

## ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY MARCH 20



**On March 20, 1973, inmates staged a riot at the West Virginia Penitentiary in Moundsville.**

**CSO: SS.8.25, ELA.8.1, ELA.8.6, ELA.8.32**

**Investigate the Document:** (*Moundsville Daily Echo*, March 20, 1973)

1. What type of article is this (eye-witness account, straight news article, feature article, editorial, column, reader contribution)?
2. What information is highlighted by the headline?
3. Who was the governor that was mentioned in the article?
4. "How can I act like a man when they treat me like a dog?" Does this quote from one of the inmates have significance to you? What does it say to you as a reader?
5. What was the state legislature considering at the time of the prison riot?

**Think Critically:** What do you think should be the ultimate goal of the state when imprisoning someone? Do you see a need for prison reform in the United States? What demands do you think the prisoners might have had? What is the best way for prisoners to express their displeasure with conditions? What rights do prisoners have? What type of living conditions should they expect?

### 305 MOUNDSVILLE DAILY ECHO

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# 40 Convicts Hold 5 Guards Hostage



COMMAND POST— Acting Warden William O. Wallace can be seen inside the little watch-shelter that is labelled "Tower 7" in the prison front yard. Here, he can watch the south front where the disturbance is audible, and still be in instant telephone contact. The huge crowd of officers gathered around the institution, includes W. Va. State Police head, Col. Robert L. Borar.

1:30 p.m.— Norman Yost, administrative assistant to Governor Moore, arrived here at one o'clock, to begin negotiations with the three dozen hardcore convicts who are holding five guards hostage.

He went inside briefly with Acting Warden William O. Wallace for a briefing.

Then Yost and Wallace came outside, walked down the yard to the broken window thru which the convicts have been shouting out, and began talking. The convict inside who talked with them was Gene Jarvis, listed as one of the ringleaders. Yost asked them to send two men under safe-conduct to the office to negotiate. The reply was yes, in 30 minutes. It was apparent that the ringleaders would not be the ones to go and they would have to brief their emissaries.

At noon today, the penitentiary was a fortress, with some 175 officers gathered around the "new walls" south of the new lower entrance, where some 40 maximum - security prisoners are holding five guards hostage and threatening to kill them.

It began about eleven this morning, while guards had the maximum security prisoners out of their quarters for a bathing session. It was reported that Convict Davis, who has been in the news for various acts of violence, jumped a guard, got his keys, and the group of convicts was in control.

Maximum security men are temporarily being housed in the long ellblock south of the control center entrance, while the prison is being remodelled — eventually they will be in North Hall in a section with its own walled-off exercise yard.

They barricaded themselves inside this hall section, and convicts who did not want to take part in the disturbance stayed out in the yard east of the enclosed hall. City police later were seen taking two convicts to hospital and five to the county jail (one would presume to park them there for protection from other convicts.)

They sent out word that if either guns or tear gas were used on them, the guards would be killed. But up to noon, the guards had not been hurt.

Acting Warden William O. Wallace set up a "command post" in "Tower 7", the little white sentry box in the front yard in front of the control center entrance, which affords a clear view of the entire front wall, and has a telephone thru which he could talk anywhere.

Soon, windows began breaking out all along the Jefferson avenue front. By noon, 15 of the 24 tall windows south of the entrance, had at least some panes broken out.

(These are the front windows of the long hall that has inside it, free-standing cell blocks 3 stories high, with narrow walkways on each story, attached to the cell blocks. There is perhaps ten feet of space between the front window-wall and the cell blocks.)

Then voices began to bellow out thru the broken windows:

"When are you going to send in the newspaper people to talk to us?"

It was an unusual opportunity for convicts to talk directly to the public, not afforded in most prisons even when those other prisons are out of control. Citizens, men and woman, got a load of the foulest talk there is. Apparently some of them must feel they are in the hardcore lockup for sex offenses, because some of the shouting said if women were sent in, there wouldn't be so many homosexuals.

One could see a man apparently standing on another man's shoulders (the window sills are that high off the main floor) waving a shiny knife perhaps a foot long. Some of his more printable shoutings were:

"How can I act like a man when they treat me like a dog?"

As he saw the Echo camera pointed toward him, he said:

"Don't take a picture of us, we're nice people. Take those pigs out front. Oink, oink."

"Nobody knows what I've gone thru for five years. . . . I've been here five years and haven't had a decent meal yet." (The Echo reporter has eaten inside the walls several times, in the convicts' dining room, found the food good and wholesome.)

"If any of us gets hurt, the guards will have to go."

Then smoke began to appear, and the fire truck arrived. Mr. Wallace said it was apparently something in the basement under that section, and was not too bad, and would burn itself out. But the firemen did hook up lines to two hydrants.

The electric company was called, and disconnected the power feed to the walls— this apparently was to reduce possibility of damage to new installations. But the loss of power made it necessary to turn the "wheel" by hand, and the other gate interlocks were impossible to operate, which made it difficult to get in and out.

But they were able to get out two injured convicts, one with a knife broken off inside him.

At noon today, matters stood with the 5 guards still hostage, unhurt, and the rioters demanding a conference with Wallace and Governor Moore's administrative assistant Norman Yost who has been in close touch with the prison's problems. Yost was hurrying here for that conference.

### —May Be Tied to Trial—

The convicts happened to time their outbreak to the moment that the state legislature is considering restoring capital punishment for in-prison killers, an offense that now cannot be punished if an inmate is already doing a life sentence for something else.

There was a suggestion it was triggered by the transferral here from Maryland of John Koton who claims to be a witness to last year's in-walls murder of Guard William Quilliams. Inmate Bobby Gene Jarvis who is to be tried for that murder, was reported to have been the next man after Davis to get loose this morning, and to be the one who let some 17 prisoners out of cells.

In Charleston, Governor Arch A. Moore said he would not make any decision on whether to fly up here, till the outcome of his assistant Yost's visit is known.

This follows a smaller disturbance last week, in which the Echo was told several convicts were roughed up.