

Photo by Stephen Shames, 1970



George Jackson (Sept. 23, 1941-Aug. 21, 1971)

GEORGE JACKSON: DEATH OF A BLACK REVOLUTIONARY

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George Jackson could not have been killed in the way San Quentin prison officials have described.

This is perhaps the only uncontested or uncompromised fact of importance to emerge from the circumstances surrounding the 29-year-old black revolutionary's slaying Aug. 21, allegedly during an escape attempt.

No explanation has been offered yet to adequately detail how Jackson, three San Quentin guards and two inmate trustees met their deaths Aug. 21—but the "official" story from prison authorities has changed so often as to be without credibility.

After a three-week investigation, during which the Guardian interviewed scores of lawyers and supporters of Jackson as well as prison officials and disinterested observers, it is obvious that prison officials have lied repeatedly in efforts to provide a rational justification for the killing of a man who was perhaps the nation's foremost political prisoner.

And they haven't even lied well.

* The gun. After the first month-and-a-half, prison authorities have provided three different versions of the type of gun Jackson is alleged to have used, although they had the weapon in their possession from the beginning.

* The "wig." Three different stories about how Jackson is supposed to have concealed the gun have also been put forward in the official account. First, the gun was hidden in his hair; then under a cap; then under a wig. At present, officials still claim a wig was involved, even after it has been demonstrated impossible to conceal a gun—and two clips of ammunition—in such fashion.

* The handcuffs. Jackson was not in handcuffs, as is customary when "dangerous" prisoners are brought to visitors, because he had been on good behavior lately, according to a San Quentin spokesman. Soon after the killing, however, prison officials maintained they had evidence weeks earlier that Jackson had been planning a prison break.

* The autopsy. Nearly a month after Jackson died, a "final" autopsy report completely contradicted the initial report which—by the position of the body, entry wounds and bullet trajectory—was at odds with the official version of how he was shot.

Certain death

These are just some of the most glaring contradictions. Others will be noted in the course of this article. But the biggest contradiction of all does not relate to facts such as guns, wigs, handcuffs or autopsy reports. It is motive. Why should George Jackson, an intelligent, creative man whose plight was becoming a matter of deep concern to the black community he loved and could someday have helped to lead, have courted certain death by attempting to break out of San Quentin in broad daylight by running across an exposed courtyard without any means to scale the 20-foot-high walls that enclosed him? Why should he, just days before he was to be provided with a courtroom forum for explaining his

case and denouncing the prison system, so carelessly throw away his life?

Here is the way San Quentin authorities say George Jackson died.

On the afternoon of Aug. 21, those officials allege, a young white attorney named Stephen Bingham smuggled a gun which was hidden inside a tape recorder into Jackson while the two men were meeting in a visiting room normally used by men on death row. When the visit ended, Jackson was escorted by a guard back to the Adjustment Center of the prison, a special security section for the prisons' "incurables." There, as he was about to be searched, Jackson allegedly produced the gun and two clips of ammunition from underneath an Afro wig, turned the gun on three unarmed guards and ordered a guard to open up the cells of 26 men imprisoned on the first tier of the Adjustment Center.

The chain of events immediately following this sequence are vague. Only the barest of detail has been made public, but the main gist is that Jackson and other inmates, having gained control of the first tier, killed three guards and two inmates who were reportedly "tier tenders." Three other guards were wounded. Two of the guards who died allegedly had their throats slashed. A third guard was killed by a bullet which struck him in the back of the head. An alarm was sounded inside the prison when a guard outside the Adjustment Center spotted Jackson with a gun. Another officer, a guard on the second tier of the Adjustment Center, also turned in an alarm.

Shortly after the alarms, prison authorities allege, Jackson jerked open a door inside the Adjustment Center which led out onto a prison courtyard. He began running across the courtyard towards the prison's north wall, about 75 yards away, 20 feet high and topped with barbed wire. As he ran he came under the fire of a guard stationed with a rifle on a balcony gun-walk to the east and that of another guard on a south gun-walk behind the Adjustment Center. It was the bullet fired from this south gun-walk that killed Jackson, who fell dead near the corner of the prison chapel directly opposite the Adjustment Center, authorities said. Jackson was allegedly followed out of the center by an inmate named Johnny Larry Spain who escaped being shot, officials said, because he hid behind shrubbery in the prison courtyard.

Jackson spent nearly 11 of his 29 years as a prisoner



A Spanish Astra M-600—small enough to fit under a wig?

of the state of California. With a history of juvenile offenses, he was arrested in 1960 for supposedly participating with another man in the armed robbery of a gasoline station in Bakersfield, Calif., a robbery which netted \$71. Jackson has described what happened then, "I agreed to confess and spare the county court costs in return for a light county jail sentence. I confessed but when time came for sentencing, they tossed me into the penitentiary with one to life. That was in 1960. I was 18 years old. I've been here ever since."

Soledad and San Quentin

Jackson spent more than seven of his prison years at San Quentin. It was while he was imprisoned at Soledad State Prison near Salinas, however, that he became part of a series of events which led ultimately to his death. On Jan. 13, 1970, Soledad Prison officials let out white, black and Chicano inmates into the newly completed recreation yard of the prison's maximum security O-Wing despite previous policies of maintaining racially segregated recreation periods to avoid "trouble." As could have been anticipated, a fight broke out between three black inmates and a group of white inmates. A white guard in a gun tower above opened fire on the group, killing the three black inmates and wounding a white inmate. Three days later, Jan. 16, a Monterey County grand jury termed the guard's action "justifiable homicide." That same day, a few hours after the grand jury's decision had been announced to the Soledad inmates, a white guard named John Mills was found beaten to death.

Soledad Prison was closed up tight for several days. Jackson and two black inmates named John Clutchette and Fleeta Drumgo were held in solitary confinement for an additional 21 days. Somewhat later, the same Monterey County grand jury handed down indictments against the three men charging them with murder and conspiracy in Mills' death. They became known as the Soledad Brothers as defense efforts grew up around their case.

Jackson became the best known of the three, largely due to the publication of his prison writings, "Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson." The book is forbidden reading material in the California prison system. In his later years, Jackson became a Marxist-Leninist and eventually joined the Black Panther party. In his book he described his task within the prison system as that of transforming "the black criminal mentality into a black revolutionary mentality." His influence among inmates and among the black and radical movements on the outside was considerable.

During the last year, the cause of freeing the Soledad Brothers became intertwined with two other events. On Aug. 7, 1970, Jackson's 17-year-old brother, Jonathan, entered a San Rafael, Calif., courtroom armed with weapons in an attempt to liberate three San Quentin prisoners. Apparently, he also sought to take hostages and to hold them in exchange for the freedom of the Soledad Brothers. Jonathan, two of the prisoners and a judge named Harold Haley—who was taken hostage—were killed when San Quentin Prison guards opened fire on a van in which the group sought to flee with their hostages. Shortly thereafter, Angela Davis, an active

supporter of the Soledad Brothers, a close friend of George Jackson and a member of the Communist party, was indicted on charges of conspiracy which alleged that she had supplied the weapons used in the abortive liberation attempt. Ruchell Magee, who escaped alive from the courtroom shootout, is also facing trial for allegedly having fired the bullet that killed Haley.

Since the killing of George Jackson there have been numerous demonstrations demanding an independent investigation of the incident, but chances of such a probe now appear slim. It is important, nevertheless, that San Quentin Prison officials still feel compelled to comment in more detail on their version of what happened on the 21st. As late as Sept. 30, Warden Louis S. Nelson was still altering and expanding upon the trajectory of the bullets which first wounded and then killed Jackson in an effort to justify that account with the findings of the final autopsy report on Jackson's death. There may yet be still other developments, too, that will decisively inspire a movement that will demand a full accounting of the facts.

Grand jury indicts

On Oct. 1, a Marin County grand jury handed down indictments against six black and brown San Quentin Adjustment Center inmates and attorney Bingham, charging all seven with five counts of murder, one count of conspiracy to escape by force, one count of conspiring to kidnap correctional officers and another count of joining in a conspiracy originated by Bingham and Jackson to smuggle a gun into the prison. The six inmates named were Fleeta Drumgo, one of the two surviving Soledad Brothers; David Johnson, Hugo Pinell, Johnny Larry Spain, Luis Talamantez and Willie Tate. Drumgo, Pinell, Spain and Talamantez were additionally charged with a number of assault and attempted murder charges on correctional officers who are not named. Nearly all of the charges carry a mandatory death penalty upon conviction.

The brief indictment states that Bingham gave Jackson a 9-mm. automatic pistol and clips during his visit on the 21st and that Jackson used the gun to kill correctional officer Sgt. Jere P. Graham. Two other guards and two inmates, the indictment states, "were killed by members of the conspiracy."

Three of the nineteen members of the grand jury, which sat through 20 hours of testimony and heard about 25 witnesses, walked out of the deliberations after the vote had been taken but before the indictment was returned to the judge. One of the three, Gerald A. Hawes, a research analyst for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, has since tendered his resignation from the grand jury. The walkout and resignation may be unprecedented for grand jury deliberations. The other two men were Rick Beban, a former student at the College of Marin, and James Kilty, director of Catholic Social Services for Marin County. All three said the Oct. 1 indictment was the reason they walked out.

The transcript of the grand jury hearings has been sealed despite laws which require it to be made public immediately upon announcement of the indictment—so there is no way of completely piecing together the state's case until the trial. What is known, however, contains a wide range of contradictions.

Guards make "mistakes"

For instance, there is confusion to this day about how Bingham, 29, was allegedly able to smuggle a gun into prison. Bingham disappeared the afternoon of the shootings, after having a late lunch with his uncle. Neither Bingham nor Vanetta Anderson, a black woman active in the prison reform movement who accompanied him to San Quentin that morning, have been seen since. Both were said to have arrived at the prison at 10:15 a.m. Anderson, who was not able to see Jackson that day because she was not an authorized visitor, was carrying an 18-by-24 inch briefcase, according to prison officials. Inside the briefcase was a tape recorder.

San Quentin business manager Irwin Ritter was quoted Aug. 23 as having said Bingham was searched before he entered the visiting room area but "not the briefcase that he brought with him." Ritter told the San Francisco Examiner Bingham walked through a metal detector "but not with the briefcase." At this point prison officials were still "speculating" that the gun may have been brought in through a tape recorder. The next day it was decided that the gun was hidden in a tape recorder which had had its working parts removed. It was also decided that the briefcase was, in fact, searched. The Aug. 24 San Francisco Chronicle reported, "As the young attorney went through a metal detector, the machine registered—apparently from some metal in the briefcase. An officer opened the briefcase and found a portable cassette tape recorder, a tool that attorneys frequently use in interviewing clients. As is customary procedure, the officer opened the battery case of the tape recorder to determine if it was functional." The officer apparently did not, however, press any buttons on the recorder to see if it actually did function.

This story, the final one, conflicts, however, with reports from other attorneys familiar with the search required of visiting lawyers, particularly of those who have clients in the Adjustment Center. From interviews with several attorneys, a somewhat different picture of the pre-visitation search emerged. There was not common agreement on all points, except for this one, that none of the attorneys ever had the experience of putting their briefcases through the metal detector. Instead,



The Soledad Brothers: Fleeta Drumgo (left) George Jackson and John Clutchette.

since it was assumed the briefcase would have metal on it, the case was always placed on a shelf and while the lawyer would walk through the detector a guard would open up the briefcase and examine its contents. Some attorneys said their tape recorders were rarely if ever checked to see if they worked although it was the experience of John Thorne, who was George Jackson's attorney, that his dictating machine was always opened. Briefcases were always searched, the attorneys agreed.

To explain how a gun was smuggled past the prison's tight security measures, San Quentin Prison officials concede that a number of "mistakes" were made the day of Bingham's visit. For one, Jackson was not handcuffed as he was escorted to and from the visiting room. For another, the guard did not check Bingham's tape recorder to see if it was working. A third mistake was a failure to close a grill inside the visiting room which made it possible for Bingham to freely pass an object across the table to Jackson. Finally, a guard on duty just outside the "A" visiting room, a room normally used for visits for men on death row but one which was being frequently used for Jackson, failed to watch the two men while they visited.

None of these "mistakes" seem conceivable in light of other evidence. The failure to observe the two men while they visited does not fit with the experiences others have had when they went to see Jackson.

Bingham's disappearance

There is also some discrepancy between Bingham's alleged involvement in the gun smuggling and his behavior immediately after the alleged incident. Around noon, Bingham phoned his uncle, Woodbridge Bingham, a retired professor of history at the University of California at Berkeley, to say that he would be late for a luncheon appointment set for that day. His uncle later told reporters that Bingham arrived at his home that day around 4 p.m. He said, "We had a pleasant, relaxed conversation, none of which related to his visit to San Quentin. He seemed perfectly normal. He left at about 5:15 p.m., saying that he had an appointment in San Francisco at 6 o'clock." Bingham has not been heard from since. It is known that there was an all-points bulletin out for him.

People who knew Bingham found it difficult to believe he would smuggle a gun to Jackson. Carol Silver, an attorney with the Berkeley Legal Services where Bingham worked for about a year, told the Guardian she found it "incredible to believe that he could have done what they have said he did. He was conscientious and intelligent and I do not believe he would ever be stupid enough to carry a gun into a prison."

Two days after the killing, the San Francisco Examiner reported that it had received a "leak," obviously from prison officials, indicating that Jackson had been making preparations for an escape attempt long before Aug. 21. A smuggled letter and a dry run of the gun smuggling were allegedly part of the advance prepara-

tions. The letter was supposedly an exchange between Jackson and his former cellmate at Soledad Prison, James Carr, who had since been released and was a teaching assistant in calculus and history at the University of California at Santa Cruz. In it, Carr is alleged to have offered to help Jackson escape. The letter was smuggled into San Quentin by a member of the Soledad Brothers legal defense team, the "leak" revealed. Jackson replied on the back of the letter, allegedly instructing him to "have two of Jackson's sisters smuggle derringers in the hollowed out heels of their shoes" and to conceal "tubes of plastic explosive" inside their vaginas.

The letter was supposedly discovered when an employe of a Santa Cruz dry cleaners' firm found the letter in a pocket of Carr's trousers which had been taken there to be cleaned. It was turned over to "authorities" who photostated the letter and returned the original which was placed back in the trouser pockets.

A "dry run"

On Aug. 1, prison officials further alleged, two of Jackson's sisters, Penny Jackson and Delora Ward and their three children came to visit Jackson at San Quentin. The children allegedly failed to pass through the metal detector successfully and after repeated tries, prison guards supposedly found that toy cap pistols were hidden underneath the children's clothing. A letter written to Jackson's attorney John Thorne, dated Aug. 2 and signed by warden Nelson and associate warden Park, states that the prison was suspending the visiting privileges of Penny Jackson and Delora Ward for an "indefinite period" and that the prison would no longer honor visits by Penny Jackson as an investigator for the defense attorneys "because of an incident that occurred on August 1." The letter goes on to say that there was an "attempt to introduce a concealed toy pistol via one of the children accompanying the women. We have no choice but to believe this was an attempt to test our defenses against smuggled weapons." Carr was interviewed by an Examiner reporter in the San Francisco County Jail shortly after the unsupported allegations were made in that newspaper. Denying the existence of the letter or of an escape plot, he said, "I loved George Jackson. . . There is no way I would let anyone send him a gun or explosives because [it would be] suicide." Carr was jailed and a "hold" placed on his parole after he was charged with assault stemming from a courtroom incident during pre-trial hearings for the Soledad Brothers last April in which guards assaulted Jackson and a fracas in the spectator section erupted.

A similar denial of the gun smuggling dry run has come second-hand from Penny Jackson who angrily denied to an attorney that there was any attempt to conceal a toy cap pistol. What is far more likely is that prison officials were looking for an opportunity to curtail Jackson's visiting privileges, as they were able to do with others and to frustrate defense efforts already

hampered by a small investigative staff and little time to conduct a proper investigation in preparation for the Soledad Brothers trial. That trial was to have begun on Aug. 23, two days after Jackson was killed. Perhaps the best refutation of the prison officials' allegations, however, rests upon the fact that the Marin County grand jury did not return any indictments against these persons supposedly so closely involved in an escape plot.

Prison security lax?

The most curious aspect about this belief on the part of San Quentin Prison officials that Jackson was plotting to escape is the obvious contradiction between their alleged foreknowledge of the plot and the fact that security measures broke down in so many vital areas the day of Bingham's visit. Most glaring is the report that Jackson was not handcuffed the day of his visit with Bingham because he had become "cooperative lately." In the Adjustment Center, where Jackson was housed, it was routine—according to former inmates—to handcuff inmates as they went to and from visits. Furthermore, Jackson was about to be tried on a charge of killing a prison guard, a charge which is not likely to cause prison guards to drop some security measures no matter how "cooperative" an inmate may appear to be.

"It's obvious why they said he wasn't handcuffed," Thorne remarked in an interview. "Otherwise, he couldn't have done what they said he did." The same contradiction would appear to apply to Bingham, who was not just any attorney but the attorney for Carr, who was allegedly involved in the escape "plot." "You would think," said another attorney, "that if they knew of an escape plot, every visitor to Jackson would at least get a skin search." Asked to explain the lapse in security measures if prison officials had advance warning of an escape plot, prison public information officer Joseph O'Brien replied, "I have no comment on that."

The gun Jackson allegedly used has undergone three transformations. In the Examiner of Aug. 22, associate warden James Park is quoted as having said Jackson fired "one or two shots" from a .38 caliber pistol. The following day the San Francisco Chronicle reported that Jackson had a 9-mm. automatic. Subsequently, based on information the newspaper said it obtained from California's Criminal Identification and Investigation (CII) bureau, the gun was identified as a 9-mm. Spanish-made Astra M-600, approximately 8 1/8 inches long and weighing 2 1/2 pounds. The gun was supposedly traced in ownership to a Black Panther field marshal, Landon Williams, who is currently jailed in New Haven, Conn., awaiting trial in the death of Panther Alex Rackley. On Aug. 29, however, the Examiner reported that through a "leak" it had learned that the escape weapon was actually a Spanish-made Llama Corto, approximately 5 3/4 inches long. This third description of the weapon was offered, curiously enough, the day after the Chronicle, in a "pistol and wig experiment," concluded that it was nearly impossible for an Astra M-600 to fit under a wig.

It is still not possible to determine the make, size and model of the gun. When asked, information officer O'Brien replied that he did not "know anything about the gun," that it was in the possession of the Marin County district attorney Bruce Bales. The CII also referred inquiries to the district attorney, who has been unavailable for comment. In the indictment handed down Oct. 1, the weapon is described simply as a 9-mm. automatic pistol. Presumably, it is the same weapon allegedly traced to Williams. San Quentin Prison officials have offered no explanation as to why three different descriptions of the weapon have been made. It is difficult to imagine how prison officials with years of correctional experience could be so unfamiliar with weapons.

More contradictions

A question does remain, of course, of how a gun was smuggled inside the Adjustment Center. An Aug. 23 autopsy report made by Marin County coroner Dr. Donovan O. Cooke says that guard Jere Graham, whose body was reportedly found inside the Adjustment Center, suffered a gunshot wound in the back of the head. The Oct. 1 indictment says Graham was killed by a bullet fired from Jackson's 9-mm. automatic pistol. If there was a weapon inside the Adjustment Center, then someone must have smuggled it into the prison—but was that someone actually Jackson?

When criminologist Richard Korn heard associate warden James Park say at a press conference that the only way a weapon could have gotten into the prison was for it to be smuggled inside by someone from the outside, he had doubts about the truthfulness of the entire story. Korn is the author of a standard college textbook on criminology and penology and altogether has 10 years of correctional experience. "The best way to smuggle in a gun," he told the Guardian, "is through prison personnel. Their lockers aren't searched and they do not have to submit to body searches. When anyone tells me that the only plausible way a gun could have been smuggled into the prison was through an outsider I know that person is lying. For Park to say that, when he knows it's not true, means that he has lied."

Correction officers are supposed to be unarmed while among inmates, but for a guard to violate this rule is not uncommon. For instance, there is documented proof that a guard at Soledad state prison, who also reportedly sought to have a white inmate there kill George Jackson, was fired by the California Department of Corrections

for bringing a gun on into Soledad Prison. This information about the guard, former Capt. Charles Moody, was brought to light during the trial of the Soledad Three (Another case similar to that of the Soledad Brothers.).

In an interview, Richard Hodges, attorney for the Soledad Three whose trial on charges of killing a prison guard ended when the district attorney dismissed the charges, explained how Moody was involved. "Capt. Moody was one of the correctional officials in charge of the investigation and particularly in charge of keeping a watch over the witnesses in the case. The most blatant thing that came out in the trial was that on Christmas of last year, he drew a gun on one of the witnesses and he threatened the guy and indicated that he had better not change his testimony."

Ownership of the smuggled gun involved in Jackson's death was traced to Landon Williams by state laboratory technicians who first had to raise filed-off serial numbers by using chemicals. The weapon, they said, was purchased two years ago. Williams has been imprisoned for more than a year, first in Denver, Colo., and now in New Haven. It is alleged that the weapon came into other hands. "It is still unknown who had possession of it recently," the Examiner reported. It is possible, although this remains clearly in the area of speculation, that the gun was one of many seized over the years by Bay Area police departments in their numerous raids on the homes and apartments of Black Panther party members.

The "wig theory"

The means by which Jackson is said to have tried to conceal the gun as he brought it back to the Adjustment Center has also been told in three different ways. First, Jackson was said to have hidden the gun in his hair, which was groomed in an Afro style. Undoubtedly recognizing the absurdity of such a contention, prison officials then said Jackson had lately taken to wearing a black knit watch cap on the back of his head and that the gun was hidden either underneath the cap, his hair or a combination of both.

Four days later, associate warden Park announced that a search of the Adjustment Center had produced a "store-bought" Afro wig which was found jammed in a cell toilet and that they now believed this was how Jackson concealed the gun. On Aug. 28, the Chronicle experimented in its newsroom with a black model, an Afro wig and the large Spanish-made Astra M-600, to see if the wig theory was sound. The Chronicle reported that the man's "attempts to hide the gun by lifting the front of the wig and sliding the weapon onto the top of his head failed. He eventually removed the wig, placed the gun inside and forced the hair piece back on his head with some struggle. The wig was obviously askew and with every step he took the gun wobbled dangerously, bringing his hands instinctively to his head." The Chronicle then observed, "If the wig theory is sound, Jackson would have had to walk 50 yards under the eyes of a guard before he reached the Adjustment Center, where, authorities say, the gun was finally spotted."

There are other problems with the wig theory. Both Nelson and Park said the wig was bought on the "outside," meaning that it would have had to be smuggled inside the prison. But the skin searches every Adjustment Center inmate must have when they leave and re-enter the center include a scalp examination which is accomplished when a guard rubs his hands briskly through an inmate's hair. It is more than likely that a skin search would lead to the discovery of a wig.

Mrs. Doris Maxwell was visiting with her son, John Clutchette, at the same time Bingham and Jackson were meeting in a nearby visiting room. Jackson had to pass by the two to enter a corridor and return to the Adjustment Center. Mrs. Maxwell told a reporter for the Washington Post that as Jackson walked past them, he bowed, said "I love you," and "blew her a kiss. 'If that big eight-inch gun was on his head, why didn't it fall off,' she asked."

Former inmates at San Quentin insist that there was no way Jackson could have smuggled a gun into the Adjustment Center, particularly because when inmates are skin searched after they conclude a visit it is before they are brought back to the center, not after as prison officials have said. Members of the California Prisoners' Union, an organization that seeks to organize inmates and former inmates along trade union lines, held a press conference in San Francisco the week of Jackson's death to refute certain aspects of the San Quentin story. The most serious discrepancy in that story, they said, was that prison officials simply omitted any mention of the skin search that takes place in a building known as the receiving and release building which is directly adjacent to the building where the visits are held. Before Jackson would have been led out onto the prison courtyard for the 50-yard walk back to the Adjustment Center, he would have been skin-searched and any weapons would have been found, they said.

San Quentin officials have maintained there were only two searches that day, once upon leaving the Adjustment Center and again upon re-entering it. Disputing this, former inmates said it was standard procedure—"never deviated from"—for there to be four searches, the most thorough in the receiving and release building upon leaving the visiting area. The skin search requires prisoners to strip naked, show both sides of their hands, open their mouths and wiggle the tongue, raise the penis for inspection of the testicles, turn-about and bend at the waist and to raise each foot, first the left and then the right, to show the heel and sole. Finally, a guard runs his fingers through the inmates' hair in a brisk fashion.

Another description of what Jackson faced has been offered by Chronicle reporter Tim Findley, writing shortly after Jackson's death. "Wherever he [Jackson] went, he was skin-searched constantly—ordered to take his clothes off, bend over and spread his legs apart, rub briskly through his hair, open his mouth. Jackson and other inmates considered potentially dangerous went through that procedure sometimes several times a day. For Jackson, the searches were most often for his frequent trips to and from the visiting room to talk with a constant stream of attorneys, investigators, reporters, family and widening circle of political friends."

But even conceding Jackson was not searched until he reached the Adjustment Center, the official version of what happened there raises even more doubts. As Jackson was about to be searched, a guard identified as U. V. Rubiacco noticed something that looked like a pencil protruding from Jackson's hair (originally, this guard was identified as Frank DeLeon who died on the 21st). The guard reached toward Jackson's hair but Jackson jumped aside and in an incredible sleight-of-hand performance, is supposed to have whipped off the wig, simultaneously grabbing the unloaded pistol and two clips of ammunition. In one motion Jackson is said to have loaded the gun and turned it on the three unarmed guards, De Leon, Sgt. Kenneth McCray and Rubiacco. According to Time magazine, prison officials said 10 seconds elapsed between the time the guard reached for the gun and Jackson successfully loaded it. He was surrounded by three guards during this sequence.

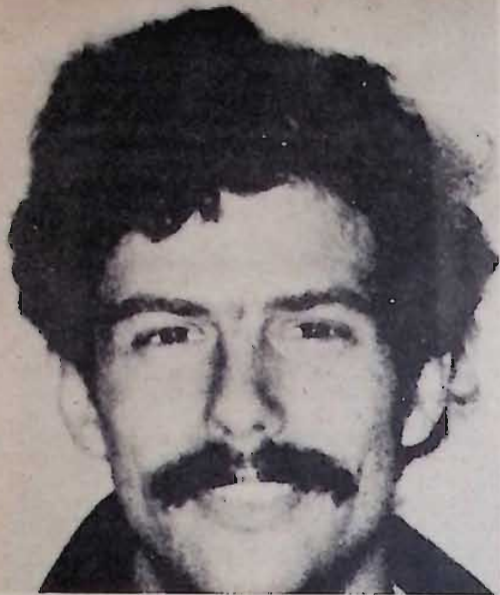
The death of Jackson

With the release of the final autopsy report on George Jackson's body on Sept. 21, prison officials had again to change their version of what happened on Aug. 21, this time in the crucial area of how Jackson was shot.

Originally, prison officials said that Jackson, followed by John Larry Spain, burst out of the Adjustment Center and began running across the prison courtyard towards an alleyway separating the prison chapel and the inmates' activities building and the 20-foot-high north prison wall about 75 yards away. About midway across the courtyard, he was shot. He staggered a few steps and rolled dead in the alleyway near the corner of the prison chapel. That was the description as of Aug. 23. The same day Marin County Coroner Dr. Donovan O. Cooke said a



Revolutionary funeral services were held for Jackson at St. Augustine's Episcopal church in Oakland, Calif., Aug. 28.



Stephen Bingham, 29-year old lawyer, was the last person to visit Jackson in prison.

preliminary autopsy report showed that Jackson was killed instantly by a bullet which entered the top of his skull, coursed down through his body, fracturing a rib, causing massive bleeding in the chest cavity and exited through his back. A bullet fragment was found in Jackson's left ankle and the coroner speculated that it could have been a fragment from the bullet which entered Jackson's head.

Later prison officials committed themselves to an explanation of who fired the bullet that killed Jackson instantly. Warden Nelson said Jackson came under the fire of guards stationed on 20-foot-high gun-walks to the east of the Adjustment Center and to the south of the Adjustment Center. It was the bullet fired from the south gun-walk, Nelson said, that killed Jackson instantly. Reporters questioned how this was possible. If Jackson was running north towards the prison wall and the bullet was fired from behind him, it appeared unlikely the bullet could have struck him in the top of the head and then exited in the reverse direction, exiting from the back. When this question was raised at a press conference, prison authorities said they would have no more comment on events surrounding the actual shooting.

Then, on Sept. 21, the final autopsy report, written by pathologist Dr. John Manwaring, was released. It showed that the bullet entered through Jackson's back, not through his head as originally stated and that the bullet's path was exactly the opposite trajectory as originally described, entering through the back and exiting through the top of the head. The autopsy report also showed that the bullet struck two ribs as it coursed through his body.

Official version changes

On Sept. 29 and 30, Warden Louis Nelson granted an interview to a Los Angeles Times reporter and held a press conference to explain how Jackson was shot in the back and how the bullet exited through his head. "People are asking," Nelson told the Times, "how a shot fired almost directly downward could hit Jackson in the back and travel upward and out of his head. But that's a far cry from the way it happened. The shot was traveling on an almost horizontal line, almost parallel to the ground." Nelson explained that while it had not been made clear before, Jackson was running in a "crouched position" at the time he was shot in the back. He said that a guard armed with a 30-30 rifle and lying prone at the south gun-walk which was 18-and-a-half feet above the ground fired the fatal bullet which traveled a distance of 271 feet and 6 inches, nearly the length of a football field. Jackson had been shot earlier in the left ankle by a guard stationed on the east gun-walk and was running "bent over" with his "hips upward" and his "head parallel to the ground." The bullet then was fired from an only slightly downwards angle and by the time it reached Jackson it was on an almost horizontal line.

Nelson speculated that the bullet was probably deflected when it struck Jackson's ribs and that this explained how it exited through his head.

If anything, of course, a bullet fired at an angle to the ground will continue to drop as it travels rather than even out into a horizontal trajectory.

In a telephone interview, Nelson was asked why it was never explained originally that Jackson was running in a "crouched" position. He replied, "The newspapers never asked the question. We've got nothing to hide. Nobody asked the question."

The escape path

There is also a discrepancy between what prison officials say was the escape path taken by Jackson once he was out of the Adjustment Center and an aerial photograph taken of the prison courtyard. Nelson slightly altered the escape path in his most recent statements when he said Jackson was not always in full view of both guards at the same time. He said Jackson disappeared from the view of the guard on the east gun-walk when he came into the view of the guard on the south gun-walk. Previously, it was understood that Jackson was shot in full view of both. An aerial photograph of the courtyard published in the Oakland Tribune shows what appears to be a large circle of blood about 15 yards from the Adjustment Center door. Attorneys have pointed out that this does not fit with reports that Jackson was shot midway across the courtyard nor with reports that he died instantly, since it is not likely his heart would continue pumping the amount of blood seen in the photograph.

There have been as many motives ascribed to Jackson's alleged escape attempt as there have been differing versions of how Jackson was killed. Associate warden James Park first indicated Jackson had constructed an elaborate mass escape plot involving explosives, but that the discovery of the weapon forced him to opt for an earlier prison break than he had planned. Later, it was hinted that Jackson had planned to use the weapon during his trial in a re-enactment of his younger brother's courtroom escape attempt.

Jackson could not have entertained any thought of successfully escaping from the Adjustment Center, particularly at a time when alarms were sounding inside the prison. He knew, as well as any other San Quentin prisoner, that to burst out into the prison courtyard at such a time was tantamount to committing suicide. Jackson would have had to run past a manned gun-walk and a guardroom just outside the Adjustment Center, scale a 20-foot-high prison wall in full view of guards positioned at three gun towers. Then he would have had to run another half mile and scale another fence before he could escape from the prison compound.

It is equally unlikely that Jackson was planning to hold the "smuggled" gun in reserve for a chance to escape during his trial. With elaborate skin searches, every time he received a visitor inside the prison, he was aware that the same process would be repeated each trial day. And in an interview shortly after his brother, Jonathan, was killed by prison guards, Jackson remarked, "If I had known ahead of time, I would have stopped him. I know the guards here. I knew they'd shoot. I knew they'd kill Jonathan."

Reason to escape

Jackson did believe, however, with good reason too—considering the threats against his life in the past and the political composition of the Adult Authority that held the power of parole over him—that the only way he might ever leave prison alive was to escape. But this hardly justifies a suicidal escape plunge. Attorney Thorne remarked in an interview with the Guardian: "George was not suicidal in any way, shape or form. George was looking forward to the trial. He saw it as another confrontation. I had told George on Monday, the last time I saw him, something I have never told any client in a criminal case. I told him I didn't see any way the trial could be lost."

The first hint of another version of what happened Aug. 21 came three days later when the two surviving Soledad Brothers, Clutchette and Drumgo, appeared in court. Clutchette shouted through a bullet-proof screen dividing the courtroom between spectators and the judge and attorneys, "He was shot in the back and when they saw he still wasn't dead, they shot him in the head." An affidavit signed by the 27 inmates of the Adjustment Center and smuggled out on a greeting card also stated

that Jackson was murdered. The affidavit said that it was prison guards who opened the cells on the first tier and that, "Thereafter, gunshots or what appeared to be gunshots went off and we all ran in our cells in the back of the same building to avoid being shot." But the inmates were unable to go into any detail about what had happened. Still another affidavit signed by them and released two weeks later repeated the charge that Jackson was murdered and "The scene was made to look as an escape attempt." The affidavit said there was a "conspiracy to murder the Soledad Brothers and Ruchell Magee in particular and the rest of the freedom fighters in general."

At the same time, attorneys visiting the inmates at San Quentin have been prevented from inquiring about the events of the 21st because prison guards in every case have monitored their conversations, always standing near enough to hear anything that might be said. The attorneys were hesitant, anyway, because for weeks they did not know whether their clients were to be indicted in the deaths of the guards or the two inmates. Reporters are denied requests for individual interviews of any inmates.

Murder plot

Jackson was constantly aware of the possibility that he might be killed in prison—and there is documented evidence prison officials had plotted to take his life. Last March 19, an attorney with the Soledad Brothers defense team took a statement from an inmate named Allan Mancino, imprisoned at the time in the California Men's Colony at San Luis Obispo. Mancino stated in a declaration taken then that while he was imprisoned at Soledad in January 1970, he was approached by prison captain Moody who "asked me directly if I would kill George Jackson. He said that he did not want another Eldridge Cleaver." Mancino, ironically, was also in the Adjustment Center at San Quentin the day of Jackson's death and was shot in the leg as the inmates were forced to lie naked and shackled on the prison courtyard.

Mancino's statement went on to say, "Moody then hypothesized of a situation where I would be taken out in the yard one night to locate a knife. He said that it would be unfortunate if I should break toward the fence and be shot if such an event actually happened. I understood this hypothetical to be a direct threat on my life if I did not kill George Jackson." Nevertheless, Mancino said he refused to join in the plot and a few days later he was transferred to Chino, a prison in the southern part of the state. His declaration was to have been used during the trial of the Soledad Brothers.

Jackson was imprisoned under California's indeterminate sentence law, a so-called reform measure which was intended to change the nature of prison sentences by making the punishment fit the individual rather than the crime. In theory, his one-year to life indeterminate sentence was meant to make release possible as soon as he was judged "rehabilitated" rather than having to serve a maximum sentence on an armed robbery charge. In practice, he was imprisoned for 11 years. To win a parole, Jackson's only chance was approval by the Adult Authority, a body of nine men lately appointed by Gov. Ronald Reagan and including a former FBI agent, two former police chiefs and a former police officer.

In any final analysis, Jackson was murdered whether or not there was a murder plot against him—although the lies of San Quentin officials point strongly to one. His crime was being black, a revolutionary and for allegedly stealing \$71 which ultimately earned him a death sentence.

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