the floor and go to my cell. I refused to do so and insisted on taking Miller straight to the hospital. At this point an official in the crowd remarked, "Who is that, Meneweather? I thought they got him too." A few seconds later the MTA (medical technical assistant), Mr. Henderson, worked his way through the crowd of prison officials and asked me to put Miller down so he could examine him and get him moved to the hospital. I obeyed, and as he unbuttoned Miller's coveralls I saw him put a Band-Aid over a hole in Miller's chest. He then stopped the flow of blood from my finger and bandaged it as best he could.

Again I was ordered by prison guards to go to my cell, but I declined and insisted that Miller be taken to the hospital. They then informed me that they could not take anyone to the hospital until after they got all of the uninjured inmates back in their cells. I moved out of the sally port onto the tier of Max Row. At this point Satcher came in off the yard carrying Edwards and was ordered to lay him on the floor and go to his cell, which he also refused to do, demanding that Miller and Edwards be taken to the hospital first. The officers advised him that nobody would be taken to the hospital until after the uninjured inmates were

all back in their cells. Satcher too then left the sally port and started to argue with the MTA concerning the removal of the wounded to the hospital.

Sergeant Matson and some other guards intervened, demanding that Satcher and I go to our cells. Not wanting Miller and Edwards to be left there on the floor to bleed to death, as I remembered in the case of Clarence Causey, we continued to insist that they be removed to the hospital in our presence. Immediately the guards started taking up threatening positions, brandishing billy clubs, expecting a battle. I removed my coveralls to give myself more freedom of movement and to avoid their being grabbed by prison guards in the anticipated battle. They didn't attack, however, because Nolen was brought in from the yard at that moment by Randolph and Whiteside and was placed on the floor, followed closely by two nonblack inmates carrying the wounded Caucasian inmate between them. After placing the Caucasian inmate on a waiting gurney, one of the nonblack inmates was pushed against Whiteside by a guard, and Whiteside, presumably thinking that he was being attacked, immediately turned his attention from Nolen, Edwards, and Miller and started punching with the inmate who had been pushed against him by the guard.

He and Randolph were set upon by prison guards with billy clubs. Satcher and I, by this time on the tier and separated from the altercation by a locked gate, could not go to the aid of Randolph and Whiteside other than to demand that the attack be immediately halted or we would retaliate on the guards who were on the tier supervising the lockup. Thus the attack was terminated without any serious injuries inflicted on either of the brothers in that incident. But Nolen, Edwards, and Miller lay dead from the shootings in the exercise yard.

Three or four days later, I was taken to the prison hospital, where I received an X-ray by a prisoner hospital attendant which revealed a break in one of my fingers. He put a splint cast on my hand and I was returned to my cell. A few days later all of the inmates on Max Row were taken before the prison disci-

plinary committee for the fighting on the yard. As usual, the blacks received the harshest punishment (a number of days of cell confinement, the only punishment meted out on that occasion by the prison officials). The entire blame for the violence was placed on the black inmates.

The murder of the three black inmates was ruled "justifiable homicide" by the Monterey County Grand Jury. Yet, at the event on January 13, 1970, there were more than twice as many prison guards present as inmates from the minute the first inmate was released to go to the yard until the last survivor was locked back in his cell. At all times they were armed with an assortment of tear gas, mace, five-cell flashlights, and billy clubs. They also, of course, had the support of the guard in the gun tower armed with the carbine semiautomatic rifle. There was no reason why they could not have terminated the altercation without the loss of a single life and possibly without the firing of a single shot by the guard in the gun tower. Yet they deliberately chose a course of action that resulted in the wanton murder of three black human beings. I cannot believe that anyone could not have foreseen violence or a high enough potential for violence to take steps to suppress it in advance and without the loss of life.

Sometime during the latter part of January, 1970, the word came into O Wing through the guards that a guard had been killed on the mainline and that it was believed by the officials that the killing was an act of retaliation for the murders of Nolen, Edwards, and Miller. Immediately thereafter three black inmates, George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette, were selected and locked up in various parts of the institution's O and X wings.³ Eventually they were all brought to Max Row. One of them I had previously met at San Quentin.

3. George Jackson was killed by guards at San Quentin prison during an alleged escape attempt in August of 1971. Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette were acquitted of the murder of the Soledad prison guard after a lengthy trial ending in early 1972.

A few days after their arrival, while I was being searched prior to a visit with my attorney, I heard the two guards who were to escort me to the visit discussing the incident in which the guard was killed. From what was said I soon gathered that one of the guards had not been at the prison on the day the incident occurred, but he had heard or read in the papers that the killing of the guard had been an act of retaliation for the murders of the three black inmates on the O Wing yard on the morning of January 13, 1970. The other guard told him that he had been told by the brass that no prison personnel witnessed the killing, and that they had learned from inmate informers that the dead guard was attacked by a crowd of racially mixed (black, Chicano, and Caucasian) inmates. Further, he continued, the identification of the inmates involved in the attack could not be ascertained. Nevertheless three niggers were going to ride the beef for it as a warning and an example to all of what they could look forward to for attacks on guards.

At this point I was drawn into the conversation by one of the guards who asked if I knew the one inmate who had been at San Quentin. I replied that I knew him there by name, sight, and reputation and that I had talked to him briefly on four or five occasions, maybe less. The guard then told me that I had better take a good look at him now if he was my friend because the next time I would see him he would be sniffing cyanide in the gas chamber. I pointed out that according to what he had just finished telling the other guard, they all knew the man didn't know who was responsible for it. With an arrogant sneer on his face he went on to point out to me that a few paroles or discharges in the right places would produce inmate witnesses to testify to anything the brass wanted said. Then they started to curse me for fingering the guard who murdered Nolen, Miller, and Edwards to the attorneys who were going to interview me, and remarked how I wouldn't get away with it.

Following the interview, I told the inmate in question about this event, and he suggested that I tell it to his attorney, who

would know how to handle the matter. I wrote to his attorney and repeated the entire matter and included the name of the guard who had done most of the talking. Having been informed at an earlier date that the law and the institutional rules had been changed, permitting inmates to personally seal communications to attorneys before mailing, I sealed the letter and sent it off.

Nevertheless, it was opened by the officials at Soledad. Photostat copies were made of it, and it was placed in my central file for the Adult Authority to see before considering me for parole. Presumably the district attorney's office was provided a copy of the letter too, since they were prosecuting the inmate and two alleged codefendants for the offense.

I was scheduled to appear before the Adult Authority in April, three months after the incident. I was told by the O Wing counselor that my injury from the gunfire would not be made public during the investigation into the deaths of Nolen, Miller, and Edwards. If I refused to discuss the incident with the various people who would be making inquiries on the grounds that I didn't want to get involved, he said that he would take appropriate steps to see that I got cut loose when I got to the board. He went on to point out that I had tried to cause trouble for the staff over the deaths of Clarence Causey and Powell, and that although I had had direct knowledge of or had witnessed those two events, in neither case had I been successful. I should know by now, he concluded, that I was fighting a losing battle, and I should just do the sensible thing and take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and go home. He added that the staff's tolerance of me had about worn itself out.

At this point I interrupted him and pointed out that I had no illusions about Soledad or anyone who worked here. Common sense, aided by my experiences at this place, forced me to believe that the entire administration of Soledad was aware of the unlawful and inhuman acts perpetrated here against blacks

by guards and nonblack inmates. The deaths and injuries inflicted on blacks here amounted to Soledad's being a death row or a holding pen where selective genocide is practiced against black humanity by the cruelest and most sadistic racists that ever preyed on mankind. What was really being offered me was a temporary escape in exchange for sharing their guilt for all the crimes committed against blacks here at Soledad prior to and following my arrival, something I could not go for and still respect myself as a human being, not to mention as a man. He responded that I should not expect to get out of prison until my maximum term expired, if I was lucky enough to live that long. I was then escorted back to my cell on Max Row.

In April of 1970, I went before the Adult Authority. Having reviewed my central file before I entered the room, they immediately informed me that they could not consider releasing me. They then asked me a few questions, and I returned to my cell. A few days later I received my board results, informing me that they had denied me parole and that I would not be brought back for three years. The following week I was taken before a committee of prison officials for classification and post board review, at which time the three-year denial was confirmed. The counselor pointed out to me that the board had stipulated that the officials could refer me for parole consideration whenever I got a year's clean time, but that they did not think I would be capable of getting a year clean. Considering the racial situation among the inmates and the agitation encouraged by the guards, I myself did not see how I could possibly get a year's clean time. I just decided to live each day at a time.

In July, 1970, I again appeared before the committee of prison officials for review and was told that I could move up to the second floor. Since they had confined me to Max Row since April, 1968, and refused me transfer to any other prison, the mainline here, or any place other than the first floor of O Wing, I of course thought they were joking and asked them not to play games with me. Finally I became convinced that they were

serious and went back to my cell to pack my property for the move to the second tier. Upon arriving on the second floor, I was assigned to the very first cell.

Approximately ten minutes later two large Caucasian inmates were moved in the second and third cells. While moving their property they each looked into my cell at least four times, which didn't alarm me at the time because that was normal behavior for new arrivals. A few days later I was assigned to the porter job reserved for blacks on the same half-day basis that existed on Max Row. (Blacks were segregated from the other races on the second floor too. The only difference was that on cleanup days the porters were allowed to integrate with the Caucasian and Mexican porters to clean the tiers.)

The inmates on the second floor, without regard to race, soon learned through observation or contact with me that I was a naturally courteous and respectful person toward everyone, until forced to be otherwise. Eventually communication was established between me and the inmates in the second and third cells. In September, 1970, the inmate in the second cell told me that they had been propositioned by officials to kill me. At this point I thought back to the third week that I had been given the porter job. At that time a Mexican inmate porter whom I hardly knew had informed me that a guard had approached him and told him that I was talking bad about him and that he, the guard, would not beef him if he got me for it. I dismissed the incident at the time as a mistake of no importance. However, after listening to what these two inmates had to say, I began to see just why I was allowed to move to the second floor, and I decided to be more cautious.

I asked the inmates to write down on paper what they had told me. I showed them how to make a perjury oath, in order to make their statements legal affidavits, and I received their permission to turn the affidavits over to an attorney or someone else who would know how best to handle the situation. Then I hid them in my legal materials and other personal effects so that

they would not be found and confiscated by the guards during a shakedown or when my property was sent home in the event that someone was successful in collecting the bounty placed on my life by the officials. Eventually, I decided to turn the statements over to an attorney I thought trustworthy enough to advise me what to do. I took advantage of the first opportunity to get the statements past the prison officials, and the statements were mailed to the attorney for me.

The officials became very angry when they found out that their selected assassins had betrayed the plot against my life and had cooperated in bringing the matter to the attention of concerned people and eventually the general public. They immediately transferred one of the intended assassins to another institution and thereafter moved me to the east side of the second tier on O Wing, where, in February, 1971, I sit writing this document of my life and experiences at Soledad.

CHAPTER 10

The Soledad Seven: Attempted Murder in Monterey

by Eve Pell

On July 13, 1970, a white guard named William Shull was stabbed to death at North Facility, a minimum-security section of Soledad. He had been stabbed more than 50 times while in his office in a small shack near a baseball diamond. Guards locked all inmates in North Facility in their cells, searched them and the cells, and questioned them. The yard shack where Shull died was tested for fingerprints, footprints, and other evidence by representatives of the Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (CII), a state equivalent of the FBI.

Records of the investigation show that prison officials at first suspected a conspiracy of Mexican Americans. They knew that Shull had had serious difficulties with Mexican Americans near the time of his death. However, after interrogating Mexican Americans without being able to establish a good case, prison officials began to interrogate blacks, and the focus of the investigation shifted. Why to blacks? Possibly because Shull's death could be regarded as a second act of retaliation for the shooting of the three black inmates in the O Wing yard; possibly because groups of black inmates gathered daily to talk around some picnic tables near Shull's office. Perhaps, also, prison authorities felt they could use this murder as a pretext for destroying black organization within the institution.