

THE GAUNTLET WAR

An Story Untold - That Is - Until Now

Our Case for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: PTSD

PART I

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To the California Board of Parole Hearing

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I was released from Solitary Confinement/Isolation in November of 2015 after serving 32 plus years in Solitary Confinement/Isolation; 25 of those years in Isolation were spent at the notorious Pelican Bay State Prison (PBSP), with no direct sunlight, and under constant psychological and physical torture, which encompasses extreme sensory deprivation.

Before I could acclimate to my new surroundings, I was immediately bombarded with various questions and/or requests. Many have asked how did I survive all those years in Isolation? I often tell people, I am still fighting the effects of long-term Isolation, e.g. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Many Prison Rights Activists have suggested that I need to allow someone to write my story, and since my release from Solitary Confinement I been receiving multiple requests from people who had expressed interest in writing my story, but I declined, with no explanation.

I have taken this opportunity to write a brief story about an “untold” story. Very little has been written about the Gauntlet War; not many of us who have survived the Gauntlet War, are still around. There are many Prisoners from these new generations who believe that the Gauntlet War was an old story manufactured by older convicts to scare them. So I have been asked about this war because those who have told this story have used my name to verify their story.

The Gauntlet War is in fact true, not a myth. Many of the survivors of this war have for the past 30 years or more debated over whether this story should be told, and if so how? How can we tell our story without exposing names and/or tactical applications which includes unknown information? I have conveyed to my Comrades, for the most part, at least 98% of the events pertaining to the Gauntlet War is still public information, it is well documented, but I believe, if we keep it concise, and only provide a constructive synopsis of the particulars, we can present a comprehensive schematic and guarded description of the Gauntlet War. This was a war that left both Prisoners and prison guards seriously injured or dead. Though I have chosen not to elaborate on the direct role prison guards and administration had directly played in the Gauntlet War, it would be better served in a separate platform. Telling this story I believe will also put to rest, once and for all, the notion that we Prisoners do not suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

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Though the methods of violence I will cautiously describe are common in both the state and federal prison systems throughout the country, it was at San Quentin State Prison (SQ) between 1983 and 1985 where these methods of violence became tactical instruments in a brutal and unforgiven battle known as Tier Warfare. In the old prisons, such as San Quentin State Prison, the tiers were very narrowed, so narrowed that one was able to touch both sides of the tier without fully extending one's arms, thus transforming the tiers into deadly gauntlets; nowhere to escape the onslaught of deadly attacks.

SQ had required that every Prisoner who was in the hole had to be hand cuffed behind their backs every time they left their cells, so there was no way to effectively defend yourself against any potential deadly attacks.

The following are just an example of some of the types of weapons that were used in the Gauntlet War; each weapon had the potential to cause serious injuries, if not death. Every Prisoner involved in the Gauntlet War had to learn how to manufacture and use each weapon:

1. Spear.
2. Crossbow.
3. Zip gun.
4. Occasionally a real gun.
5. Bombs: These bombs were made from both gunpowder and matchheads, and in some cases C-4 plastic explosive. These bombs were packed with prison made shrapnel. For example: small birdshots from shotgun shells fired at us by the prison guards, glass, small rocks, staples, and sometimes the heads of real bullets.
6. Blow darts tipped with bacteria (e.g. fecal matter).
7. Boiled water mixed with oil.
8. Incendiary Bombs.

There existed three (3) extremely dangerous elements that validated the Gauntlet War at San Quentin State Prison (SQ) as the most deadly. I will briefly describe each one:

1. Though we were in the hole, the Administration had initially allowed certain prisoners out to clean up the tiers. Each tier had its own Tier workers (i.e. tier Tenders). C-Section had five tiers, but the 4th and 5th tier. S was Death Row. The Tier Tenders were also active in the Gauntlet War. Keep in mind every time we left our cells we were cuffed up behind our backs, but the Tier Tenders were not cuffed. Tier Tenders were also accused of running in the shower and stabbing their opposition while they were also in the shower. In one incident a Tier Tender ran up to three different cells and shot at each occupant with a zip gun. Tier Tenders have also been accused of attacking other prisoners as they leave their cells cuffed behind their backs; even some of the Tier tenders were speared while they worked on the tiers. The Administration eventually banned Tier tenders from working the tiers in C-section.

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2. We (i.e. New Afrikan) Prisoners showered on the days when the Mexican and White Prisoners went to the exercise yard, and on those days, when we went to the exercise yard, they went to the shower. Many Prisoners were accused of not going back to their cell, but instead they would stand in front of their opposition's cell and act like it was their cell and the guard would let them in your cell while you are on the yard. Then when you come back from the exercise yard, you are placed back into your cell with your hands cuffed behind your back; before you can get your handcuffs off, your opposition would jump out from under your bed with a knife and attack you while your hands were still cuffed behind your back.
3. The Cut-out: The Cut-Out was considered one of the most deadly attack methods used in the Gauntlet War. The first tier was considered a blind spot; the lower gun-walk was not able to see your entire body, thus leaving blind spots. Every group would send their smallest soldiers to the first tier and once they acquired a target they would then cut two to three of their cell bars and remove them. They would then squeeze out of their cell and attack their target with a knife while he was still cuffed behind his back.

Though C-Section in SQ was the primary battlefield for the Gauntlet War, the battlefield was also in East Block and D-Section, both at San Quentin State Prison. East Block was known as "Little Vietnam"; bombs would go off at least two to three times a week. We could hear the bombs from C-Section. Without going into details, there were ways one could throw a bomb in your opposition's cells late at night. These bombs had the potential to maim or even kill (Note: The Administration had banned matches from the hole after a Prisoner got his hand blown off when he allegedly attempted to throw a bomb into the cell of his opposition (the fuse was too short). In 1984 I had a bomb tossed in my cell late at night, around 2:30 a.m., I knew it was coming. The day before that night, one of my Comrades got shot by a zip gun, so I knew that I was going to be next. I sat on my bed with my mattress rolled up as a shield against the attack. I saw a pole with a mirror on it looking into my cell and knew it was coming. The bomb fell into my cell, but it did not get on my bed, but it was still a powerful bomb. It was loud. My ear was ringing, and my comrades were calling out to me, but it was hard for me to hear them due to the ringing in my ears. I eventually was able to yelled back to them in Swahili letting them know that I was alright, my leg was bleeding, but I was good.

When a bomb went off, staff was required to walk the tier to check on each cell, but most of the time they didn't, they are trying not to get caught up in the middle of a secondary bomb explosion, but on this night, the guard did make the required walk; he saw all the smoke coming from my cell and the debris on the ground and asked me how was I doing and if I needed any medical attention? I told him no. Back then, if your injuries were not serious, you denied being injured. After this incident, staff moved me to the very last cell (59), this would require me to walk the entire Gauntlet, a deliberate set - up, no doubt?

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Note: D-Section in SQ was also deadly. The Gauntlet War in that section had produced some serious injuries, but it was C-Section that most Prisoners and Guards alike feared entering. At that time, C-Section was considered the most dangerous unit in the country.

The Gauntlet War was a racial war; New Afrikan/Black Prisoners and Mexican Prisoners from Northern California vs Mexican Prisoners from Southern California and White Prisoners.

This synopsis was not designed to tell the complete story of the Gauntlet War; many of us who have survived the Gauntlet War are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), not to mention, being shell shocked. There is no way one can survive the Gauntlet War and not suffer from PTSD. Many of us were living in a constant state of extreme stress for months, if not years. We were in a constant state of intense Hyper Vigilance. Every time we left our cells, there existed the potential to be attacked or killed by one of the many methods I have listed.

1985 marked the end of the Gauntlet War. A correctional Sgt. was speared to death in C-Section, and this led to dramatic changes within the California Department of Corrections (CDCR) as a direct result of the Gauntlet War. All Staff and prison guards are now required to wear protective vests; many of them are unaware of the reasons behind wearing the vests. In 1984 the Gauntlet War got so bad in C - Section, the CDC/Government declared a state of emergency; officers were required to wear towels around their necks to avoid being speared in the neck; they were also required to wear helmets and carry protective shields, they were also instructed to escort us behind the protective shields, but we protested, all races came together and told Administration that we refuse to be escorted behind protective shields, we would rather take our chances. Looking back at that decision, we were obviously suffering from some form shellshock, numbed to the danger that lurked around us, or to our potential demise.

When I recently went to the Parole Board (2019), the Board had recognized the spike of violence in my central files, along with the possession of knives, zip guns, hacksaw blades, as well as cutting on my cell bars; none of these Board members were around during the Gauntlet War, and they looked at me as if I was telling a manufactured story. I attempted to explain to them the reason for the spike between 1983 and 1985. I was trying to survive – stay alive, but they did not want to hear about that. Now, I agree with the majority, the Gauntlet War story needs to be exposed and shared with the people, also a copy will be sent to the parole Board.

I am an imprisoned activist, committed towards the uplift of my community; I don't claim any perfection, but my undying love for my People compels me to give my time towards making this world a better place for them to live. I never deny the fact that I struggle everyday not to surrender to the seduction of insanity, an escape from the demons that stalk my peace in the darkest of night, but it is the love that I have for Humanity that keeps me from capitulating.

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I am a soldier and survivor of the Gauntlet War. I survived the Quiet/stripped cells. I survived Bedrock and being placed on an exercise yard by myself with approximately 24 alleged Neo-Nazis. Fortunately for me, they did not play into the administrations hands. I survived The Gladiator Games of Corcoran State Prison in 1989. I survived being one of the most censored Prisoners while at Pelican Bay State Prison (PBSP) as well as attempt at sabotaging my marriage and my outside support network. When staff tampered with my food tray I survived. I survived 32 plus years in solitary confinement. I survived 25 of those 32 years in the notorious Pelican Bay State Prison Isolation Unit. I survived a 60 day hunger strike. I survived 25 years of sensory deprivation and no direct sunlight for 25 years. But the CDCR refused to accept responsibility for the crimes they committed against me. I am a Survivor, and I suffer from PTSD!

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