

# ALCATRAZ 1946

Alcatraz Revolt - The Second Day - 'Shot in Cold Blood, I Lay There 10 Hours'

by Stanton Delaplane

It was Joseph Paul Cretzer— "Dutch Joe," the bank robber and cop killer, who went wild with a .45. "I was shot down in cold blood by Cretzer," said Guard Robert R Baker. Baker lay playing dead in the cell block for 10 hours.

But it was crafty little Bernard Coy, a Kentucky bank robber who sprung 24 hardcore convicts from their cells. Guards said Coy, probably cleaning windows, reached through the bars of the gun gallery and caught Guard Burch around the throat with a T-shaped squeegee. He dragged Burch against the bars and slugged him. With a handful of keys, a rifle and revolver, Coy threw the release switch on the cells. Coy kept the rifle. Cretzer, the killer and escape artist, got the pistol

## **CRETZER LAUGHED**

When nine guards, including Baker, charged, unarmed, into the cell block, they walked right into the guns. Guard Sundstrom was slugged in the jaw. Baker, Sundstrom and Simpson were thrown into one cell. The other six guards went into another, Baker reported.

"Someone suggested they hold us as hostages, Cretzer just laughed."

"We don't need hostages, he said, 'We're not going to make agreements. We want the keys.

"They threw Miller (a guard) on a bench and punched him and kicked him. Miller took it as long as he could and they gave up the keys. He held out the important key the key to the back gate. Miller passed out.

"The cons seemed to go crazy. Thompson swung a rifle, yelling 'Let's shoot the sons of bitches.

"They jammed us into a cell. "

## **CRETZER WENT WILD**

"I don't know who fired into the other cell. But Cretzer stood at the door to the cell I was in and went wild. He emptied a .45 automatic into us. There wasn't time to think of falling to the floor.

"Simpson (a guard) stood on the bed. Two bullets hit him in the chest, and he fell flat on the cot.

"Before I could get under a bed, a bullet got me and dropped me. Sundstrom, in my cell, fell to the floor behind me and wasn't hit.

"I thought Cretzer would come in and finish us off. But he left.

## **I DIDN'T PASS OUT**

"I lay there for 10 hours with blood splashing from my wound. The floor was cold, and I didn't pass out. Sundstrom hugged the floor without a sound. But I could hear Simpson moaning.

"We didn't dare help him. The convicts kept coming back and looking in.

"When Cretzer said he didn't want hostages, a con said: 'Let's kill these witnesses. We don't want witnesses.

"Coy was one convict who did plenty of damage during it all. I saw him pick off three guards with as many shots during the start of the fight in the cell tiers.

"He's deadly with a rifle."

Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 4 May 1946 page 1.

### **Hour-by-Hour Account of Battle**

Here is a chronological report of the bloody battle of Alcatraz Island which began Thursday afternoon.

#### [THURSDAY]

2 p.m.-A pair of desperadoes, identified as Bernard P. Coy, Kentucky bank robber and Joseph Paul Cretzer, murderer and bank robber overpower guard in prison gun gallery, take possession of arsenal and with 16 other convicts open fire, holding an undisclosed number of guards as hostages.

3:15 p.m.-Residents of Marin county and Golden Gate Bridge passengers hear gun firing from Alcatraz.

3: 17 p.m.-Warden J.A. Johnston sends word there is "serious trouble" but is unable to tell extent of injuries suffered by officers or amount of damage done.

3:20 p.m.-Warden sends emergency calls to Marines stationed at Treasure Island; to S.F. Police, the Navy and Coast Guard.

4 p.m.--Gun fire intensifies on Alcatraz.

4:30 p.m.-Naval and Coast Guard vessels ring island to circumvent possibility of escapes.

5 p.m.-First load of re-enforcements landed on island; believed to be Federal agents.

5:30 p.m.-First tear gas bombs and hundreds of bullets hurled by guards into southern windows of cell block.

6 p.m.-Marines, in battle dress and equipped with a variety of weapons, land and take over guarding of non-battling convicts.

6:15 p.m.-Firing continues at higher pitch. Thousands line San Francisco shore, watching pattern of tracer bullets, Naval patrol around island increased.

7:15 p.m.-Warden informs outside world prisoners continue to hold possession of gun gallery. Two officers wounded as they attempt to storm arsenal: identified as Harry Cochrane and Fred Richberger. Cochrane's condition held critical.

7:45 p.m.-Wives and children of embattled guards line Aquatic Park, pleading for word of husbands and fathers.

8:30 p.m.-Warden Johnston telegrams word of death of Officer Harold P. Stites and wounding of Officers Herschel R. Oldham and Elmus Besk.

9 p.m.-Most sustained burst of gunfire of entire day opens and continues for more than 45 minutes.

10 p.m.-San Francisco police rushed to scene under command of Captain Bernard McDonald.

12 midnight-Battle continues, although at a slower tempo. First group of wounded hostages landed in San Francisco, all critically injured; are rushed to Marine Hospital.

#### FRIDAY

1 a.m.-Two more wounded men landed in San Francisco; report shooting halted momentarily and insurrectors cornered in cell block. Admit tear gas being used extensively.

3 am.-Warden Johnston sends word of rescue of several more hostages. Reports serious injuries to R.R. Baker, Captain Henry H. Weinholt, Cecil D. Corwin, William A. Miller, Carl W. Sundstrom, Joseph Burdette, E.B. Lageson, Robert C. Bristow, Fred S. Roberts. Identifies

assault leaders as Cretzer, Coy, Thompson, Shockley, Fleish, Carnes.

4 a.m.-Battle continues but is now isolated in western wing of main cell block--one black spot on brilliantly illumined fortress.

5 a.m.-Crescendo of battle again increases after pre-dawn lull.

5:30 a.m.-Warden issues terse order to "shell out" convict holdouts.

7 am.-Guard Miller dies at Marine Hospital after identifying Cretzer as slayer.

8 a.m.-Guards launch vigorous new attack with hand grenades.

9:05 a.m.-Guards attempt to chop hole in roof of cell house to drop more grenades in besieged area Other leathernecks set up automatic weapons in protected positions in high wall.

9:30 a.m.-Reports received Justice Department reinforcements and guards being flown to Alcatraz from Leavenworth, Kan., Denver, Col., and McNeil Island.

10 a.m.-Reinforced combat Marine forces land.

11 a.m.--Grenades are lobbed into cell block every half hour.

11 :32 am.-Grenade assault fails to dislodge desperate prisoners. New "shape charge" and bazooka shells are ferried to island.

11:35 a.m.-Fire ignited by low-lobbed grenades at base of cell block.

11 :38 a.m.-Warden reports situation still out of control.

11 :41 a.m.-Three cases of TNT and two demolition experts dispatched to island, along with supply of gas masks, indicating possibility of chemical warfare would be opened against convicts.

11:45 a.m.-James V. Bennett, director of Federal Bureau of Prisons in Washington admits it may take "some time" to control situation.

12 noon-Rifle grenade fire, directed by an Army officer, continues. It is concentrated, however, around the fifth window of the main cell block.

1 :40 p.m.-All firing ceases abruptly on the island. Reports say the guards are negotiating for unconditional surrender.

6:55 p.m.-Battle resumes, with the convicts firing from barred windows and the guards returning the fire through holes chipped in the cell block roof. The exchange lasted for 15 minutes.

12 midnight-Alcatraz notifies San Francisco Police Department activities suspended for the night. Convicts still barricaded.

Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 4 May 1946, page 3. by Jack Eoisie

## **Grenades Pin Rebels in One Cell Block**

### **ABOARD A NAVY LANDING CRAFT OFF ALCATRAZ**

May 3

The battle of Alcatraz, as it appears from the outside, has settled down to a grim effort by guards and marines to keep the rebellious convicts pinned down in the one cell block they hold.

Five stout men, protected by a ledge about 100 yards directly beneath and out from the "hot" cell block window, are doing the job of keeping the convicts from reaching the window ledge-and a possible dash for freedom through the shattered bars.

They are doing the job by firing, about every five minutes, four fragmentation grenades launched from either an Army rifle or carbine.

During the hours we watched, no other weapon was used - no bazookas and no mortars. Earlier in the day a few smoke grenades churned up outside the beleaguered cell. It is understood that of the five men who can be seen operating the grenade launcher with methodical precision, one is a Marine. He is Warrant Officer C.L. Beckner, who commands the Marine detachment on the island.

They are preparing to fire now. The grenade is inserted carefully into the launcher device attached to the muzzle of the gun.

There is a slight report as the grenade leaves the gun, but it is drowned out by the sharp concussion as the projectile strikes the wall. A flash of yellow flame lights up, and then curling black smoke.

This one, then, missed the cell, but immediately another is fired, and all that can be heard is a smothered concussion. Black smoke drifts out the window. The one went in.

Each grenade sprays the cell area with sharp metal for a radius of 50 feet, forcing the convicts inside to keep down on the floor or behind sheltering objects in corners.

Two more grenades are fired and then, the stronghold relaxes. The men can be seen lighting cigarettes and stretching out on the beds of bright purple flowers.

Major H. W. Thompson, who commands a heavy weapons company in the Fifth Division, is on the boat. It is his opinion that Warden Johnston had decided against using anything heavier than grenades because bazooka shells or mortars could knock in the walls and give the convicts access to freedom during the night.

Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 4 May 1946, page 4.

### **Ringleaders of the Revolt**

Six Lives of Crime and Punishment Killings, Beatings, Steel Bars, Escapes

A 19-year-old Oklahoma youth, serving a 99-year term for kidnaping, holdup, murder and escape, was listed by Warden James A. Johnston as one of the six ringleaders in the Alcatraz insurrection.

He was identified as Clarence Carnes of McAlester, Okla, who began his criminal career at the age of 16.

Taken into custody as a murder suspect he slugged the jailer at Atoka county jail; beat the janitor and fled.

He was captured later the same day near Strongtown Prison and was sentenced to life in the Granite Reformatory for murder.

### **ESCAPES FROM PRISON**

On February 3, 1945, he escaped from Granite while working in a quarry outside the walls; kidnaped a Granite farmer and force him to drive him to Shamrock, Tex., where the farmer was released.

For that crime he was charged under the Lindbergh law, and while awaiting trial in the Oklahoma county jail assaulted a jailer and attempted to escape.

On March 19, 1945, he was sentenced to 99 years for kidnaping the Granite farmer and was sent to Leavenworth prison. He was transferred to Alcatraz last July.

Sam Shockley, 36, the other Oklahoman named as a ringleader, in the insurrection, is serving life for kidnaping D.F. Pendley, president of the Bank of Paoli, Okla., and Pendley's wife, the assistant cashier, after robbing the bank of \$942.28 in March of 1938.

The Pendleys were released, unharmed, later that day, when Shockley's car stalled and he was forced to flee on foot.

### **ROUTED BY YOUTH**

After having been routed by a teen-age school boy armed with a shotgun, Shockley was captured by a McCurtain county posse when he sought to raid a farmhouse for food. He was convicted on May 16, 1938, and was sent to Leavenworth. Later that same month he was brought to Alcatraz.

Bernard Paul Coy, 46, identified as one of the two who initiated the plot, was sentenced to a 25-year term for his part in the \$2175 robbery of the Bank of New Haven, Ky., in March of 1937. He was identified by Cashier A.E. Kirkpatrick as the man who walked up to the cage, drew a sawed-off shot gun and held him at bay while a companion scooped up the money.

He and his associate, Delbert Lee Stiles, hid in a cave in the Rolling Fork river; were captured, convicted and sentenced. Coy was sent to Atlanta prison, but transferred to Alcatraz in July of 1937.

### **RELEASE PLEA REFUSED**

In October of 1942, he filed a habeas corpus petition claiming his terms should not run consecutively. Federal Judge Martin L. Welsh denied the plea and it was carried to the Circuit Court of Appeals, where Welsh's ruling was affirmed in July of 1943.

Scheduled to appear Monday before Federal Judge Michael J. Roche for a hearing on his habeas corpus petition is the fourth of the Alcatraz ringleaders, Marvin Franklin Hubbard, 34. Hubbard filed his petition March 15, claiming that when he was arrested in Chattanooga on August 15, 1942, and charged with stealing firearms, and kidnaping and transporting a kidnaped person across a State line, he was forced by FBI and State and county police to confess and plead guilty.

He said he was told if he didn't confess he "wouldn't leave the jail alive." He said he refused and then was beaten into unconsciousness.

Statements by doctors at a Chattanooga hospital show he was treated for a broken nose, cuts, bruises and a possible fractured skull.

Hubbard pleaded guilty of kidnaping a Chattanooga police officer; stealing a tommy gun and two revolvers and an automobile.

### **ATLANTA GRADUATE**

He was transferred from jail in Chattanooga to the County Jail in Knoxville; escaped September 11, 1942, was captured and sent to Atlanta. He was transferred to Alcatraz on November 28, 1944 after participating in a mutiny in Atlanta.

Joseph Paul Cretz, 35, fifth of the ringleaders, is serving a 25-year term for bank robbery; five years for escape from McNeil and life for murder of a United States Marshal at Tacoma, where he was awaiting trial for escape from McNeil.

He was convicted originally in 1940 for three Los Angeles bank robberies and, according to Associated Press dispatches from there, attempted to escape on the eve of his transfer to

Federal Prison in February of that year.

It was two months after Cretzer was found attempting to unlock his handcuffs with a key fashioned from a belt buckle, that he escaped from McNeil Island.

## **PRESTON GRADUATE**

He began his criminal career in 1927, at the age of 16, and was sent to the Colorado State Industrial School for burglary and larceny. In June of 1931 he was sent to the Preston School of Industry at Ione, Amador county, for burglary, and nine years later received his 25-year sentence for robbing a national bank.

While at McNeil Island he made a daring attempt to escape by seizing a truck and driving it through a gate. It was while being tried for this that he killed the U.S. Marshal.

He was transferred to Alcatraz in August, 1940, and in May of the following year he and three other life-termers tried to escape. They bound and gagged a prison guard, but were overpowered.

Last of the ringleaders is Miran Edgar Thompson, 29, transferred last October from Leavenworth to Alcatraz to serve a 99-year term for kidnaping and a life sentence for the murder of an Amarillo, Tex., police officer. He has a record of eight escapes.

## **SEVENTH SUSPECT**

A possible seventh leader was listed by Warden Johnston as Louis Fleish, onetime leader of the Detroit notorious "Purple Gang" in the early '30's.

He was convicted of possessing an unregistered machine gun and has been arrested for safe-cracking and prohibition racketeering. Two of his brothers have served bootlegging sentences at Alcatraz.

It has not yet been definitely ascertained whether Fleish actually was one of the insurgents.

Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 4 May 1946, page 4.

## **Ex-Prison Official Warned**

**In 1942 Convicts Predicted Rebellion Said 'They'll Try to Massacre Everyone**

From a former Alcatraz official yesterday came the disclosure that more than four years ago he received a strange warning that the bloody rebellion on "The Rock" would erupt. But even more baffling than the grim prediction in his opinion is the mystery of how the rioting convicts ever laid hands on enough weapons to throw the whole island into a state of terror and siege.

The former official is Morris O'Hearn who in 1942 was custodial officer at Alcatraz. He is now a real estate man here, but his knowledge of the prison's geography and its supposedly "break proof" safeguards are detailed.

## **DON'T GO TO ALCATRAZ**

Concerning the warning he was given that "the break" would come, O'Hearn explained: "In 1941, I spent 10 months at the McNeil Island Federal Prison to take a training course

for an associate wardenship. I left in January of 1942, but before I departed a peculiar incident occurred.

"One of the con bosses came to me and said: 'You've been a pretty square john with us, so maybe we can do you a favor. Don't go to Alcatraz. There's going to be a big break there. It may be a long time in coming, but when it does they're going to massacre everybody.'" "I thought it was just con talk," O'Hearn went on. "I didn't pay any attention to it and never mentioned it to my superiors when I got to Alcatraz."

"But when I saw the newspapers and read what had happened, it hit me right between the eyes, even at this late date. I thought, 'My God! This is it. It's the big break and they're trying to massacre everybody!'"

### **HIDDEN FACTORS**

As to how the convicts got their weapons for the attempted break, O'Hearn declared there must have been deeply hidden factors which only the most searching official investigation will bring to light. He buttressed his opinion with this description of the seemingly insurmountable difficulties the convicts faced:

The building containing the two cell blocks where the rebellion broke out is a rectangular structure designed as the prison's "citadel." The revolt is supposed to have started inside this building.

There are no weapons inside the place except those carried by two guards who keep watch from gun galleries. There are two such galleries extending the width of the wall at each end of the building and about 12 feet from the floor.

Each gallery is protected along its bottom by a sheet of four-foot high steel plating, then by steel bars.

Each of the two-gun gallery guards carries a rifle and a .45-caliber automatic with 20 rounds of ammunition for both guns.

There are other guards on the floor of the building, but they carry no weapons, not even clubs. (These men apparently were the ones seized as hostages.)

### **ONLY FOUR GUNS**

To get at a gun guard, the convicts would have had to shove a table used by the floor guards as a desk over to the wall, climb up on it, take the man in the gallery by surprise somehow, slug him and then grab his weapons.

O'Hearn failed to see how this would have been done before floor guards or the second gun guard could have acted. But even granting that both gallery guards were overcome and stripped of their weapons, he pointed out that they would have given the convicts only two rifles and two pistols, with a total of 80 shots.

To lay hands on additional weapons, O'Hearn went on, it would have been absolutely necessary for the convicts to get out of the building and all reports say they never broke free of the place.

He explained: There would be two sources for more guns, the gun towers spotted at strategic locations over the island and the prison armory, which is located to the right of the main entrance to the cell building, and outside of it. There is no way to reach either a gun tower or the armory from inside the structure.

## TOWERS COVERED

A gun tower guard is equipped with a rifle, a .45 automatic, a machine gun and gas grenades. Each tower is covered by at least one other gun tower. Guards passing from the armory, where they get their weapons, to the towers to change watches, are in sight of a guard post constantly. So are the guards who leave the towers when their watches end and return to the armory to surrender their weapons.

The armory, itself, O'Hearn went on, then is in gun tower range. Also the guard who is stationed there to receive and hand out weapons is locked in and does business through a narrow steel wicket.

Finally, O'Hearn pointed out, to leave the cell building the convicts would have had to pass through the "sallyport" an arrangement of two steel doors operated by a guard on the outside who uses a small peephole in the outer door to identify anyone trying to get out. "It certainly should be foolproof," O'Hearn concluded. "There must be something we don't know about yet."

Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 4 May 1946, page 4.

Bloody Rebellion at Alcatraz Is Over; Reporter Writes From Battle Scene; Warden Tells Just How It Happened

By Stanton Delaplane

INSIDE ALCATRAZ, May 4-Warden James A. Johnston is telling his own story tonight. How two-man electrical locks stopped Rufus "Whitey" Franklin, the escape artist. How a lost key and a bullet-ducking gun guard stopped a long-planned escape.

How Bernard Coy "monkey-climbed" the gun galleries and spread the bars with a home-made spreader-made of brass toilet parts.

It's the first press conference on The Rock. And at the finish Johnston and Director James Bennett led a tour through the cell blocks, nerve-tight with the aftermath of the revolt.

"Hey, Saltwater Johnston," yelled the cons. "Tell 'em how you starved us for two days!" Johnston paid no attention.

In his own office, still littered with steel operating equipment, white-haired Warden Johnston fought the three-day battle over again.

About 2:30 Thursday afternoon I got a ring from the armorer and he said: "There's some trouble in the cell house. I don't know what it is, but I think it's bad."

"I said: 'If you think it's bad, kick on the siren.' That means every man on the reservation, on duty or off arms himself and comes running. Well, I am having lunch, but I grabbed my hat and was over in a jiffy.

"First thing I met was Associate Warden Miller coming out of the cell house. His eyes were watery and his face was black like you'd blacked it with lamp black. He said: 'There's somebody loose with a gun. ,

"Do you know who it is?' I asked. He said:

"I think it's Coy.'

"What happened to you?' I asked him.

"I heard there was some trouble,' Miller said. 'On the way in I grabbed a gas billy (a gas billy, the warden explained is a club that you can use to club with or shoot out tear gas). I thought I saw an officer, but it was Coy.

"He said: "You son of a bitch, I'm going to kill you!"

"Then he shot the gas billy back, bursting in my face.

Miller told the warden he had given the alarm.

"I can't raise the west gun gallery," said Miller.

"So we figured," Warden Johnston continued, "that Coy must have the gun in that gallery."

In the high-ceilinged cement walls of the cell block, Johnston showed what he meant.

The cells run three tiers high. There are three sets of tiers in one room, Blocks A, B and C.

In another room, narrow and adjoining, is Block D. It is cut off by cement walls, lanced by a pair of locked doors.

Block D is for bad boys. Escape artists-solitary. Across the whole building, crossways at the end, runs the gun gallery.

The gun gallery is two levels high behind solid steel bars. It is completely away from the cell tiers, a catwalk stuck on the side of the wall.

From this lookout walk, the gun guard-the only man in the room with a gun--commands the long sweeping corridors between cell tiers.

"Now when we put a man in there, he goes in from the outside," said Johnston. "You can't get in from the inside. You go from outside the building. A lieutenant in charge takes the relief guard through two doors. The first is barred. The second is solid steel with a bullet-proof view.

"You can't get in. But Coy did. We found that out tonight."

Here's how Coy did it:

Coy was a floor sweeper outside the cells.

"He must have been planning this for a long time he and Cretzer."

"The first thing these men do is case the joint. They case every guard looking for a weak place. They had Burch cased.

## **HOW COY DID IT**

"The gun gallery has a door between the big room of A, B and C blocks and D block too. Burch went through that door on his regular rounds---I want to emphasize that he was doing his regular duty. He went through the door and closed it on the lower level of the gun gallery. He was then in D block.

"Coy was working on the floor in the big cell block room.

"When no floor guard was looking, Coy just swarmed up those steel bars clear to the roof. You can see up there how the bars curve over, basket shaped at the top.

"Where those bars were curved, they were easiest to bend. They are cross barred all the way up, you can see that. See?" said Johnston, pointing up to the gun galleries.

"Oh, Saltwater Johnston," sang a con from the cell house above. "Are the street cars still running in Frisco, Johnston?"

Johnston paid no attention. Above the floor guards moved around the catwalks outside the tiers.

"Coy had a home-made spreader made out of rods and screws from a toilet. Nobody knows how long he had it. Months maybe. He had a pair of pliers.

"When he put the ends of the rod between the bars and twisted the nut, it forced the ends and the bars apart. He managed to spread these bars from five inches to seven inches with an 15 inch crosshatch." (The steel bars are cross-barred.)

"He ran down the ladder to the lower level. When the guard came back, he just slugged him."

Coy then seized Burch's rifle and .45.

Then he climbed back out the same way."

"Well, we didn't know whether the man on duty up there, Burch, was dead or alive. It was difficult to know what thing you'd do first.

### **CRETZER FREED**

"What had happened was Coy stuck up the floor guards and threw them in a cell. Then with Burch's keys, he got into D block and stuck up the floor guards there.

"He opened the doors for Cretzer, who got the .45 pistol.

"He let 19-year-old Carnes out. He let out Sam Shockley and Hubbard and I don't know how many more were running around loose. There were about 30 men in the big cell room and about the same in "D" block. All the tough guys in there.

"Coy ran to the kitchen window, sticking up Guard Stucker. Stucker made a break from the kitchen and got into the basement where he locked himself in with 18 cons.

### **FIRED ON TOWER**

"Coy began firing at the gun towers. You see if they could knock out two towers, they had a clear run to the boats through the back door that leads into the yard.

"The guards ducked and they missed.

Meantime, Johnston was radioing San Francisco police and the Coast Guard for help. A hundred and fifty prisoners in laundries and shops were herded into the yard. Cretzer and Coy could see them through the locked back door-through the slit.

Stucker, from the prison basement, reported that Cretzer had the .45. He ran out of the way while Coy was shooting up the gun towers.

"Stucker said he could handle the 18 in the basement all right. Stucker handled himself magnificently, I want to say that.

"We got six prisoners herded that were in the kitchen. Dr. Clark, a relief doctor and Dr. Farr, the dentist, were holed up with prisoners in the hospital. We couldn't get to them. We told them to stuff the keyhole and sit tight.

## **OUT OF CONTROL**

"Our gun gallery was out of control. You can see the way it commands everything," said Johnston pointing along the corridors.

"Tell de truth, de whole truth and nothing but de truth, Johnston," said a convict grinning through the bars alongside.

"We sent Guards Stites, Cochrane, Oldham, Mahan, Lieutenant Frank and Lieutenant Bergen to fight their way into the gun gallery from the outside entrance," Johnston went on.

"Two men were to open the doors of the gun gallery and cover a man who was to enter.

"In 15 minutes we had to send a stretcher to bring Stites out. We just got him on the floor and before you could tell whether he was dead or alive, they brought Cochrane out shot in the shoulder.

## **"THEY COULDN'T MISS"**

"We just got around to ripping the coat off Cochrane when they brought Mr. Maxwell out. His face was covered with blood. He said while he was covering Stites, he tried to shoot through the bulletproof window slit and a ricochet hit him.

"Oldham, who was covering Stites, got shot himself.

"When Stites opened that door he was silhouetted at 30 feet. They couldn't miss. They were covering the doors.

"Burch was lying up in the gun gallery behind the shield that covers the lower half of the lower tier. They had stripped his uniform off him and Coy was wearing the coat.

"Cretzer took two shots at him, saying: 'I'll kill you if you try to reach that phone!'"

"They were in control of D block. But they missed the man they wanted, Rufus "Whitey" Franklin.

"We know one man went with them Sam Shockley. There were a dozen gas billies up in the gun gallery and they threw those down. Carnes had a knife he got in the kitchen.

"Cretzer knew the electrical system, all right, but he couldn't get somebody to work it with him.. In D block, the lower tier of cells is controlled so that two men have to pull separate switches to open them.

"When they couldn't get Franklin, Cretzer said: 'Well, that ---it all up.'"

"Then he tried to find a key to the yard door. Guard Miller had thrown it away when he saw they were in trouble.

"Burch in the gallery heard Cretzer say:

"Well, that does it up. San Francisco is just as far away as ever."

At the first hint of trouble, Johnston said, they had sent four men on the run. The men were unarmed, since guards do not carry guns into the block-only into the gun gallery.

## **GUARDS LOCKED UP**

As they rounded the cell tiers, the convicts simply stuck up the guards and threw them in a cell. They had Burch cornered in the gun gallery, three floor guards in one cell, four rescue guards in another.

The still blood-splattered cells are side by side at the end of C block, just below the gun gallery ..

"By that time, they had altogether Coy, Cretzer, Comes, Tex Thompson, Marvin Hubbard and we don't know how many more running around.

"They couldn't get the key away from Miller. That's why they shot him. The rest they shot up to get rid of witnesses.

"Cretzer made Sundstrom strip of this clothes in the cell. As he started to take off his pants, his wallet fell out. Cretzer picked it up. It had \$92 in it. Cretzer took it out and threw the wallet back in the cell.

"You can call this highway robbery,' he said.

"Then he stuck the .45 between the bars and said, 'You sons of bitches, we will kill you now,' and started shooting.

## **THE RESCUE**

"We could see the door to D block-between the combined A, B, C blocks and the D block-was open. We had to send unarmed men in to close it. We just couldn't take a chance of their getting another gun.

"Those men had to walk the whole length of the cells, through the corridors, they brought out those wounded men.

"The cells from which they took them are 15 feet from the open D block door where the convicts held the block.

All of the men were conscious when they got out. Sundstrom who was missed by Cretzer's fire and played dead, walked out. So did Bristow. The rest were dragged out. Warden Johnston displayed a scrap of white paper, penciled by Sundstrom as he lay on the floor of the cell. It reads:

"Cretzer killed or shot Joe Simpson in the stomach and chest twice and shot Beker also. He missed me so far." Then Sundstrom signed his name.

## **SHOT IN THE BACK**

"Well," said Warden Johnston. "We learned the story from those men we brought out.

"We figured the man with the rifle was in D block. But we sent in another officer, Fred Roberts, and he was shot in the back. And from the line of fire, it could only have come from 'C' block in the big, three block room.

"We got Roberts out and sent him to the hospital.

"Maxwell washed the blood of his face and kept going.

"The unarmed men who rescued the guards closed the door into D block."

Warden Johnston made little mention of what it took for the guards who went unarmed in the dim light into those cell blocks.

## **THE MARINES ARRIVE**

At one point a flash globe exploded with a firecracker pop. Everybody jumped and then roared with laughter.

"The Marines asked if we wanted help, and when I said I could use 20 men to guard the prisoners in the yard, they came over zigzagging like it was Iwo Jima or something. They helped a lot."

"This Marine Buckner said he could help us with some stuff. So he got some grenades and we figured out the angles, while Miller covered him with a rifle. He had to lob the stuff over one tier and drop it on the next.

"By Friday morning, we began dropping stuff down the utility corridors in C block where we figured some of these men were holed up."

Warden Johnston explained, pointing it out, while Alcatraz cons called "Saltwater" in the upper tiers.

## **HOW CONVICTS FIRED**

A block consists of three double tiers of cells, facing away from each other. Between them runs a narrow corridor through which run steam and water pipes that feed the cells on either side. The corridor is open all the way up through the tiers.

By hiding at the bottom between walls, the convicts kept out of fire. When the fire slacked off, they climbed the water pipes to outlets on upper tiers. From those tiers they fired on guards and then dropped down again.

## **"SOME LOST THEIR NERVE"**

"We got the men in from the yard and locked them up," said Johnston. "And we got help from other Federal prisons, some guards flown in to relieve our men who were worn out. We got Thompson and Shockley and Carnes. They lost their nerve and got back in their cells when they saw it was all up. They're in solitary now saying they didn't have a thing to do with it.

"We knew Coy and Hubbard and Cretzer were in the C block utility corridor, still able to get up in the tiers and fire. We stationed guards at each end where steel doors close the corridors. One man would jerk the door open and we'd fire a shotgun blast down the corridor. Then we'd slam the door.

"Between times we dropped fragmentation grenades right down in there.

"This morning we started shortly after daylight about 7:30 to go in, one officer pulling the door open and two blasting down the corridor.

## **THE BODIES**

At 9:45, officers went crawling into the dark over the pits (the floor of the corridor is simply cross beams, four feet apart with a 30-inch drop between beams. The corridor is about two and a half feet wide).

"At about that time," said Johnston, "we pulled out Coy. He was like this (Johnston put his hands up as though holding a rifle.) The rifle was beside him and rigor mortis had set in.

He was still wearing the guard's coat.

"A few feet beyond we found Cretzer with the pistol beside him.

"We think they were both dead last night.

"Hubbard we found off by himself. He was last to die. I suppose he lay there all night waiting for it. He was still limp.

"Coy must have escaped a shotgun blast just as he was getting ready to fire.

"Cretzer had three keys in his pocket and the .45

"All they had at any time was a rifle with 50 rounds and a pistol with 21 rounds. They threw down gas masks and billies from the gun gallery but they didn't have any more guns.

## **"LET'S GET OUT OF HERE"**

"Until tonight we thought Coy snaked that gun out through the bars of the gallery some way. We just found the spread bars.

"One bystander convict was wounded, a man named James Groves."

Director of Prisons Bennett accompanied the party through the cells where convicts were reading, most of them on their bunks. He said the prison was "tight." "You'd be nervous too." The walls are somewhat marked with fire and the blood stained blankets are lying on the bunks where Cretzer shot up the guards. Nobody went into D block. It was still too hot, they said. "Sometimes they get started throwing stuff through the bars." Another gun guard walked along the catwalk where Burch was slugged.

A few cons crowded the bars to see the flashlights go off

Yelled one: "Hey, Saltwater, you gonna get your pitcher [sic] in the papers?"

"Let's get out of here," said Bennett.

The first press conference on Alcatraz was over.

Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 5 May 1946, pages 1 and 8.

Battle of Alcatraz: The Warden's Report

One Rifle and One Pistol Was Prisoners' Arsenal; Three Ringleaders Killed.

A Mass Break Had Been Plotted, But Went Awry at the Outset. Coy Pried Bars to Seize the Guns

by Alvin D. Hyman

The revolt on The Rock is stamped out. Its leaders are dead.

Its supporters are back in their cells and for the first time in three days and nights its battleground is still.

That was the word that came directly from Alcatraz Island at night as Warden James A. Johnston drew aside the curtain which has hidden his domain since its establishment. For the first time in 12 years he invited the press into the Federal penitentiary.

Hours earlier shortly after noon the warden had dispatched a hurried telegram to the mainland to say that the three days of fighting had ended. He disclosed that the three ringleaders, Bernard Paul Coy, Joseph Paul Cretzer, and Marvin Franklin Hubbard had perished violently in pursuit of their foolhardy dreams of escape.

What he left unsaid had stirred a welter of surmise and conjecture. To replace these with facts, he called in the press, and for the first time afforded a comprehensive, connected version of the uprising and its end.

From his narrative emerged these facts:

1. The entire three-day battle was waged by a handful of convicts who at no time had more than one rifle and one pistol. They got those arms by surprising and slugging a gun guard.
2. It began as a scheme for mass escape, engineered by Cretzer, the San Francisco cop killer, and spearheaded by Coy, a seemingly mild and inoffensive convict swamper.
3. It lost a major part of its drive at the very outset, when Cretzer and Coy balked by a piece of the prison's escape-proofing, were unable to liberate the man on whom they banked for guidance and help--Rufus "Whitey" Franklin, guard killer, and escape artist.
4. In full realization that their game was up, Cretzer and Coy played out their losing hand.
5. In accordance with their code, they "went out first class." All three died fighting, Coy and Cretzer late Friday night, Hubbard early yesterday morning.

Step by step, the warden detailed the course of the three-day battle.

He recounted that one guard found himself trapped in the basement of the cell house, adjacent to the murderous fighting, with 18 prisoners. His name was Stucker," said the warden. "He kept those prisoners down there through all three days of battle."

He told how Dr. Clark, an interne, and Dr. Farr, a dentist, locked themselves in the dispensary on an upper floor and stayed there till the fighting ended.

And he related how Harold Stites, veteran guard died while attempting to rush into the gun gallery to rescue a fallen fellow guard.

Johnston unfolded his circumstantial narrative some eight hours after his first telegram, signaling the end of the revolt.

Warden Johnston's message made it clear that the battle by that time had settled into a mopping up operation.

"We are continuing to search the utility corridor," he telegraphed The Chronicle. "We are making checks of all the prisoners, cell by cell, which will take considerable time. It seems quite certain that no prisoner has escaped so far."

Within a few hours, word came from the island that the checkup was completed. All convicts were accounted for. One, identity withheld, had a minor wound. That with the three deaths, was the entire list of convict casualties.

The warden asserted his forces suffered no further casualties after the first violent, frenzied hour of the revolt. Then Cretzer and Coy and their cohorts had herded unarmed

prison attaches into two cells, had savagely slugged and kicked them and fired into them in cold blood.

Two had died. Thirteen others had been wounded.

The battle ended in its third day as James V. Bennett, boss of all Federal prisons, set foot on the island to lead an investigation. Bennett, who flew in from Washington, announced shortly after reaching Alcatraz around noon.

"I believe the revolt is practically over. Actual fighting has stopped."

He added: "We are sure that fighting has stopped. We have complete control. We have accounted for the weapons that the prisoners used."

Those weapons were one rifle and one pistol, which Coy snatched up after felling Bert Burch, prison guard with the aid of a draughtsman's T-square.

With that comparatively modest armament, provisioned with some 75 rounds of ammunition, the insurrectionists had stood off for a day or more all the resources the prison could muster.

This they contrived by establishing their position in the dark cluttered corridor, a tunnel-like passage with a door at either end of an almost impregnable spot.

At its height, Bennett estimated the leaders had rallied between 25 and 30 men around them. But as the first enthusiasm withered under the bursting of grenades, many withdrew, returned to their cells, and saw it only as spectators. Others surrendered shortly before discovery of the three rigid bodies sealed the end of the rebellion.

## **WIVES RETURN**

Other news trickling out of the suddenly stilled battlefield disclosed that Burch, the victim of Coy's slugging, has fully recovered and back on duty, that nine FBI agents were questioning guards and about to tackle the job of squeezing information out of "dummied up" convicts; that a dentist, doctor and record clerk who had been in a position tantamount to hostages, were released and unharmed.

These dribbles of information came as a boatload of Alcatraz wives, hustled ashore at the inception of hostilities, returned to their island homes.

Their transfer from the island was standard procedure, invoked against the wild scheme that underlies almost every Alcatraz escape plot: Get down to the living quarters, grab the guard's families as hostages, and use them to bargain for a guaranteed getaway.

Some wives, it was reported, had been unable to travel to the mainland and had been kept locked in their homes throughout the turmoil.

The third and last day of the uprising produced so little activity as to suggest that authorities believed well in advance of their entrance into the utility corridor that hostilities were at an end.

Guards, pacing the catwalk alongside the cell-house, no longer moved furtively, hugging the walls.

They seemed to saunter, and they carried their rifles casually.

### **A SINGLE SHOT**

Shortly before 8 a.m., a group of six Marines paraded along the catwalk and set up a ladder. A man in prison uniform mounted it and peered through a barred window-the window around which Friday's prolonged firing of rifle-grenades had centered.

Then he called for a rifle. He sighted it upward, through the window, and fired a single shot. Then the ladder was moved to the next window, and again the prison attache made a careful inspection. Window after window received this treatment, but no further firing occurred.

Apparently satisfied with their findings, the group withdrew, and shortly afterward, the entire detachment of Marines returned to the mainland.

At 9:20 a.m., there was a sudden burst of gunfire inside the cellhouse. Listeners counted a dozen shots. Then silence spread over the island until 10:40, when three more shots sounded.

Those were the last fired in the Battle of the Rock. Within an hour, Warden Johnston was flashing his announcement that the leaders were dead and the fight over.

Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 5 May 1946, pages 1 and 4.