

**SKATZES/LUCASVILLE FIVE SUPPORT BULLETIN NO. 11. MAY 1998**

**Ed.** The Lucasville Five have been moved from Death Row at the Mansfield Correctional Institution to the Ohio State Penitentiary, or "super max." Readers wishing to write George Skatzes may do so at the following address:

**George W. Skatzes #A173-501  
Ohio State Penitentiary, P.O. Box 1436  
Youngstown, OH 44501-1436**

Your letters are much appreciated. But if you write, please understand the following: 1. Your letter will be read by a Correctional Officer; 2. You may not receive an answer, because the required embossed envelopes are expensive and letter paper is scarce, because the only pen allowed is a flexible instrument with which it is difficult to write, and because George is often depressed; 3. At this time super max prisoners are permitted to keep only two letters, so it may be difficult for George to respond in detail.

In this issue of the Bulletin we conclude our account of what happened on April 15, 1993, the day Officer Robert Vallandingham was killed.

George Skatzes was distressed to learn of Officer Vallandingham's death. In Bulletin No. 10, we described how when he heard of the killing, Skatzes convened an impromptu prayer meeting with hostages Clark and Ratcliff. He knew that a fateful line had been crossed, saying to the blindfolded guards, "Boys, I don't know if we are ever going to make it out of here." Prisoner James Mays remembers encountering Skatzes after the body had been taken out to the yard. He asked, "What the hell is going on?" George answered, sarcastically, "It takes a hell of a man to stab someone through the heart when he's tied up." (At the time George did not know how Vallandingham had been killed. Eye witness statements indicate that Vallandingham was strangled with an extension cord.)

When George Skatzes returned to the telephone as a negotiator in mid-afternoon, the guard's death was on his mind and on the mind of the prison negotiator, Dirk Price. One of the several men advising Price told Price to tell Skatzes: "Look, there are guys here that have . . . lost a fellow officer. They're ready to do some shit." (Transcript, Negotiation Tape # 8, p. 39). And Price told George: "we've got a dead officer. . . I've got people . . . that saw us carry one of their buddies out of here." (Ibid., p. 42.)

Skatzes' regret for Vallandingham's death came through clearly in the following exchange:

**PRICE:** What are you going to do, George, throw us another body tomorrow?

SKATZES: No sir. . .  
PRICE: Last night, you . . .  
SKATZES: . . . not if I can help it.  
PRICE: . . . told us you wasn't going to do it.  
SKATZES: Listen, I didn't want that to go down this morning. I, I, dearly hate that, and I voiced my opinion about that in here. I'm not shy about that.  
PRICE: What happened, George? Did you lose control or what?  
SKATZES: Never had control. I'm just a negotiator. Just one man. (Transcript, Negotiation Tape # 8, pp. 46-47.)

Discussion between Skatzes and Price began where Skatzes and Dave Burchett had left negotiations on the evening of April 14: with the idea of releasing a hostage (or two hostages) in exchange for the opportunity for the prisoners to put out their message on live radio or TV. The hope of getting negotiations back on track was complicated not only by Vallandingham's death but by a number of signs that the authorities were preparing an assault. When Price suggested that in exchange for appearances on radio and TV the prisoners should be willing to release three hostages, Skatzes replied:

I will throw that before the committee, but I honestly believe that I can only get you two, 'cause they're paranoid about you storming this place. . . . They're paranoid about you getting us down to a minimal number [of hostages] and then storming the place and killing everybody in here.  
(Transcript, Negotiation Tape # 8, p. 16.)

#### Were the Authorities Preparing an Assault?

Was it paranoia to believe that on the afternoon of April 15 the authorities were on the verge of an all-out assault? Several fragments of evidence suggest that an assault was imminent.

During the night of April 14-15, at 12:45 a.m., Commander Tom Rice communicated to Tactical, Legal, Liaison, and National Guard: "It is requested that the appropriate staff from the ONG [Ohio National Guard] meet at the Portsmouth Patrol Post at 0600 4/15/93 to review the draft of a plan of attack on L block. Please advise those who will be attending ASAP." (Critical Incident Communications, p. 236; emphasis added.)

At 8 a.m. on April 15 the following suggestion was recorded by the authorities: "Information obtained from listening devices indicates all inmate activity ceases when new broadcasts are made concerning SOCF. If an assault becomes necessary, this could be used as a distraction. Contact local radio stations and have them announce that a special program will be aired at a determined time." (Critical Incident Communications, p. 249; emphasis added.) Had the prisoners possessed this information, it seems certain that they would have been even more paranoid about planning a statement by a prisoner over the radio.

At approximately 3:15 p.m. on April 15, prisoner negotiator Stanley Cummings<sup>1</sup> (who preceded Skatzes on the phone) told Price that inmates were hearing drilling and digging in the tunnels and ceiling, as well as seeing men on the roof of the gym. (Transcript, Negotiation Tape # 8, pp. 2-3.) In fact the authorities apparently were drilling in the tunnels. The official transcript of the negotiations recorded conversation among police officers away from the telephone, as well as conversation by the negotiator of the moment over the telephone. The following was said away from the telephone:

SERGEANT HUDSON [later the lead prosecution witness against Skatzes]: I heard the F.B.I. was bringing in some of those . . .

FEMALE VOICE: I seen them.

SERGEANT HUDSON: . . . low speed, quiet drills. I don't know if they're here or not.

FEMALE VOICE: I saw them. (Transcript, Negotiation Tape # 8, p. 6.)

As Skatzes and Price labored to complete negotiations for a hostage release and a prisoner statement to the media, the possibility of an assault continued to distract them.

Repeatedly prompted by the other prisoners at his elbow, Skatzes told Price to get his people out of the tunnels. "I don't know if you're setting explosives. I don't know what you're doing . . . but get the people out of the tunnel." (Transcript, Negotiation Tape # 8, p. 54.)

Price protested, "I am not setting explosions. . . . You're not seeing them drilling and setting. If we have people down there, it is only to maintain the security of that tunnel . . . nothing else is going on." (Ibid., p. 55.) Skatzes would not relent:

SKATZES: I know what's happening. I know that there's something going to happen this evening before dark. I know you're blowing it. . . . I know this in my heart. . . . If nothing happens on this yard before dark I know the ultimatum. I know that you're blowing the fucking floor down there or whatever. You're setting up down there. . . . There's no question in my mind about that. (Transcript, Negotiation Tape # 8, pp. 55-56.)

Skatzes told Price he had been instructed to say that unless

---

<sup>1</sup>The negotiation tapes transcript states that the prisoner negotiator who spoke before and after George Skatzes on the afternoon of April 15 was Anthony Lavelle. Apparently it was Stanley Cummings (see testimony of George Skatzes, Skatzes trial transcript, pp. 5384-5385). The authorities had difficulty distinguishing Cummings' voice from Lavelle's.

the authorities removed their people from the tunnels, there would be no further negotiations until the next morning. At the same time, George repeated his conviction that unless there was some movement before dark the authorities would attack. The following segments of the transcript suggest the tension under which both men were working.

SKATZES: I know in my heart that tonight's the night. I know that. I know that if we don't go out there and do something, as you got it set up, that you're blowing and you're coming in here. I guess that's just the way it's going to have to be, man.

PRICE: It doesn't have to be that way, George.

SKATZES: I know it doesn't have to be that way, but they sent the word down and there's nothing till the AM and there's nothing I can do about it.

PRICE: Hey George, do you feel like you're in danger?

SKATZES: I've been in danger ever since this thing started.

PRICE: George, we're not going to harm you. We're keeping you safe.

SKATZES: You're talking to a dead man. I know it. You know it. . . . That matters to me not.

PRICE: The cable and the microphone are coming out right now.

SKATZES: I'll come out there and talk to you. That's all I can do.

PRICE: You got to bring one hostage with you, George.

SKATZES: They won't go for it.

PRICE: You go for it, George.

SKATZES: If it were up to me, if I was the decision maker, sure, I'd go for that. But they won't go for it.

(Transcript, Negotiation Tape # 8, pp. 57-58.)

But, in the end, they did go for it. As dusk was about to fall, Stanley Cummings and Price agreed that 1) George Skatzes would go out on the yard with a hostage and release that hostage in exchange for making a radio address, and 2) the next morning, a prisoner would go out with a second hostage and release him in exchange for speaking on TV.

#### Skatzes' Talk on the Radio

The idea that if there was a talk on radio, George Skatzes would make it, had come up quite suddenly in the telephone negotiations between Skatzes and Dirk Price.

PRICE: George, the tables are being moved as we speak into the yard. I want you and them to give me somebody now to talk to me face to face on live radio. You owe me that much.

SKATZES: Can I come out there and talk to you on live radio?

PRICE: Yes, George . . .

SKATZES: Me?

PRICE: . . . you can come out there and talk to me on live radio. (Transcript, Negotiation Tape # 8, p. 48.)

After that negotiations bogged down for a time. But when Cummings and Price finally came to an agreement, Cummings proposed George as the prisoners' spokesperson. Cummings said: "Let us send an individual that's willing to come out there and talk to you, which is George." (Transcript, Negotiation Tape # 8, p. 85.) George himself recalled: "Somehow in there, I don't know how it come about, they elected me to go out there." (Skatzes trial transcript, p. 5385.)

The arrangement was for Skatzes to take hostage Darrold Clark with him to the yard. A prisoner named Pratt wrote out some grievances on a piece of paper. Other prisoners told Skatzes that he was not to discuss Officer Vallandingham's death. Officer Ratcliff, held hostage with Officer Clark in the same cell, wrote a note for his family but prisoners took it away from him. Ratcliff thereupon asked Skatzes "to deliver a message to his people." (Testimony of George Skatzes and Darrold Clark, Skatzes trial transcript, pp. 1410-2411, 5385-5386.)

Skatzes and Clark went out on the yard. Skatzes took Clark's blindfold off. Clark recalled: "I think he had some paper or something with him, set it down. He undressed, showed them that there were no weapons on his body." (Ibid., p. 2357.) There is reason to believe that the wind may have blown away the note on which Pratt had written out demands, although George testified at trial that he "couldn't even read the writing." (Ibid., p. 5387.)

Skatzes and Clark approached the table in the yard and sat down. Price told George, "there's your cup of coffee I told you I'd have ready." Skatzes replied, "Darrold wants one. Got a cup for Darrold?" (Radio address of George Skatzes, Skatzes trial exhibit.) After Clark was given coffee, George Skatzes spoke as follows:

All right this is inmate negotiator George. I'm out here at the negotiating table, my brothers.

If you can hear me on that radio, please holler at me. (Sound of yelling in the background.)<sup>2</sup>

Okay, I'm out here. I know there's a lot riding on my shoulders right now. I'm gonna do the best job I can. Everything's kind of tense. Everybody's a little nervous, but before I come out here everybody in the world had something they wanted [me] to say. I can't possibly remember everything.

Okay. All right, here we go. I can't possibly

---

<sup>2</sup>Prisoners in other facilities at least as far away as Columbus and Mansfield were also listening.

remember all of [the] demands but I'll touch on some and what I feel [are] the most important. But first off, I'd like everybody to understand that to the best of my knowledge tomorrow morning, at 8:00 a.m. I believe, we are going to have live coverage of this on Channel Ten news. To the best of my knowledge one more hostage is to be released in the same process that we have just went through. That is upon negotiation approval here. You still hear me up there, brothers?

Okay. From the offset of this we have tried desperately, desperately to get in contact with the news media. We have been stopped by this administration. They think they can confine this incident within the walls of this prison, like no other part of the world can hear this. They think they can hide everything like they've been doing here for years and years.

This is not the case. We are oppressed people, we have come together as one. We are brothers. We are very oppressed and we're very sick of it. We're not going to take this any more.

We are a unit here. They try to make this a racial issue [but] it is not a racial issue. Black and white alike have joined hands at SOCF and have become one strong unit.

We have endured pure hell in there that they have put us through. We are still standing strong and we will remain strong until we either negotiate this to our likings, or they will kill us. We are prepared to die, if need to be.

And we hope it doesn't come to that. We hope there is no more violence, we hope there are no more unnecessary murders. We as a convict body send our condolences to Bobby's family. I can't pronounce his last name so I'll have to use his first. But that is something that had to happen. A lot of us didn't want it but that's, I'm sorry, that's all I can say.

Now. First off we want to continue to have news media coverage. We want to work and negotiate. We want all of our moves babysitted by you people out there on the other side of this fence. People other than the people attached to this administration or sympathizers of this administration.

We preferably would like to have an FBI negotiator. We want to get away from this administration. They are oppressing us. They act like this is a joke. I have worked very closely with the hostages. We are in agreement. They have seen right beside me, eye to eye, first hand, as to how this administration has acted like this is a joke. It is not a joke. Lives are involved here.

Now, we are releasing one: Darrold Clark, Junior here. I guarantee you, folks, he is not gonna be coerced, pressured or otherwise when he goes on the other side of this fence, and he is going to tell you what it's like in here.

He's going to tell you, I guarantee you he has seen it side by side beside myself, Jeff Ratcliff, and a few others, as to how this administration has acted, and acts like this isn't nothing. This is something.

List of demands. Excuse me if I seem to rattle on: I've got so much on my mind, and I can't possibly keep it in order. There's a lot of pressure, you know?

One of [the] things that we want to get rid of in this oppressed condition is our father oppressor, King Arthur Tate. He has got to go. Talk to me! It's nepotism. I hear a lot of complaints about this in the inmate population. They have got to stop that. What's the sense of dealing with one person when one person over here cracks your head and they turn around and look over here and their uncle cracks your head, too. What's the difference? They all see eye to eye. We're not gonna take no more oppression.

There's another thing that I personally have in my heart. It's about this TB thing in here. Now, they give us those tests, and there's some rumor, maybe, I don't know, but there's something like 33 percent of the people in this inmate population (not talking about the guards) that have tested positive, but approximately 33 percent of the inmate population, if that's true, that's tested positive. Am I still on the radio up there, brothers?

Okay, I'm very limited in time. I'm sorry. . . . The list of demands and all like that is by no means short. I could rattle on forever.

I do have one more thing. A man asked me to do him a personal favor. He asked me to bring a note out here to his people. I wasn't permitted to bring a note. That's fine. I will say Jeff Ratcliff sent his love to his momma and his papa and his people and he said that he is in there hanging in there strong. He was with [Darrold] Clark all the time, he is doing good and I hope we will have him out of here soon, too.<sup>3</sup>

(Second person speaking inaudibly)

And Jeff, if you can hear me, Donald Ray said he loves you, brother. I don't know, there's so much running through my head and I know there's a lot of pressure on me out here. I'm a strong individual. I can handle it. I know perhaps I haven't pleased everybody because I haven't touched on everything. I've tried. Like again I say, I'm limited on

---

<sup>3</sup>Ratcliff testified at Skatzes' trial that his parents were across the highway in a school, and that "every time you turned around [my mother] was collapsing." When George transmitted Ratcliff's message, "a buddy of mine . . . ran over to the school and said, as long as he's with inmate George, you might as well believe he's going to be okay. And that gave them hope and faith." (Skatzes trial transcript, pp. 5998-A - 5999-A.)

time. There's a lot running through my head.

But one thing I would like to say, in the past in my time here at SOCF, I have said that there are a lot of passive motherfuckers in this population. Because of everything they seem[ed] to be so passive about taking.

I'm a man enough to stand up and say I'm wrong. These people here, these my fellow convict brothers, have done nothing (inaudible) at this time, and you are standing strong and a lot of you feel like me that you are ready to die, and I'll tell you what, brothers, every damn one of you, I'm proud of you and I take my hat off to you.

And there is one more thing that I would like to say to you people out there on the other side of this fence that can hear me. Please try to help us get some type of electricity and water in here. 'Cause we are not going to bow down, we are not going to give up, we are going to remain no matter what they put on us; if we die, we die. But we would like to have some lights in there, and some water.

(Second person speaking inaudibly)

If we're still alive I hope that we can continue to negotiate and I hope that this is not a trick, I hope we have the live TV coverage in the morning.

(Second person, inaudibly: "Thank you, sir. I understand your hand of fellowship.")

Fine with me, that's fine with me.

(Second person: "But George, you've been an honest man and we appreciate it. . . . Okay, George. Thank you for dealing with us in good faith. . . . Thank you for working with us, George.")

Yessir. (Skatzes' trial exhibit.)

George Skatzes was asked at his trial how the other prisoners responded to his radio talk. He answered:

It was kind of strange because I am not a person with an inflated ego or anything like that, but like when I come back in, it was all about like hoorah, or whatever, then holding up candles whenever I walked down the hallway, but . . . I am just me, you know. (Testimony of George Skatzes, Skatzes trial transcript, pp. 5387-5388.)

A witness at Skatzes' trial, Brian Michael Young, was asked to describe the general reaction to George's performance. He answered: "Well, there was, especially at the end, there was a lot of yelling and screaming, this and that. I guess, you know, overall, people liked it." (Skatzes trial transcript, p. 5097.)

**GEORGE SKATZES SUPPORTERS**  
**P.O. Box 1591, Marion, OH 44301-1591**