

THE skies glowed orange-red over McAlester the night of 27 July, as our Public Information Team approached in our hastily-acquired "Huey" helicopter. A smoky pall hung in columns as embers rekindled new fires at "Big Mac", Oklahoma's 64-year old State Prison.

Guardsmen had been summoned from around the State to quell rioting, burning and chaos.

At 2:30 Friday afternoon, some 25 to 30 prisoners had grabbed several guards, injuring them, and begun moving throughout the prison, gathering strength. By later that afternoon, a dozen buildings in the 1,700-man facility were aflame, with about 600 prisoners controlling everything inside the walls. Prison guards, a few Oklahoma Highway Patrolmen, and some 40 to 60 Guardsmen of the local 445th MP Co, and McAlester Police, held the walls.

Hostages were being taken, and Warden Park Anderson said "the situation was very critical". More assistance was requested from the National Guard.

As more Guardsmen arrived, a Headquarters was set up in the prison "Gift

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Shop" and Rodeo Office immediately Southeast of the prison walls.

Guard towers were reinforced late Friday night and into Saturday morning with what men were available. One was isolated, so the prison guards were pulled off. Another was fire-bombed, and was left burned-out and unmanned.

As time went on, the 1st Bn, 180th Inf, arrived. The 2120th Supply and Services Bn and Co B (Medical) of the 700th Support Bn also were called out. Total troop strength approached 1,000 by Saturday morning.

Ammunition Issued

Troops began moving onto the prison perimeter as soon as Squad and Platoon leaders could be briefed on safety and firing procedures and precautions. Once all instructions had been given, two clips of ammunition were issued to each Guardsman.

The McAlester MPs, some of whom had been there for as long as 12 hours with no relief, food or water, finally

were released to their Armory, about two miles from the prison, for a hot meal and some rest.

While the riot-equipped Guardsmen were moving into position, other units were being activated. The 745th MP Co of Oklahoma City was brought 150 miles from Summer Camp at Ft Sill.

Early Monday, Wayne Lawson, Oklahoma Public Safety Commissioner, who was coordinating all forces, commented: "The National Guard, with the assistance of local law enforcement advice, etc., performed very, very effectively and efficiently. We feel that truly it was a result of their having been here that, thus far, there have been no casualties to speak of; and we know, should they not have been here that circumstances would have been much, much worse."

Some inmate casualties came to light early Saturday. Two prisoners were confirmed dead, apparently killed by other inmates, and about 20 were injured seriously enough to require hospitalization.

At the height of the outbreak, 21 hostages were held by the inmates. Two were released Friday night and six more

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Saturday morning, but Deputy Warden Sam Johnson was held until the last.

At 6:30 Saturday morning, the 1/180th Inf moved to the rodeo grounds entrance just inside the prison with three Companies, holding one in reserve.

After donning gas masks and helmets, they moved through the gate and into the rodeo grounds area.

Two helicopters were to begin dropping tear gas into prison confines at 7:27, immediately after two other helicopters had landed Oklahoma City Policemen and National Guardsmen atop cell block roofs to act as snipers when the Guardsmen went inside.

The Guardsmen were waiting to enter the area where the rioting prisoners then set fire to debris piled of sweeping them out into the industrial area North of the walled enclosure. The prisoners then set fire to debris piled against a 20-foot-high chain link gate.

The tear gas and ground attacks were cancelled seconds before they were to have been launched.

NCOs Asked to Negotiate

Inside the prison, officials were meeting with the inmates. The inmates requested that one White and two Black NCOs enter and talk along with the negotiators.

Leo McCracken, State Director of Corrections, commented on the presence of the Guardsmen: "These people, and particularly one, did a tremendous job."

"Sergeant Miller Newton put up some excellent reasoning and judgment in regard to why they should stop this revolt, turn the hostages loose, and get back into the normal procedures. And, I think his efforts in the long run certainly paid-off."

SSG Sam Utterback, the one White Guardsman, remarked: "After the prisoners release all the hostages, I certainly hope Governor (David) Hall comes to meet with them". SP4 Harold Washington, the third Guard negotiator, voiced agreement.

Throughout the uprising, Governor Hall repeatedly told the inmates that there would be no meeting until all hostages were released.

AUG./SEP., 1973

Troops mass at entrance to rodeo area, waiting for designated time for move on prisoners.

Early Saturday afternoon, hostages were released, and the Governor arrived to meet with and listen to the grievances of a committee of eight inmates.

The Infantry Bn was pulled back from the rodeo grounds around noon and set up its perimeter defense. Guardsmen stayed to guard the 700 or so prisoners who did not participate in the riot and requested protection in the rodeo grounds and industrial area.

The Medics moved into all areas of the prison and took out several injured inmates.

While the released hostages held tearful reunions with loved ones just outside the prison, fights broke out within the confines of the yard Saturday afternoon and evening as an uneasy calm settled on the prison by nightfall. Most inmates, who had vacated their cells, elected to sleep under the stars while Guardsmen and Highway Patrolmen kept watch.

Guardsmen Posted on Roofs

Sunday morning brought more action. "Hueys" swooped in low over the cell blocks and landed Guardsmen and troopers onto the roofs.

All except the two abandoned towers were manned by Guardsmen with at least one Highway Patrolman in each.

Inside the cell blocks, Guardsmen and prison officials were moving through the cells, clearing remaining prisoners out into the yard so that locks could be repaired and electricity could be restored, while others helped guard firemen trying to put out a fire set Sunday morning.

All prisoners had to eat during the riot was what they had carried from the mess hall before setting it afire. Prison employees took doughnut carts to the gate Sunday morning and several hundred prisoners gathered. But the employees refused to enter the prison yard. Two Highway Patrolmen finally entered with the carts while others stood close by, riot guns poised.

Prisoners swarmed over what was there. Most of the available food had been burned when prisoners set fire to a warehouse Friday night.

At 11 a.m. Sunday, MPs, plus an armored personnel carrier, moved the yard along with Patrol troopers began forcing prisoners toward the Southeast corner of the prison, while on

the West side other prisoners were being hustled into the rodeo grounds. Then a cell-by-cell search began for weapons and injured and missing inmates.

Later Sunday, some of the prisoners were taken out, stripped, and searched and then taken into the central rotunda area where two Platoons of Guardsmen were stationed. The prisoners were put into the cells for the evening. "Many of the cells would not lock and the only protection the Guardsmen had within the rotunda was one strand of bars around the rotunda that was chained with log chains and padlocked," Commissioner Lawson said.

The "hard core" element still was partitioned-off at the Southeast corner

while the 700 who had boycotted the riot were segregated in the industrial area. Afraid of the other inmates, they refused to go back.

Troop Units Rotated

Monday morning the 1/180 was relieved by the 120th Eng. Bn while the 2120th S&S Bn was relieved by the 1/158th Field Artillery, and Co B Medics were replaced by the 145th Medical Co of the 120th Medical Bn.

Tuesday, a field kitchen was set up by prison officials to feed prisoners, but some balked at the meatloaf dinner; they wanted steak. "Hell," one Guardsman said, "We haven't been eating that good."

On Wednesday, a prisoner was stabbed to death in the area where all the "hard-core" prisoners were located. By then a chain link fence and barricade separated Guardsmen and Patrolmen from inmates.

By Wednesday afternoon, more relief came. The 1/158th and the 120th were replaced with the 1/171st and 1/189th FA, which had been to Annual Training. Their Medical Platoons replaced the 145th Medics in front of Warden Anderson's home, across the street from the prison.

Members of the 138th Fight of the Air Guard searchlight units were pressed into service as were searchlight units of the State Maintenance Office.

The 445th Aviation Co flew throughout the entire campaign, supporting all units on request, while Headquarters of the Oklahoma Army National Guard coordinated all personnel in the area.

Damage Extensive, Cost High

Damage estimates have ranged from \$20 to \$30 million with estimates of at least \$20,000 per day to keep Guardsmen on duty.

Facilities escaping fire damage, for the most part, were the Administration Building and cell blocks, the solitary confinement building, and a few out-buildings.

The hospital, mess hall, chapel, and three industrial buildings within the wall were gutted.

In the industrial area, surrounded by two 20-foot chain link fences, 12 buildings were burned to the ground.

A young Infantry Squad Leader summed it all up: "After seeing his mess, it sure makes me want to live the straight and narrow the rest of my life. I never want to see the inside of any prison again."

Noncoms, asked for by inmates, talk-over situation with Wade Watts (right), Oklahoma NAACP head. Guardsmen are (L to R) SSG Sam Utterback, SP4 Harold Washington and SSG Miller Newton.

APC is moved in to aid MPs and Patrolmen in keeping prisoners contained in corner of yard. Soaked prison guard (hatless) is in foreground.

Guardsmen protected fire-fighters. Hulk of woodworking shop is in background.