



U.S. Department of Justice

Federal Bureau of Prisons

Office of the Director

Washington, D.C. 20534

August 10, 1990

Ms. Alice Krupit  
#402  
3446 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20008

Dear Ms. Krupit:

I am writing in response to your inquiry regarding the film Through the Wire, which was recently aired by the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), and its depiction of the treatment, received by three inmates at the Federal Correctional Institution, Lexington, Kentucky.

The film in question contains numerous distortions of fact, calculated to malign the principles for which the American criminal justice system stands, as well as the professionalism and personal dedication of the staff of the Bureau of Prisons. It also contributes to a pervasive negative stereotype of prison operations that inhibits the positive progress so very necessary in our Nation's prison system.

Prior to the film's broadcast, the Bureau of Prisons contacted PBS officials and requested five minutes of air time to address the damaging claims made by the film. Our request was denied. Hopefully, this written response will serve to provide the public with accurate information in relation to the film's glaring inaccuracies.

First, a few documented facts about the inmates highlighted in the film and portrayed as non-violent political offenders:

a) Susan Rosenberg was sentenced in the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey on May 20, 1985 to a 58 year term for conspiracy, Possession of Unregistered Firearms, Carrying Explosives During the Commission of a Felony and Possessing Numerous Pieces of False Identification as a Fugitive. The offense involved stockpiling an arsenal of weapons and explosives to be used for terrorist activities. She is an

admitted "professional revolutionary" who considers herself an enemy of the United States Government. When arrested on this offense, she was a fugitive from justice, arising from her indictment in the Brinks Armored Car robbery on October 21, 1981. During that robbery, one Brinks guard and two police officers were gunned down and killed. Additionally, a third police officer and a second Brinks guard were shot and wounded.

Ms. Rosenberg was part of a November 2, 1979 kidnapping of a Correctional Officer and Prison Matron in Clinton, New Jersey while assisting in the escape of Jo Anne Chesimard from the Clinton Correctional Facility. Ms. Rosenberg's conviction in this multi-count case involves Conspiracy to Commit Acts of Kidnapping, Robbery and Murder.

b) Alejandrina Torres is currently serving an aggregated 35 year term for Seditious Conspiracy to Commit Offenses against the United States Government, Unlawful Storage of Explosives, Threats of Violence, and Transporting Stolen Motor Vehicles in Interstate Commerce. She is a verified member of the FALN and openly admits to her involvement in the armed struggle against the United States Government. In 1983 she was involved in plotting the attempted escape of incarcerated FALN Leader Oscar Lopez-Rivera from the United States Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas.

c) Silvia Baraldini was sentenced in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York to a 40-year term for Racketeering and Conspiracy to Carry Out Affairs of a Criminal Enterprise through Armed Robberies. Additionally, she was given a three year consecutive sentence in the Eastern District of New York for Serious Criminal Contempt of Court. She is therefore serving an aggregated term of 43 years. The present offenses involved Ms. Baraldini and a large number of codefendants conspiring and committing acts involving murder, kidnapping, robbery, and obstruction of criminal investigations. She has specifically been convicted of kidnapping a prison guard and a prison matron during the escape of Joanne Chesimard from the Clinton Correctional Facility in 1979. Joanne Chesimard was a Black Liberation Army leader who was in prison for the murder of a New Jersey State Trooper. This escape was carefully planned and executed with precision by heavily armed individuals carrying M16 automatic weapons, shotguns, and several handguns.

When she was arrested, on November 9, 1980, Baraldini had in her possession some of the security procedures for the Rockland County (New York) jail where the Brinks Armored Car suspects were then incarcerated. Her second conviction, resulting in the Contempt of Court charge arose from four simultaneous bombings on February 28, 1982 at the offices of the New York Stock Exchange, the American Stock Exchange, the Chase Manhattan Bank and Merrill Lynch.

Some facts about the housing unit at Lexington: The High Security Unit (HSU) for female offenders at the Federal Correctional Institution, Lexington, Kentucky, opened in October, 1986. Prior to its opening, the Bureau of Prisons recognized a need for a facility to house high security females within the prison system. An increasing number of female inmates were coming into the system posing significant escape risks. They were serving lengthy sentences, they had either escaped or attempted escape in the past, they were prone to violence and some had sufficient outside community resources to possibly aid in their escape. That is, some inmates were tied to groups or organizations who in practice and precept advocated escape from confinement for its members.

Inmates placed in the unit could only be maximum custody and several levels of review were necessary prior to the final decision for placement by the Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The Director was the only one who could remove an inmate from the unit if and when he determined that the original factors for placement in the unit no longer applied and transfer to a less secure facility was appropriate. Quarterly reviews were conducted by unit staff of each inmate's assignment to oversee her adjustment and assess the propriety of continued placement in the HSU.

From its opening in September 1986 until its closing in August 1988, the unit housed a total of seven inmates. The conditions of confinement were carefully monitored by staff to ensure compliance with Bureau policy and to provide appropriate care. The unit was designed to be "self contained" in that most of the functions and services offered throughout an institution to a general inmate population had to be similarly offered within the unit to the HSU women. Opportunities were provided for work, indoor and outdoor recreation, religious programming, social and legal visits, social and legal telephone calls, personal hygiene, commissary privileges, receipt of mail, medical treatment and feeding. In carrying out these services, the women in the high security unit had ample and frequent opportunity to interact with numerous staff working at Lexington. Correctional staff were assigned to the unit 24 hours a day and each of the women received visits from unit staff and medical staff on a daily basis. Administrative staff and other employees visited the unit either on request or in making frequent rounds. The visits included institution Executive Staff, chaplains, educational representatives, psychologists, and at times, maintenance staff. Additionally, the women were free to mingle and interact with each other throughout the unit, with the exception of the evening when they were locked in their cells from 9:45 p.m. until 6:30 a.m. Although the HSU was located in the basement of a general female housing unit, the use of the word "basement" is mis-

leading. The vast majority of the unit was above ground level, including all of the cells or living areas. The unit has numerous windows which afforded varying views of other parts of the institution or the county park next door. All windows within the unit contained security screens but allowed the entry of natural sunlight. The security screens were not opaque and allowed vision out of the windows.

The unit contained various pieces of equipment which were provided for inmate use. This included a laundry facility, a personal computer, 25-inch color televisions in each of the cells, a television in a common recreation room, an exercise bicycle, a rowing machine, a treadmill, a ping pong table, board games, materials for ceramics and athletic equipment for such things as racquetball. The unit also contained a law library and other books for personal reading. All inmates had access to daily showers, ample personal hygiene items and a small amount of personal property.

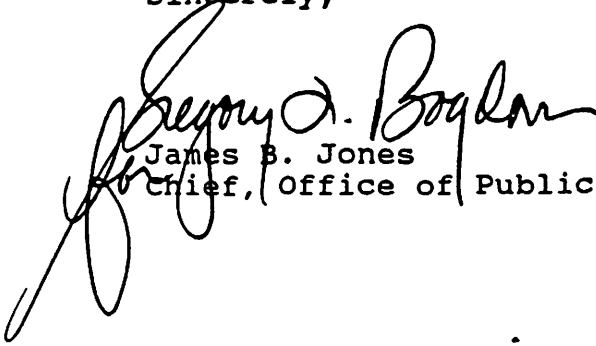
The unit itself was well-ventilated and climate controlled by a heating and air-conditioning unit. Although the common areas of the unit were monitored by cameras for security purposes, there were no cameras installed in individual inmate cells or shower facilities. Inmate meals were identical to those served to the rest of the population at FCI Lexington. Medical diets were also available and one of the inmates received a kosher diet. All meals were approved by a registered dietitian and were nutritionally balanced.

The HSU was never designed to confine all females within the Bureau of Prisons' system who require higher security than that offered at other institutions. It was an interim measure to confine a few of the more salient cases until completion of construction of a new female unit at the Federal Correctional Institution, Marianna, Florida. With the opening of that facility in August 1988, the female inmates were transferred and the unit no longer houses women. FCI Lexington underwent a mission change in April 1990, and the old HSU currently serves as a male detention unit.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons is a professional agency that marked its 60th anniversary this year. We pride ourselves in being viewed as a leader in the corrections field and feel a great disservice has been done to the nearly 17,000 professional staff in its employ, who deserve accolades...not criticism.

It is unfortunate that the general public has been provided with only the biased views of a few who tend to exaggerate, and oftentimes fabricate a story, in an attempt to win support for their cause. Nevertheless, the mission of the Bureau of Prisons to protect the public and provide a secure, safe and humane environment for staff and inmates, will continue to be carried out in a professional manner.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James B. Jones". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

James B. Jones  
Chief, Office of Public Affairs