

ATTICA

A Prisoner Remembers The Attica Massacre
Liberation News Service

On September 9, 1971, well over half of the 2,237 inmates of Attica Prison in New York took it over to dramatize their demands which included improved medical care, adequate legal assistance, effective rehabilitation programs, application of minimum wage laws to work done by inmates, among other things.

September 13, Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered a force of 1300 state troopers, sheriff's deputies, prison guards and National Guardsmen to retake the prison. Of the 43 people who died at Attica (33 inmates and 10 guards) 39 of them were killed by gunshots in the assault on the prison. At least 80 other inmates were wounded. "There was more at stake than saving lives," Rockefeller said later. "There was the whole rule of law to consider. The whole fabric of society in fact."

Fifteen months afterwards, during the Christmas bombing of North Vietnam, 60 inmates were indicted for their part in the rebellion - on charges ranging from murder and kidnapping to coercion, unlawful imprisonment and possession of contraband.

But what about the prisoners and guards who were killed in the assault. The state doesn't seem interested in indicting anyone for their deaths since they all died by gunfire and none of the rebelling inmates had guns. In fact, Assistant Attorney General Robert Fischer announced last March that there would be no indictments against law enforcement officers of any kind. He has said however, that more indictments against inmates can be expected.

It's two years since the rebellion, time enough to forget exactly what the assault on the prison was like. A National Guard medic who served in Vietnam called it a "war zone".

The following is an interview with Chris Reed, a 23 year old black inmate who participated in the rebellion. During the assault on the prison, Reed's leg was shot off to six inches below his knee and he now wears an artificial leg. Hospitalized for 11 months, it was 8 months before he could walk again.

Chris was indicted with 13 others on 34 counts of 1st degree kidnapping. (You can get life imprisonment on each of the 34 counts). "We were standing up there for things we believed in. We wanted respect in demanding these things which are rights. What they're trying to push is the view that what we did was a criminal offense and all we are are just convicted criminals".

The following interview was done in Auburn Prison.

THE INTERVIEW

LNS: Could you describe the attack and the retaking of the prison?

REED: The helicopter flew over and told everyone to surrender. Guys put their hands on their heads. After they said this the second time, they just opened up shooting and chopping gas.

"Don't harm the hostages," they said, "Put your hands on your head and move over to A block or B block-surrender to an officer." Guys were doing this and they were getting shot anyway. Before I could even get my hands up, I was cut down. As I fell I caught my balance and managed to pull back up again and I was hit again, and again. In the process I got my leg shot off.

While I was laying there, bullets were cutting me from all angles. There was a little piece of chair that was knocked over. I tried to get behind the chair for cover and bullets were crashing through. It got to a point that I was seeing bullets—that's a hell of a thing.

LNS: The shooting came from the state troopers who were stationed on the wall over-looking D-yard?

REED: I believe I got shot by the troopers in A block and C block and from the helicopter too. The doctor said there was no whole bullet left in me to take out,

they passed right through. Right now I have 100 pellets spread out still in me—little fragments—and a whole sheet of lead the size of my hand which is inside my leg. To do the damage it did, I was most likely shot by dum-dum bullets, which are an illegal weapon. [The Geneva Accords outlaw the use of dum-dum bullets—soft-nosed bullets which start to spin on impact, creating a gaping wound.]

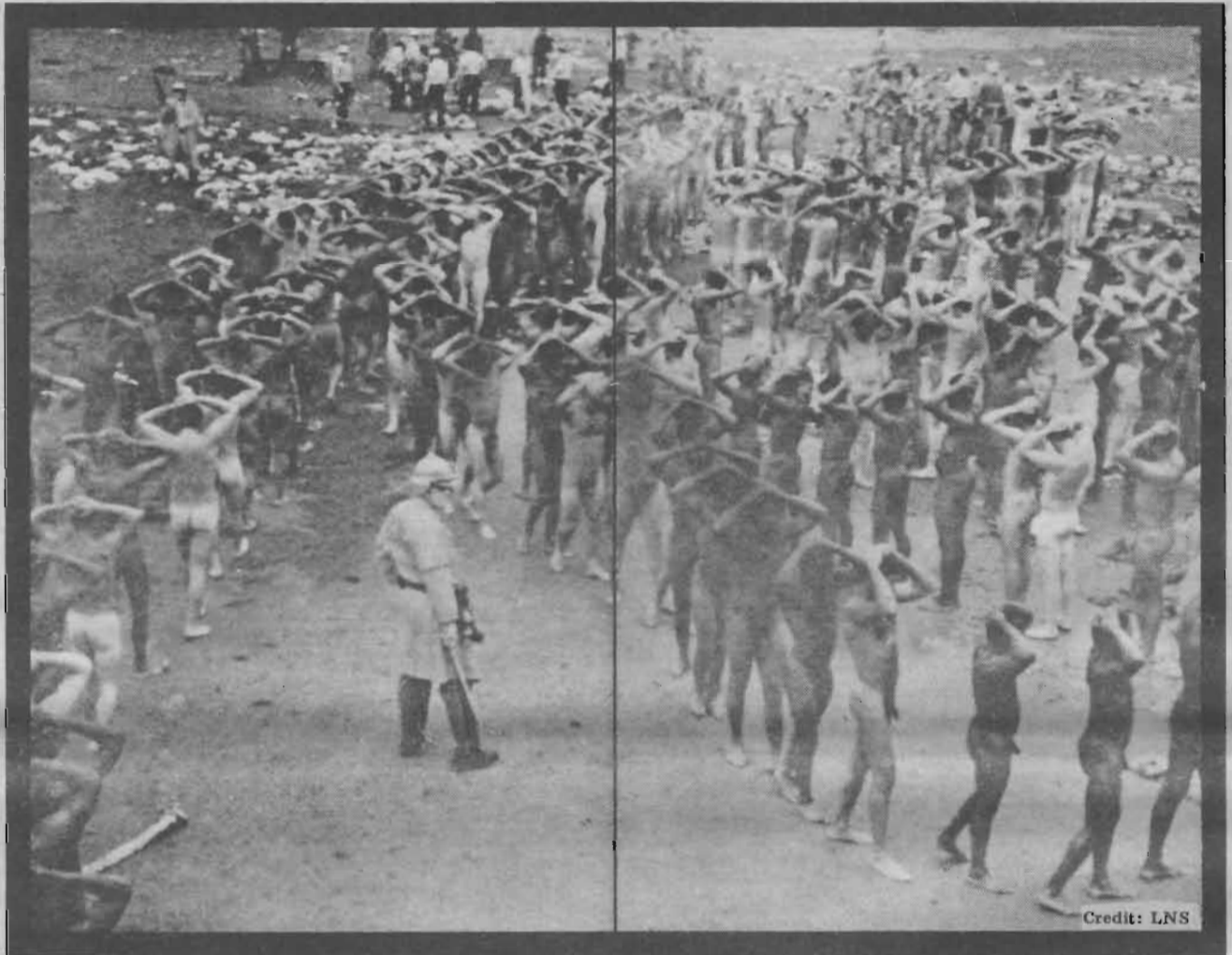
LNS: What happened after you were shot?

were still living—myself and several others. It was raining and very misty that day. The blood from these guys was filling up the puddle. He told me to get down again. I had all this gas on my face, burning me really bad. I submerged my face, trying to wash the gas off. When I got a better look at the other end of the puddle, I could see big clogs of blood.

I heard a guy holler out, "Please don't kill me, don't kill me." He was delirious and the trooper told him to shut up. He said, "Don't kill me" and he kept repeating

hours were up to get another shot. After I realized this I decided the next time I wouldn't take any more pain shots. When I refused the pain shot, the guard wrote me up "Refused pain shot." I got 14 days keeplock for that when I got back to Attica.

The room in the hospital is smaller than the average cell. A cell is normally 6 by 8 and these little rooms are 6 by 4. It's just enough for a bed and a stand and that's it. No toilet. You have to get up and go to the bathroom. Every time you want



Credit: LNS

REED: Then a state trooper shot pepper gas on me—it gave me 2nd degree burns all down my body. While I was laying there, another trooper walked over to me and asked, "Is he alive?" I moved a little bit to show I was alive because they were reshooting guys. He poured mace in my face. I sprang up because it was strangling me.

My leg was all bloody and gushy. The trooper said, "Look at this here, he's shot in both legs." I look and I see I was shot in the other leg.

"You won't rebel no more, will you," the trooper said and hit me with a gun butt, the one that was shot off.

"Let's kill him." By this time they were still rashing the areas. The other one said, "No, we're not going to kill him, he's going to bleed to death. Walk over there and climb over the rail."

"You're crazy," I said. "What did you say?" he asked and smacked me across the lips with the barrel of the gun.

I hopped and got to the rail. I took my fairly good leg and put it over. I had to swing my other leg over it. It flew over and I heard the bone go "crick, crick, crick, crick" and I just knew, if I was going to save my leg, it wasn't going to be saved now. With me swinging it with my body weight, any chance of mending the nerve was busted now. "Lay down," he said. I looked where he wanted me to lay down and there was a puddle of water.

In the area I was in, only a few guys

it. "Shut the fuck up." The guy kept saying it and then I heard a shot ring out and I didn't hear this guy anymore.

The medic came down and asked, "Is anyone wounded here?" The trooper said no. So they picked up all the wounded in other places and started piling up the dead, putting tags on them. Then the Deputy Warden came along and handcuffed me. I lay there in that position until I passed out . . .

The next time I woke up I was in the prison hospital. They also had guys laying in empty cells on floors with wounds, seriously injured with blood dripping all over.

A Latin brother was yelling out; he was in pain. Dr. Sternberg, the prison doctor, came in and said, "Shut the hell up. I hope you all die." This is the doctor.

Then an inmate who's a nurse there and a good friend of mine, saw me and how my whole leg had gone cold, gangrene had set in. He brought me to the attention of the doctor, "You can't keep this guy here like this. This guy is dying." His influence got me to the outside hospital. Other than that, I truly believe I would have died right there. This was the kind of treatment we were getting, and mine was mild compared to many others.

LNS: You were then shipped to Meyer Memorial Hospital for 3 months. Were you still harassed by the guards there?

REED: The guards from the prison who were there to guard us were constantly telling the nine of us in the ward that they were going to kill us. We laid in bed with intravenous and blood transfusions in us. Some of the guys were in traction. The guards stood in the hallway, whispering, "We're going to kill them tonight; we're going to kill all those niggers. . . ." We had no radio, TV, we couldn't smoke, we couldn't read, we couldn't talk.

I was given an option on medication. I oppose drugs myself. I was given demerol, which is habit-forming. I found myself yelling to the nurse before the three

a nurse, you have to knock on the window, get up out of bed if you can or yell and keep yelling until somebody comes. If you're in critical condition and you are dying, you die because nobody can hear you.

At night I would hear in my mind all those thousands of rounds of ammo that was fired in the vicinity where I was. These guards, knowing that some guys may be shell-shocked would go out there in the hall near our ward and go "Pow, pow." And when they brought us back to Attica, they had shooting practice right in back of the hospital. All of a sudden I would hear "Pow, pow" guns shooting up there. I thought, here I go again and this time they will kill me.



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