

From Bad to Worse:

Transferred from Red Onion to Wallens Ridge State Prison

By Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

On January 20, 2012, I was transferred from Red Onion to Wallens Ridge State Prison. This transfer came on the heels of a December 12, 2011, incident where a large portion of my hair was ripped out by a Red Onion guard, a staged investigation by a Virginia Dept. of Corrections Internal Affairs agent Johnny Acosta, and my having sent out an article and report on it all. Obviously, no coincidence.

From one set-up to another.

On the morning of January 20, I was confronted at my cell by Red Onion's C-Building Unit Manager, Michael Younce, and Lieutenant Delmer Tate, who both lied telling me that agent Johnny Acosta wanted to speak with me in the prison's video-court area. I was, upon being handcuffed and leg shackled, "escorted" by them to the prison's transport area and put into a cell, and told to strip down to be searched by security chief Kevin McCoy because I was "taking a trip." Numerous guards entered the area including one Joseph Ely, a prior Red Onion guard who'd transferred to Wallens Ridge to be promoted to a Lieutenant. Ely was carrying transportation restraints and a 50,000 volt electric stun belt which prisoners are made to wear when taken on road trips. I instantly realized I was being transferred to Wallens Ridge.

I asked McCoy several times about my property. He assured it'd be right behind me. It wasn't. It was all left at Red Onion, where much of it will likely be destroyed, "lost" and taken.

McCoy attempted to provoke a situation by having me given a pair of pants to wear that were too small. I refused to wear them. After a standoff, I was given a pair in the correct size, restrained, belted and taken to a transport van. Inside the van, I was crushed and locked inside a tiny steel cage measuring about 5 feet high and 2 by 2 feet square, in which I could barely move. Once on the road, Ely asked if I knew where I was going. I answered

“obviously to Wallens Ridge.” He then asked did I really not 2
know I was being transferred? I told him no, that I was told I was
going to see someone. He added, “You know why you’re going
back, don’t you?” “Not really,” I answered. He then stated,
“Well, you know a lot of people don’t like you. You probably
won’t leave walking.” I was to receive numerous similar threats
by guards that I was being sent to Wallens Ridge to be set up for
violence.

Upon reaching Wallens Ridge, I was met by numerous guards,
especially ranking guards, whom I’d known from my 2000-2003
confinement at Wallens Ridge. All displayed openly hostile
attitudes. One of the guards, who was holding one of my arms
and “escorting” me from the van to the intake area, Dixon,
repeatedly dug his fingers into my right arm. I was also
accompanied during this walk by two large dogs barking loudly
and straining wildly against their leashes.

I went through the strip search and endured another standoff over
too-small clothes, by Sergeant Cochrane and Lieutenant Swiney,
both obviously trying to provoke a situation to “justify” using
violence. So I relented and wore the clothes for the brief walk to
the unit.

I was leg-shackled, cuffed from behind and “escorted” by a mob
of guards to the D-3 housing unit. Every cell in the unit was
empty. I was put into D-301, one of only two cells in the block
with a steel box approximately 8" x 12" x 18" with a Plexiglas
cover, welded to the outside of a cell door and around the
opening in the door through which food and other items are
passed and handcuffs applied and removed. I was made to kneel
to have the leg shackles removed, and to put my hands outside
the slot into the box where the handcuffs were removed. I then
removed my hands from the box and a steel plate was slid in
place across the door opening, closing off access to the box.

Cochrane and Swiney came to the door in turns, repeating the
same threats Ely had made, adding that “this time there won’t be
any witnesses,” indirectly referring to my placement in a
completely empty unit. Major Combs then came to the cell
asking if I’d changed, commenting that I’d gotten grey hair since

last he'd seen me and was "getting old." Every guard I've 3
encountered from then to now has been invariably hostile, and
verbally insulting. I've been called a "nigger" no less than 15
times and subjected to numerous homosexual taunts in efforts to
provoke and enrage me, which I pay no mind to. One guard, R.
Ricketts has gone out of his way to repeatedly verbally taunt and
threaten me with abuses to come.

I've had my meals and beverages dropped into the visibly filthy
box on the door which is never cleaned, indeed it can't be where
it contains rust, peeling paint, fermented food and beverages
residue, and one must place dirty clothes, shoes, toilet cleaning
items, etc. into the box to be searched by or exchanged with
guards. Using the box for meal service is a per se health hazard.
Not only is my food contaminated by being placed into direct
contact with the box's surfaces, but I've found paint particles,
dirt, lint, etc. in my food and beverages from the box.

I was also brought clothes by Swiney that had been sprayed with
mace or gas. I've been kept incommunicado – denied phone use,
all property, and kept in a completely empty unit.

I've also received two trays with foods containing broken pieces
of metal and rocks. Guards, including Cochrane, refuse to
provide me with or to accept for filing forms needed to pursue
emergency and other grievances and complaints. I had to go
through a Lieutenant Bergan to obtain complaint forms from
Cochrane, who then gave me only two out of five requested by
me.

As indicated in my last report/update, the December 12, 2011,
assault where my hair was ripped out was preceded by threats by
the assaulting guard, in that I'm

now being faced with a consistent series of threats by a staff
known to abuse and even kill prisoners – which I'll elaborate on
below – it is important that this situation be made known as
broadly as possible. I believe outside exposure, support and
pressure has kept many of the more serious violent official
intentions at bay. These threats under the circumstances must be
taken very seriously.

Wallens Ridge: A Nest of Vipers

Several of the threats here have been accompanied by guards making disparaging remarks about me being a “protester,” “Black Panther,” etc., often accompanied by racial slurs. It is well known that Black prisoners known to challenge or protest abuses or who are politically active are abuse targets at Wallens Ridge. John Gaskins, aka Mac, who was recently released from Wallens Ridge, has been both witness and victim. While at the prison, he witnessed prisoners inclined to protest being set up by guards, beaten and thrown into segregation. He was himself, for this reason, set up on a false infraction and thrown in segregation until he was released from Virginia’s prisons. He expected to be beaten by the guards himself at any time.

A----, aka Outlaw, the prisoner with whom I engaged in written political exchanges in my book, *Defying the Tomb*, was also brutally beaten and hospitalized at Wallens Ridge a couple years ago.

In my prior update/article, I discussed a 2001 beating by 3 ranking Wallens Ridge guards of a Black prisoner, last name Plummer, which resulted in the guards being prosecuted. The charges were circumvented by the entire prison’s staff coming together to stage a scene at the prison to sway the jury to acquit the guards, and the investigator – Johnny Acosta – who found the guards to have assaulted Plummer, was in turn sued by them. Many of the guards involved in that cover-up still work at Wallens Ridge, including Major Combs, Cochrane, Swiney, etc.

Prisoners have also been killed by Wallens Ridge officials or at their prompting.

Most recent was the controversial killing of Harvey Lee Watson by his cellmate Robert Gleason, who pled guilty to the killing and implicated Wallens Ridge staff as complicit and responsible. Several were fired after-the-fact, when autopsies found Watson had been dead for half a day when discovered by guards inside the cell. The guards had falsified records claiming they’d been making routine checks of the prisoners. However, those who caused his death were passed over. Gleason personally told me

numerous times that he only realized after killing Watson that Wallens Ridge officials had used him, set him up to kill Watson to remove a thorn from their side. He vowed to plead guilty to the killing and to use the case to expose what they'd done. Which he did, to no avail.

In that case, they wanted to silence Watson, who kept protesting that officials had knowingly transported him from Sussex One State Prison in Waverly, Virginia to Wallens Ridge with a dead prisoner sitting with him in the van. Watson had also just

set his cell on fire the night before being transferred and had recently set another prisoner on fire. He had outstanding punitive segregation sentences to serve and was not supposed to have been released to population. He also was supposed at all times to have been housed in cells alone, even in population, due to mental health status. However, ranking Wallens Ridge officials and the counsellor, wife of Lieutenant A. Gallihar, conspired to put Watson in Gleason's cell in population. Gleason was known to have been convicted, suspected, and charged with numerous killings. Officials felt he was their man for the job.

In the cell, Gleason complained to staff counsellor Gallihar, ranking officials, the warden, even people on the outside that Watson was sick and needed to be moved out of his cell before he was forced into a drastic reaction. Watson would drink urine, masturbate in the open, talk loudly to himself all times of night, etc. Lieutenant Gallihar, his wife and others told Gleason, "You know how to deal with it," refusing to move Watson. Gleason admittedly snapped and killed Watson. The scandal has been widely reported in the media and Gleason is open about what happened and why. The day after the killing, A. Gallihar, who wasn't at the prison the day of the killing, fabricated an incident report as though he was, on his wife's behalf to cover for her.

During or about 2003, a white Connecticut prisoner was strangled to death by Wallens Ridge guards who claimed the death a suicide hanging. A similar attack was attempted against another white prisoner, Michael Austin, now confined at Red Onion, during or about 2010. The guards disliked Austin because he'd grown up around and embraced Black urban culture and

clashed with the prison's rural white guards who'd ridicule him and try to influence him with racist values. In his case, guards 6 premeditatedly rushed into his cell, claiming falsely he was attempting to hang himself, put a thick string around his neck and began choking him. Their designs to strangle him to death were foiled only because the string broke.

During 2003, another Connecticut prisoner, a Black man named Lawrence Frazier, was electrocuted to death by numerous Wallens Ridge guards while he was restrained to a steel bed frame by his extremities. The death was dismissed as caused by insulin shock, however an examining doctor found the electrocutions contributed to, if not caused, his death.

A documentary "Up the Ridge" was filmed by a local radio group exposing the racism and abuses surrounding the prison and reporting on Frazier's killing.

During 2001, I was myself the victim of a brutal assault by a mob of Wallens Ridge guards, including two who beat Plummer just months later. In my case, I was drawn out of my segregation cell while fully unrestrained by a guard G. Sexton, inviting me to an off-the-record one-on-one fight (what we call "a fair one" in prison). His intentions, however, weren't to fight but to set me up for a mob attack. Sexton never once put up a fight, but was knocked down almost immediately and began screaming for back-up. I was subdued without resisting and upon being handcuffed

and shackled was repeatedly kicked in the face and head, electrocuted with multiple 50,000 volt stun weapons, had all but 3 of my then almost 2-foot-long dreadlocks systematically ripped out, and was left with multiple facial lacerations that had to be stitched closed, burns across my upper body and arms, and blood red and purple contusions covering the entire whites of my eyes across their front halves. The attack was covered up by Wallens Ridge officials at all levels and Internal Affairs agents who destroyed pod surveillance camera footage of the attack, moved all vocal prisoner witnesses to other units, and colluded reports claiming all my injuries were inflicted by Sexton defending himself against an unanticipated attack by me when the cell

“accidentally” opened. At first they’d claimed I opened it, whereas Sexton himself told guards in the control booth to open it.

What’s more, Wallens Ridge’s present warden, Gregory Holloway, has subjected me to extensive past torture while a unit manager at Greenville Correctional Center, during 1998. At that time he kept me on an illegal status called “white cell status,” when I was left for 8 months, even during winter, with nothing inside the cell, but one pair of boxer shorts. No property was permitted. I could not even brush my teeth and ended up having to have several filled for cavities as a result. I was only allowed a mattress and bedding from 10 pm through 6 am. I contracted the flu, sinus infections and colds. Throughout the white cell confinement, my cell window to the outside was broken, letting in freezing and cold outside temperatures.

While on white cell status, Holloway accused me of knocking him unconscious in the medical department while my blood pressure taken with my hands cuffed, supposedly in response to his torturing me. I remained on white cell status until I was transferred to Red Onion in 1998 from Greenville.

Therefore not only is Holloway an official who’s known to illegally torture and abuse—and will admit having me on that illegal status—but one who has cause for vengeance against me. It is highly unlikely I can expect to receive any semblance of just treatment under him, nor that he would act to prevent threatened abuses. Indeed it is probable that he is privy to such abuses. Furthermore, Holloway is but a token Black figurehead, recently appointed to Wallens Ridge to counter a widespread image and reputation for racism like at Red Onion. Similarly, at Red Onion, a token Black warden was appointed in the early 2000s, under whose supervision racism and abuse escalated. Indeed, he went out of his way to avoid making waves with the local entrenched white supremacist status quo that de facto ran Red Onion, as it does Wallens Ridge.

Dark faces in high places is today’s chief tactic for masking institutionalized racism.

Conclusion

If officials did not send me to Wallens Ridge with deviant designs, then this admits I qualify to be housed at any other VDOC prison of the same level 5 security classification, such as Sussex One or Two State Prisons, where a more racially

diverse and tolerant staff exists. At Wallens Ridge and Red Onion, I and other politically active prisoners and those who challenge abuses have been targeted in a clear pattern with official violence and abuse.

It's my request to supporters and readers to raise as much protest and awareness about this situation as possible and press for my reassignment to a less volatile and more racially diverse and tolerant environment, such as the Sussex prisons. And to also be aware of the foul conditions that we live under on these razor wire plantations. For me, it just went from bad to worse.

Dare to struggle! Dare to win!

All Power to the People!

Rashid explains: "This method of 'escorting' segregation prisoners is used ostensibly so guards can maintain complete control while remaining behind the prisoner so he cannot butt, spit or otherwise assault them and can be easily maneuvered to place and pinned against a wall. During such escorts, guards are to remain behind and to the side of the prisoner."

Also, those who lock up
prisoners and hold them in
the maximum security area of
the prison are the ones who
are the most violent.



Exhibit A

Rashid was assaulted by staff at Red Onion on Dec. 12. He has a dislocated shoulder and is yet to receive proper medical attention. He had a 3 by 7 inch swath of hair pulled out by the roots. This occurred when he refused to turn his back on an officer as he came out of the exercise cage. Please contact VDOC Director Harold Clarke at .

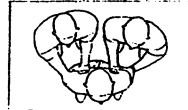
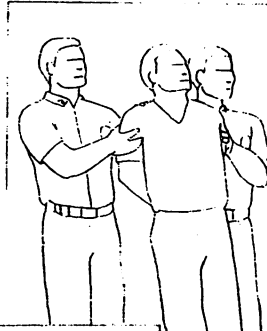


Exhibit B

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