

PRISON MURDERS

Oklahoma's shittiest prison is in McAlester. It is the site of daily atrocities. Back in the days after the riot (1973) that finally destroyed everything but the cages, the captives who suffered there began calling it McAuschwitz, because it averaged about a murder per month. It was such a concentration camp style prison that it had special little sets of cages scattered all around it, much like, I imagine, Dr. Josep Mengele had many special wards scattered about his complex, where he performed his depraved human experiments. The guards and their media pals like to call the place "Big Mac!", as if they are proud of what they do there. The guards perform the atrocities; their media pals help them cover them up or justify them when they get caught at them.

Their worst miniature hellhole was called "The Rock!" This is a set of fifty cages, 7 by 5 feet, in two rows, back to back. A slab of concrete was the sleeping rack. The toilet-sink at the back was 18 inches from where you lay your head. To shower, only one time per week, you had to stick your hands out the beanhole for shackling. Then the kops would lock you in a chain link fence cage, unshackle your hands through a hole, then watch you shower. If you reached up to hold the showerhead so that you could wash your foot, you would get slammed with a jolt of electricity. They would bury people in this place for years. Finally, after a pack of guards hosed down [REDACTED] with tear gas, then left him to suffocate, the state put a time limit on how long they could bury you there. They gassed him to death for not kicking his food tray back under the door. All the kops got away with his murder.

The second worst set of extra punishment cages was on the sixth floor of their "New" cellhouse. This, they called "Weed Row." During the Candy Riot, a couple of friends and I were able to go up there and look around. The mesh on the cages and catwalks was so thick that you could not even press a matchhead through the holes. They would bury up to 400 people in the two-man cages on the two top floors. Only the most vicious and sadistic kops wanted to work here. They would beat and gas people often. They were always calling maintenance up to weld thicker mesh in more places. The more they abused their victims, the more ingenious their victims became at squirting urine through the mesh.

A third set of cages were the 'holes' below the rotunda. Here, you got no light, plus it was damp from seepage. Thumb-length cockroaches infested the place. Victims here only got bread and water. It was total isolation. The kops liked to sneak in quietly, then, suddenly; WHAM! Slam! You would jump out of your skin with the noise of the beanhole slamming open just long enough for the kop to throw in a brick of bread, then slam the hatch shut for another 'day'. Since it was always dark, you never knew when your three days were up.

A fourth set of torturous cages were up in the top of the west cell house. They called it "the jail." The wind whipped through there at several miles per hour. The windows banged open and shut at random. It was freezing cold when I had to bring up a cart and feed them. Each time I came, they would beg me for blankets. When I told the kops, they would not even pretend to care. The inmate cries were so pitiful that I began smuggling sheets up to them. We were all short of everything, and almost no one had anything to spare. Many of us had to tie our pants on with strips of sheet. It was

astonishing how they could simply refuse to properly clothe us. Socks were almost never provided. They had to last for years, or you did without. The food was often beets and greens. In two years spent as a cook there, I found at least ten cans of state-produced farm goods bowed out from the pressure of botulism bacteria living inside. It is a miracle that they did not kill hundreds of captives with the food. The guards knew to only eat from their special, separate kitchen.

This was the synergy that the guards and their captives had working between themselves. At its worst, the kops would pull out their fire hoses and spray everyone in their cages. Then they might fire up their mace fogger. It was huge; built to be towed behind a truck. It would fill up two tiers with pepper gas in less than five minutes. No matter what you did, you could not breathe. Since everyone got punished when one person threw urine, the mutual hatred ever grew.

██████████ was one of the people who knew first hand how dangerous and life threatening it was to get gassed. He was in the cage next to ██████████ when the kops fired round after round of teargas into his cage. Just the overflow drifting out of ██████████'s cage was enough to almost smother ██████████. He wet a towel, spread it over the back of his head, then shoved his face into the toilet. He hacked his guts out for hours. The dust gets everywhere, and it is of such fine particles that it takes hours for it to settle out of the air. The smallest movement causes it to waft back into the air, so trying to wipe it up with a wet rag restarts the coughing and tearing, sneezing, burning and snot slinging.

██████████ was a big guy, though not too tall. He was about ██████████, born with a barrel chest and thick arms, which he cultivated with a lifetime of weight lifting. He was old when I met him; about ██████████, and starting to shrivel up, though he was still committed to the

inmate arms race. To intimidate doubters of his fitness, and potential attackers, he would flip upside down against a wall and whip off twenty headstand pushups. He had to be strong, tough and dangerous just to survive. He had no family support, so he had to hustle others for his living. He was the muscle for his clique (This was before the media began calling mere associations between two or three people 'gangs'). The brains was [REDACTED]. Another cunning opportunist of theirs was [REDACTED]. Together, they loan sharked, ran the house when people wanted to gamble, smuggled dope when they could, sold it when it was available, and constantly scanned the scene for crooked guards, weapons, food, punks or wine-making opportunities. Just prior to the riot of 1973, [REDACTED] had masterminded a months-long tunnel building enterprise that let nine people escape. This is recounted in other of my writings, probably titled "Hiding Out." This project is about [REDACTED], who is likely the most dangerous sane man that I have ever met. I tried writing this about him before, but the college student who was assigned to type it decided to steal it instead and give it to the police. They skulked around for a short time investigating, then filed it away in one of their 'never see again' cabinets. They really could not care less about his past, because there was no way that they could use it to screw anyone in the future.

The article that terrified her and enticed police was an account by [REDACTED] and others describing his collecting on debts accrued by a rival in the worst Kansas prison.

[REDACTED] had tried to get his money back from [REDACTED], a Negro, several times. The guy was full of more and more elaborate excuses. The fact that some of the debt was gambling losses in one of [REDACTED] crooked poker games made it easier for [REDACTED] and his buddies to dispute. The fact that some of it was from loan sharking (cigarettes, food and

dope) profits, out of [REDACTED]'s own pocket, made [REDACTED] determined to get it back. What also rankled was that [REDACTED] and his associates could see these Negroes eating the candy bars, selling the coffee and smoking the cigarettes and dope that they collected from their own people's vices. They had the money; they could pay. They were not paying. They were not paying because [REDACTED] was a newcomer, with no reputation of violence to fear. [REDACTED] was becoming a laughing stock the longer he let [REDACTED] slide on his debt. Two of [REDACTED]'s underlings tried to juice him up into attacking the guy. As with all such situations, this instigation got turned back onto the instigators. Between the three of them trying to get the others to act, an impromptu plan was indeed formulated, same as weasels gather to raid a prairie dog town.

People who live off the vices and weaknesses of others are, or become, very paranoid of retaliation. This fear of ones dirty deeds returning is a powerful incentive that drives not only the prison weight lifting race, but an arms trade in tangible weapons as well. When the rival clique scares your clique with the amount of weight it can lift, it is natural that the scared group seek sharpened instruments, poking sticks or bludgeons. Since they had a machine shop at the Jeff-city prison, [REDACTED]'s weapon was a beautifully grounded, heavy thing that had started out as an 18 inch file. It gleamed with yellow and blue scorching where it had been too-hastily ground. Amazingly, the edge was sharp enough to shave the hair off your arm. The wooden handle had been sloppily riveted. Though it was grey instead of slivery, and you would never expect it to be sold in a first-world store, neither would you expect a thing like it to be made in prison. It had cost [REDACTED] a lot of money; possession of it begged the question: If you own a knife, why not use it?

After juicing █████ into doing something, █████ dragged them into helping him collect the debt. He picked Sunday, because most of the kops would be off, bored or sleepy. He arranged for a distraction to occur: a fight on the yard would attract all the kops and rubberneckerers. Soon as it began, █████, █████ and █████ began marching resolutely toward █████'s cage.

█████ had a five man cage. The racks would fold up against the wall, leaving a cramped space big enough for a flimsy card table. A game was in progress, and it was the same as any prison poker game. A house took a percentage of every pot, or a flat fee. Cronies of the house player conspired to help fleece the ignorant buffoons who thought that they could beat the odds. █████'s two cronies were "█████" and █████. Their fool was a new guy whom they called "█████" after the type of gun he was caught with after robbing a gas station in █████. █████, knowing nothing about █████'s loan fight with █████ sat with his back to the door. █████ sat warily facing the door at all times. His two cronies were smart enough to always alert when anyone passed or entered the door. They sat left and right of █████ at the table. Farthest from the door, in the darkest recesses of the cage, lay three locker boxes where █████ and his 'gangstas' kept their wealth of cigarettes, coffee and candy.

As █████, █████ and █████ strode halfway down the long row of cages leading to █████'s cage, one of them suddenly turned yellow.

"Uh," quavered █████, "I'll be up at the control office to warn you if the guards show up!" He scurried off before anyone could object to this last second change of plan.

█████ cursed. He and █████ strode up to the dark hole that was █████'s door. █████

charged in. As he noticed that no one had entered with him, he heard a hoarse voice whisper from behind, "I'll jigger for you."

Not waiting for his eyes to adjust to the darkness, [REDACTED] barked, "Get my money now!" All four of them had heard [REDACTED]'s comment and interpreted it to mean that mayhem would shortly ensue. Emphasizing this conjuncture was [REDACTED]'s simultaneous act of drawing his machete. A collective gasp arose from each of the poker players. The whites of their eyes bulged. The first one to move was [REDACTED]. He had not gotten his position as leader by being slow on the uptake. He threw himself backward out of his chair and began scrabbling under his bedcovers, presumably for his own weapon. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] tried to stand, but were hampered in this by the narrowness and clutter of the cage. Much faster and unhindered was [REDACTED], who suddenly raked his chips and bolted for the door. [REDACTED], unable to see too well, imagined that [REDACTED] had snatched up a weapon and was attacking. [REDACTED] chopped down with his machete, cutting deep into the flesh between [REDACTED]'s neck and shoulder. The guy yelped in surprise and pain as he crashed to the cement floor. [REDACTED] was the first to untangle his feet from his chair and the table legs. He had one foot free and had just yanked the other loose as he fell forward onto his side. He screamed once before [REDACTED] steel bashed past his flailing arms and cut the side of his neck and face. [REDACTED] dragged the table with him as he threw a lamp at [REDACTED] and dived to the back of the cage. The table up-ended, throwing their radio, sodas, coffee, ashtrays, cigarettes, food and chips onto [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] leaped into the mess after [REDACTED] who had managed to get his knife unshipped. The table edge smacked [REDACTED] across his nose as it flipped. [REDACTED] tripped over it and sprawled across

██████████ as he tried to crawl away. ██████████ took a fistful of hair, pulled the man's head back and slit his throat.

██████████ struggled to get out from under the table as ██████████ and ██████████ fought. ██████████'s two-hundred pounds on it made this difficult, as did the darkness. ██████████ managed to pull himself out and get up a fraction of a second before ██████████ did. Instead of attacking, he saw a clear path to the door, which held no obstacle or silhouette of danger. ██████████ bolted for the door, only a few milliseconds before ██████████ could give chase. He leaped over the table and a chair. His ankle snagged up the cord from the lamp. ██████████ stumbled, fell; his knife skittered away. ██████████ landed on ██████████'s back as he tried to crawl away quickly on hands and knees. ██████████ went the same way as ██████████; a shriek, a fistful of hair and a slashed throat.

While his adrenalin continued to surge, ██████████ returned to ██████████, who had actually gotten his head out the door. He screamed and clawed as ██████████ took his foot and dragged him back in. After finishing off ██████████ he made certain that ██████████ would never get up to tell tales or retaliate. ██████████ re-sheathed his knife and rushed out, not bothering to collect any debt. As he would describe it later, he had killed three people just to execute one deadbeat swindler.

If anyone had the guts to tattle on ██████████, they had not the guts to testify against him in the man's court. Or the man decided that the quadruple murder should be kept quiet from the public so as to not unduly alarm citizens or point out the state's negligence. ██████████ got completely away with the bloodbath, discharged his ██████████ sentence and was transferred to ██████████ to do his sentence there. ██████████ and his co-criminals were nothing but burglars, and drunks, before landing in prison. They

would cruise a van through rural areas, looking for stuff to steal and sell for booze and gasoline. ██████ told me his philosophy of life just before he got out. He had decided that he would be on whatever type of work or food or housing welfare that the state provided, for the rest of his life. He felt that the state owed him for all the beatings and gas and mace that he had suffered. Worse, he felt that the society of "square Johns" owed him too. His reasons for thinking this were that they had knowingly put in place the sadists who had beaten, caged, gassed and deprived him during his decades in prison.

██████ did get out, and he did enjoy the state's welfare housing, food-stamps and church charity briefly. Then his old ways resurfaced. He got to drinking, then to stealing at night. He had, along with almost all other captives of his time, said that he would not let them drag him back to prison again as easily as they had done the other times. The cops and media use this nonsense, said in the heat of passion, to scare the public for the benefit of all cops and 'journalists'. In the case of ██████ it actually came true. The cops caught him burglarizing in ██████ while too drunk to know what he was doing. Crooks call this "Blackout Thieving," or "Stealing while blind." The cops set their dogs on ██████, then shot him to death as he was killing one of their canine "Officers."