

INMATES FREE 3 GUARDS AND END TAKEOVER

By HILLARY STRAUS in Pine City, N.Y.
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Three guards taken hostage at the state's toughest prison were freed yesterday, ending a 26-hour prisoner uprising.

Atrocities against the hostage guards were reported by witnesses. All three freed hostages were hospitalized.

Inmates ended the siege after being allowed to go on a local TV station to be interviewed about allegedly brutal conditions at the Southport Correctional Facility Special Housing Unit.

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The takeover at the ultra-maximum-security prison 90 miles northwest of New York City began Tuesday at noon, when inmates in cell block A, who had been allowed into the prison yard for their one-hour recreation period, used homemade knives to free six guards hostage.

Three guards who suffered injuries in the siege were released hours later.

The remaining three were allowed to leave the prison between 1 and 2:21 p.m. yesterday, said state Correction Commissioner Thomas Coughlin.

The inmates, who received no food during the siege, agreed to go back to their cells after the interviews about prison conditions were broadcast over loudspeakers. Coughlin said a local district attorney will investi-

gate the takeover and charges will be brought.

Four correction officers, who were inside the prison when the takeover began but managed to elude capture, told a reporter they watched as the abducted guards were stripped, blindfolded and handcuffed, had chains placed around their necks and were dragged to several cells.

At least one hostage was forced to eat excrement, three of the witnessing guards said. One of the guards was stabbed in the back of his leg, the witnesses added.

The witnesses asked that their identities not be revealed.



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KEEPING A CLOSE WATCH: A state trooper has a high-powered rifle ready as he peers through binoculars to follow the progress of the takeover.

James Flateau, a spokesman for the state Correctional Services Department, confirmed that the hostage-takers used chains, blindfolds and handcuffs, but he would not comment on the witnesses' other claims.

Dennis Middaugh, a field representative for Council 86, the union representing the guards, claimed that a letter from an inmate had been passed to guards Sunday stating there would be a riot on Tuesday.

Gov. Cuomo ordered an immediate investigation, saying, "For now, we can all be satisfied that the confrontation has been defused without loss of life. The crisis has ended."

But the newly revamped prison is a powderkeg that could re-explode if conditions do not change, union officials and inmates' attorneys agreed.

The high-profile, reduced number of guards watching over inmates locked in stifling isolation cells 23 hours a day.

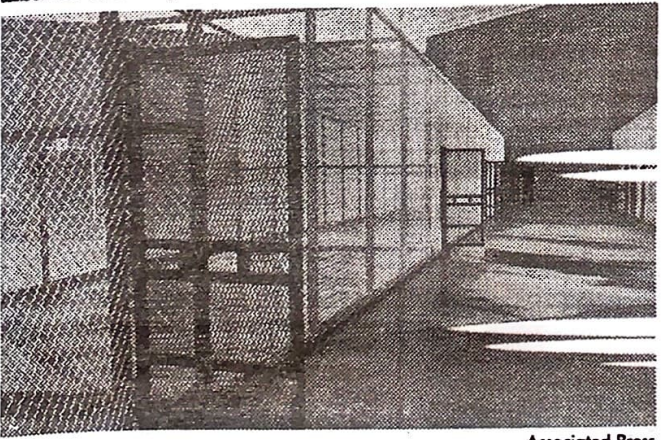
"It doesn't make sense, to concentrate all the trouble-makers in one place and reduce the number of guards," said Tom Terrizzi of Prisoners Legal Services in Ithaca.

Three Southport inmates have sued the prison in federal court, claiming mis-



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ON THE INSIDE: Inmates not directly involved in the takeover.



Associated Press

OPEN CAGES: Inmates began their rebellion in the Special Housing Unit.