

January morning was Opie G. Miller, a retired Army man and a reputed expert with the .30 caliber semi-automatic which he held in his hands.

Miller, 51, had joined the Soledad guard staff in August 1962, a year after he retired from the Army as a non-com with 20 years service. A short, stocky man with an oval face and slightly receding cropped hair, Miller was a product of Woden, Texas, a small agricultural town that is excluded from most atlases. As a guard, Miller had a reputation among prisoners and staff of being sullen and severe. That was probably the reason he was often assigned to standing watches in gun towers, where he would have little, if any, direct contact with inmates. Two days before the opening of the yard, Miller was "checked out" in the use of the .30 caliber rifle. As in the past, he performed well.

The release for yard exercise began at 8:45 A.M., when W. L. Nolen's cell door was opened by a switch in the officers' area. "Prepare for yard release," a guard yelled down the max row corridor. Nolen stepped out of his cell and walked down the corridor to the cagelike sally port. As directed by the mimeographed sheet handed out by Sergeant Maddix two weeks earlier, Nolen carried his clothing and a towel under his arms. Inside the sally port, he handed a guard the towel and his clothes, which consisted of coveralls, foam rubber shower shoes, a T-shirt, shorts and socks. While the clothes were being examined for shanks and razor blades by one guard, a second officer conducted a skin search, looking for concealed weapons in the prisoner's mouth, under his tongue, in his hair, in and behind his ears, under his armpits, between his toes, under his feet and in and around his rectum and genitals. The skin search is routine for all prisoners entering and leaving the maximum security cell area. "Spread 'em," a guard ordered. Nolen grabbed his buttocks and leaned forward. The other officer handed Nolen his clothing and the inmate dressed to enter the yard.

Nolen was the first prisoner released into the yard. As he stepped onto the concrete pavement in the quiet gray moments of that Monterey winter's morning, he could look back

over his right shoulder and see the armed guard, Opie Miller, above and behind him some 30 feet away. Nolen walked away from the gun, stepping across puddles of rain water toward the handball area at the north end.

Two white inmates—a lanky, lean-faced Chicano named Joseph ("Colorado") Ariaz and Howard ("Smiley") Hoyle—entered the yard after Nolen. The make-sheet on Ariaz described him as "assaultive" and noted that the Chicano "boasts about disliking niggers and considers them less than human." Hoyle was a racist himself. Just months earlier, he had stabbed a black prisoner in another wing of the prison.

Minutes later, Richard ("Cactus") Ferguson, "Hawaiian John" Fanene and Billie ("Buzzard") Harris joined these two near the hospital fence. Ferguson, 22, was doing three to life. Fanene, 24, was of Samoan ancestry. Soledad officials said he was "not necessarily a racist, but identified with whites." Harris was a white supremacist, a member of the so-called Aryan Brotherhood.

By the time the white trio joined their comrades at the hospital fence, three other black inmates—Earl Satcher, Ed Whiteside and John

while but the ball sailed over the fence and they stopped. When someone threw the ball back over the high fence, Whiteside took Nolen's place. Satcher, both hands hanging onto the ends of a white towel around his neck, laughed and joked and acted as a sort of greeter to other black prisoners as they entered the yard.

Raymond Guerrero, 29, a white inmate doing six months to ten years for narcotics possession, was another veteran of racial brawls. Soledad officials said Guerrero had, just two months before this date, been in a fight in which a black was badly beaten. Guerrero was the eleventh man into the yard. While he was joining the whites at the south end, Hawaiian John Fanene left the group, walked to the heavy punching bag along the O-wing wall and began pounding it. Between jabbing combinations, Fanene looked toward the gun tower. He said Miller, the gun guard, held the rifle "poised," as if ready to fire. This worried Fanene because he had been wounded in the yard at San Quentin and still carried the scars. Fanene stopped working on the heavy bag and moved over to the speed-punching bag, where he kept watching the tower as he punched. He was watching when Miller aimed and fired the first shot.

When Thomas Meneweather entered the yard, he "automatically" glanced up toward the gun tower and found himself "looking into the muzzle of O. G.'s carbine." Meneweather, Soledad officials said, had a "serious disciplinary record." He made zip guns and bombs and furnished them to other blacks on max row. When he entered the yard, Miller motioned him to the north end with a wave of the gun barrel. Meneweather challenged Randolph to a game of handball.

While Fanene punched the speed bag and glanced nervously at the gun tower, another white racist was cleared for yard exercise. Ronnie Dean ("Harpo") Harper was a close friend of the whites responsible for Clarence Causey's death, thus having earned a special hatred from the blacks, who wanted to "tattoo some knuckles onto the man's face." Harpo Harper joined the whites near the hospital fence.

The last two blacks to enter the yard were Cleveland Edwards and Alvin ("Jug") Miller. Edwards, twenty,



Earl Satcher

Randolph—were in the yard and had joined Nolen at the far north end. . . . The four blacks took a few steps to the center of the handball court and began warming up, slapping the handball against the cinderblock-backstop. Nolen and Randolph played for a

was doing a relatively lengthy six months to ten years for struggling with a police officer. Soledad officials didn't like Edwards because he had a "negative attitude towards authority. . . ." Twenty-three-year-old Jug Miller, who would die within minutes, was serving five to life for robbery.

The last inmate to enter the yard before the shooting began was Robert ("Chuko") Wendekier, 21, a white con who was doing six months to five years for possession of a weapon. According to prison records, Wendekier was noted for "riotous behavior" and had "assaulted a number of inmates." Prison officials said that Wendekier, a Hawaiian, "goes with whites when trouble starts."

By now, 15 men had entered the yard. Each had been skin-searched for weapons. Almost all were considered "racist" by prison officials. Almost all had a prison record of racial fighting. All were aware of the racial score to be settled for the Causey killing. Since they were unarmed, no one expected to get killed, but a free-swinging, knee-jabbing, foot-stomping melee was anticipated as guards, inmates and prison staff awaited the beginning spark. It was like placing scorpions and black widow spiders in a shoebox. . . . As O-wing administrator Eugene Peterson admitted in a confidential memo to Warden Fitzharris, "Most of the men [in the yard] have been to the other lock-ups [prisons] at one time or another and know most of the inmates in the other lock-ups. The hate or alliances go deep and many are of long years standing, i.e., a friend of mine was stabbed by a friend of yours, so I'm going to have to stab you."

The carnage began shortly after Chuko Wendekier entered the yard. Wendekier walked under the basketball hoop in the center of the yard and ambled over to the fence, where he began talking with Harper, Harris and Fanene, who had just stopped punching the speed bag. The four men laughed and joked about the "niggers" playing handball, about getting out on the yard for the first time in more than a year, about the anticipated fistfight and about the gun guard pointing the rifle around.

When Fanene left the speed bag, W. L. Nolen began punching it. Nolen

called to Meneweather, who had been helping Nolen with his court petitions against the prison, and suggested that they punch the heavy bag. Nolen worked with the heavy bag while Meneweather held it and watched. Meneweather had also been anxious about the gun tower. He noticed that the gun guard had his aim on them as they approached the bag and kept the rifle leveled at them while Nolen punched it.

Nolen, who had won most of the boxing matches he fought in prison tournaments, had just given the heavy bag a few combinations when Wendekier approached the drinking fountain along the O-wing wall. As Chuko passed near him, Nolen yelled at him and threw a quick right, slamming his knuckles into the white con's forehead. Wendekier returned three punches, then decided that Nolen, with his boxing experience, was too big and too fast to square off against. Chuko dove for Nolen's legs, grabbing his blue denim trouser legs, trying to pull Nolen down. Meanwhile, Fanene, who had walked up with Wendekier, was standing slightly behind Chuko. Fanene threw a few punches at Nolen, punches that whizzed past Wendekier's ear, but he missed. Fanene, his mind flashing quickly on the scar he still bore from the San Quentin yard, turned once more to look at the gun guard. He watched as Opie G. Miller aimed and fired.



Soledad, California

The first bullet tore into Nolen's chest, piercing his body just to the right of the breastbone. A white wit-

ness saw Nolen sag to his knees, clap his hands behind his head, elbows shaking, and fall forward, his forehead slamming into the concrete. Wendekier said he kicked Nolen a few times, unaware that Nolen was bleeding to death. Meneweather, who had let go of the bag he was holding for Nolen, started for Chuko to stop him from kicking his black friend. He didn't reach Wendekier because Billie Harris and Harpo Harper jumped him first.

"Watch out," Cleveland Edwards yelled at Meneweather.

Meneweather, a powerfully built man and a judo expert, turned to meet Harris and Harper. He caught Harris in midair, letting the white con's momentum carry him, and threw Harris to the pavement. Edwards called that he would look after Nolen but as he ran toward the fallen black leader the gun guard squeezed off another shot. Edwards grabbed his stomach and fell on his face. The shot went through Edwards and smashed into Meneweather's left hand.

John Randolph and Ed Whiteside were playing handball when they heard the rifle shots. They spun around and saw Edwards fall to the concrete, holding his stomach. Randolph started running, zig-zagging toward the fence near the hospital, then back toward the shower stalls. He heard another shot. The bullet hit Jug Miller in the gut as Miller was running along the O-wing wall toward the fight scene. Randolph, who was just a few steps away, tried to grab Jug Miller to stop him from falling but he couldn't. Miller was dead weight. He fell near the pull-up bar and speed bag as Randolph let go and turned to face Billie Harris, who had got up from Meneweather's judo throw. Randolph and Harris glared briefly at each other. Then, glancing at the carnage around him, Harris decided to stop fighting. He walked a few steps, paused, and felt a burning sensation in his groin. He had been shot in the testicles.

Satcher, who had been pacing back and forth in the northwest corner of the yard, also had headed for the fight. By the time he got to the middle of the yard, at least three shots had been fired. Satcher squared off against Cactus Ferguson, each feinting with left jabs and threatening rights, but neither landed a punch. When the fourth bul-

let was fired and both men noticed that inmates had actually been shot, they put their hands down. Two of the wounded blacks moaned. Harris, a testicle shot off, sat on the concrete pavement, loudly cursing the blacks and the gun guard. Satcher cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled, "It's all over with."

"Well, it better be all over with," Opie Miller, the gun guard, yelled back.

The four surviving black prisoners first tried to figure out who was the most seriously wounded. Satcher and Randolph, kneeling over Nolen asked how badly he was hit. "I'm probably hit in the leg," said Nolen, but his shirt showed bleeding in the chest and back. The men decided to move Jug Miller.

"Everyone was now waiting for the doctor," said a witness, "but after about ten minutes nothing happened. We then began hollering to the gunman in the tower to open up the emergency gate to the hospital, but he refused and just stood there with his rifle aimed at us." After 15 minutes passed, Meneweather decided to try to take Jug Miller off the yard. He kneeled down so two other black cons could place Miller across his back and shoulders. "I started to walk toward the door through which we had entered the yard," said Meneweather, "but the tower guard pointed the gun at me and shook his head. Then I started forward with tears in my eyes, expecting to be shot down every second, but the tower guard told me, 'That's far enough.'"

"If you take another step, it'll be your last," Opie Miller shouted from the tower. "Nobody leaves the yard until I get an official O.K."

"If they don't get back, shoot another one," Sergeant Maddix yelled from the open O-wing door.

John Randolph and Ed Whiteside carried W. L. Nolen up the hospital ramp but they were stopped by a guard who pointed a tear gas gun in their faces. "I started cussing and inching forward," said Randolph, "until the gunman in the tower told me to stop and pointed his rifle at us. So we stopped."

By this time, Nolen had drifted into shock and was trying to swallow his

tongue. Randolph slapped Nolen's face and the wounded man calmed down. But a minute later Nolen's eyes rolled up to the top of his head and he started biting his tongue. "I began slapping his face again," said Randolph, "but to no avail."

While the blacks were arguing with the guards about taking the wounded off the yard, two white prisoners—Ariaz and Guerrero—moved to the north end of the yard and played handball. They played for about ten minutes.

Finally, three guards and two MTAs (civilian medical technical assistants) appeared at the O-wing sally port and walked onto the yard. The guards were carrying tear gas guns. An MTA stopped by each of the wounded black prisoners and mutely shook his head three times. The guards said the wounded could be brought in off the yard but that the men would enter through O-wing instead of directly up the hospital ramp to the emergency rooms. This meant a long circuitous route to the hospital, through the series of O-wing doors, down part of the prison's main-line corridor and through the hospital security doors. Both the blacks and the whites protested, arguing that the hospital gate, whose ramp jutted out into the yard barely twenty feet from the wounded men, should be opened. They knew that prison laundry was taken in through there almost every day. The guards refused. . . .

The bullets that ripped into Nolen, Edwards and Miller did not kill the men outright. According to witnesses, all three men lay bleeding in the yard for 15 to 20 minutes before officials would unlock any gates to take them off the yard. The guards never did unlock the two doors which led directly to the prison hospital. The three blacks bled to death.

A "corrected copy" of the highly confidential report of the chief medical officer at Soledad, Dr. Daniel W. Boone, stated that Nolen "was brought to the hospital in a moribund condition . . . from a circular 4 mm. wound in the right 4th interspace just to the right of the sternum." The bullet was about as close to the middle of a man's chest as a shot can be placed.

Jug Miller, the doctor said, was brought to surgery in a "near mori-

bund state." Miller had a four-millimeter circular wound in the "epigastrium just below the xyphoid process," just below the middle chest, slightly above dead center on the stomach.

Cleveland Edwards was carried into the prison hospital "bleeding profusely from the left femoral area," a large artery in the groin. Boone reported that he tried to expose the severed vessels to control the hemorrhaging but by then the "subject had already succumbed."

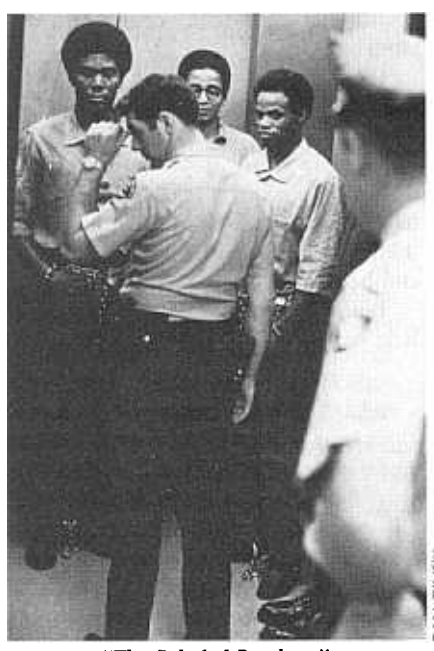
Billie ("Bizzard") Harris lost a testicle. . . .

Word of the triple killings flashed quickly throughout the Soledad "main line." Within hours various groups of black inmates were demanding the arrest of the gun guard and a grand jury investigation. Investigators and attorneys from the Monterey County district attorney's office poked and probed, but after a passage of three days, there was no word on the progress of the "investigation." The prison continued tense, "like a fire-cracker fixing to explode," as one white inmate described it.

During the evening of the third day, the Monterey County district attorney told reporters in an interview that Opie G. Miller's killing of the three black prisoners was, in his personal opinion, "probable justifiable homicide by a public officer in the performance of his duty." When the black inmates heard this report on television, they were incensed. Within an hour a white guard named John V. Mills lay dying on the concrete pavement of Y-wing. He died in the prison hospital without regaining consciousness.

Mills probably never knew any of the truth about the killings on January 13. His death was revenge, cold detached revenge. Opie Miller—the man who shot Nolen, Edwards, Miller and Harris—took an extended vacation in Germany. The Mills death, the first killing of a guard in Soledad history, resulted in the arrest of three black inmates: George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette. Due to the incredibly heavy-handed and racist treatment of these three men during pre-trial hearings in Salinas, defense attorneys won a transfer of venue to San Francisco, and the case of the three

rapidly became a cause celebre in California. Movement forces called them the "Soledad Brothers" and their



"The Soledad Brothers"

case—which focused on racial injustice and inhuman prison conditions—began receiving wider attention and press coverage. It was not until August 1970, however, that the press really closed in. For it was then that George Jackson's younger brother, Jonathan, armed himself and entered the Marin County Courthouse. The younger Jackson emerged with five white hostages, including an assistant D.A. and a Superior Court judge, hostages they wanted to exchange for the freedom of the Soledad Brothers. In a murderous barrage of gunfire, Jonathan Jackson was killed. So were two other black inmates, James McClain and William Christmas, and the white judge, Harold Haley. Ruchell Magee, one of the survivors in the van, is on trial for murder as this is being written.

Within days of the Marin Courthouse shooting, law enforcement officials reported that Angela Davis had purchased the guns involved in the kidnapping. Warrants were issued for her arrest and she was captured in a downtown New York motel nearly three months after the event. Federal authorities delivered Ms. Davis to California, where she was imprisoned at the Marin County jail. Meanwhile,

George Jackson had been transferred to San Quentin.

AUGUST 21, 1971: THE DEATH OF GEORGE JACKSON

San Quentin Prison is California's oldest. Because it has the only gas chamber in the state, it also became the most famous. It was here in the late spring of 1960 that Caryl Chessman lost his ninth stay of execution and was strapped into a steel chair to inhale the bitter almond stench of two cyanide capsules. It is here that Robert Kennedy's assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, and the Tate murderers Charles Manson and Charles Watson sit and sleep their life away. It was here that Ruchell Magee awaited trial for his involvement in the Marin County Courthouse tragedy. And it was here, on a plaza of flower beds and walkways, that George Jackson met his death on a late August Saturday in 1971.

Except for a gusty wind that funneled in through the Golden Gate, the day George Jackson died was sunny and warm. He had expected at least one visitor that August 21 and inside the Adjustment Center he kept asking the guards whether his visitor had arrived. The guards said no, even though they knew otherwise. Two people were waiting to see Jackson but the visiting room officer had told the guards on the telephone that they had not been "cleared."

The two visitors, a young, white radical attorney named Stephen Bingham and a black female activist named Vanita Anderson, had signed in at the prison's East Gate at 10:15 A.M.

Inside the East Gate, the two walked about 200 yards to the prison's security fence, where all visitors are required to pass through a metal detector. Purses, bags, tape recorders, briefcases and similar large objects, while not passing through the "inspectoscope" detector, are examined routinely by the guard at that gate.

That Saturday, Correctional Officer Bernard C. Betts processed more than 225 visitors through his metal detector. It was not his normal duty station but he had manned the machine before. It was another routine day for Betts. A man wearing a leg brace set the metal detector off. So did a woman wearing a naugahyde coat with

three-inch metallic buttons.

Steve Bingham passed through the inspectoscope at about 10:20 A.M. Betts remembered that the young attorney was wearing a mod necktie and a corduroy jacket, his long hair combed neatly. Betts could not recall that the Berkeley attorney carried anything.

Vanita Anderson walked up to the inspectoscope carrying what looked to Betts like a portable typewriter case. Light-complexioned, with a mild Afro and wearing a pair of finely hand-crafted copper earrings, Ms. Anderson was dressed in a three-piece checkerboard suit.

"What's your title?" Betts asked.

"I'm a legal investigator," she answered.

"Who are you going to visit?" Betts inquired.

"George Jackson," Ms. Anderson replied.

Betts instructed her to pass him the bluish-gray metallic case, holding it away from the metal detector so the case would not set the machine off. She thrust the case toward him "in a contemptuous manner" and Betts began examining the contents. The case was about 20 inches long, 16 inches wide and some four or five inches deep. Inside, Betts found several inches of yellow legal-sized paper and a tape recorder. The recorder was nine to ten inches long, five or six inches wide and almost four inches thick. The guard carefully removed the back of the recorder and saw four C-size batteries, various diodes and transistorized parts and a speaker. Betts did not try to turn the recorder on to see if it worked. He said later that there were about three inches of the recorder which he could not see. He also said that the tape recorder and the attaché case belonging to Ms. Anderson were the only ones which passed through his gate that day.

"You're clear," Betts said to the woman, returning the case. He picked up his phone and called the visiting room to inform guards there that the black female visitor was carrying a tape recorder inside her attaché case. . . .

The visiting room guard was Daniel P. Scarborough, a quiet, gangly officer who was well-liked by most of the

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