



PEOPLE'S TEMPLE

Exalting 'Beauty of Dying,' Jones Leads 408 to Death

By Leonard Downie Jr.
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GEORGETOWN, GUYANA

ith exhortations on the "beauty of dying," the Rev. Jim Jones led 408 of his followers in the Peoples Temple Church to a mass suicide-murder and was himself shot to death, according to reports yesterday from the scene of the massacre.

Guyanese authorities said most of the victims appear to have been killed with poison drawn from a vat set in a clearing in Jonestown, the agricultural settlement where Jones' cult was based. Only three of the bodies had gunshot wounds.

By late yesterday only a dozen of the several hundred residents of Jonestown who apparently fled into the surrounding forest had returned to the compound. Authorities said the returnees were helping to identify the dead.

A survivor of the mass murder-suicide told an investigating group that visited Jonestown yesterday that the poison consisted of cyanide mixed with Kool-aid in a vat. It was administered by Jonestown's staff doctor and nurses to men, women, children and babies. Those who tried to refuse the poison or escape were forced by armed guards to take it.

It was not known if Jones was shot by someone else or killed himself.

Authorities said Jones' wife and a son were also among the dead. The authorities who searched Jonestown yesterday found, in addition to the bodies, more than a half million dollars in cash scattered about the compound, a "sizable quantity" of gold bullion, wallets filled with U.S. Treasury checks, and more than 800 passports. There had been allegations in the U.S. press that Jones' followers had confiscated Social Security checks from Jonestown's older residents.

The macabre mass suicide and murder was directed by Jones Saturday evening after a handful of his most fanatic followers had attacked a congressional fact-finding



Jim Jones,
People's Temple leader,
and his wife, Marceline.
UPI photo

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group that had just left Jonestown.

Rep. Leo J. Ryan (D-Calif.), three American newsmen and a Peoples Temple defector were shot and killed, and twelve others were wounded, when gunmen ambushed Ryan and about 30 newsmen, government aides, relatives of People's Temple members, and defectors from the sect at 4:20 p.m. Saturday. The group was waiting to board two charter planes on the Port Kaituma airstrip near Jonestown, and about 150 miles north of here.



The Rev. Jim Jones shakes hands with San Francisco Mayor George Moscone after Jones was appointed to the San Francisco Housing Authority in 1977. AP photo

Two other members of the fact-finding group, civil liberties lawyers Mark Lane and Charles Garry, had stayed behind in Jonestown. They escaped into the surrounding tropical forest when Jones ordered that everyone in the compound must die and made their way to Georgetown where they gave a detailed account of the massacre at a press conference and in interviews yesterday.

Lane, 51, and Garry, 69, hid in the forest in a heavy rain Saturday night before finding their way to Port Kaituma on Sunday. They said here yesterday that Jones was unhappy that the two-day meeting with Ryan had ... a number of Jones' followers asking to leave with Ryan and another attacking Ryan with a fishing knife. Lane said yesterday that Jones told them some of his men had gone to attack the congressman and his party at the airstrip as they were leaving.

Then Jones, who had threatened in the past to lead his followers in mass suicide because of attacks on him in the U.S. press and courts, gathered Jonestown's residents in a large open-air meeting place and used a loud-speaker to convince them of the "beauty of dying."

Lane and Garry, who had been sent under guard to another part of the compound where they saw men arming themselves with automatic rifles, escaped into the dense underbrush. While hiding, they heard more amplified exhortations from Jones, then silence, and then the sounds of sustained gunfire.

They heard screaming people running through the underbrush around them and more scattered sounds of gunfire in the forest.

Officials of this nation and the small U.S. embassy located here have been overwhelmed by the enormity of the mass killings of Americans by Americans at Jonestown and at the Port Kaituma airstrip.

The government of Guyana is supervising the efforts to determine just what happened at Jonestown and at the airstrip. They were also searching with a 100-man military force for the possibly hundreds of Jonestown residents still scattered in the surrounding jungle.

Guyanese officials on the scene in Jonestown said they also found 30 to 40 weapons and "hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition." Among the weapons were automatic rifles, revolvers and other types of guns.



The Rev. Jim Jones leads his People's Temple flock in a 1976 protest on behalf of local journalists, jailed for refusing to reveal a source.
AP photo

Only one arrest has been made thus far, that of Peoples Temple member Larry Layton, who was identified by witnesses as among those firing shots at Rep. Ryan's party on the Port Kaituma airstrip.

The Guyanese defense force also has set up a heavily armed guard of at least 20 troops around the Georgetown headquarters of the Peoples Temple on the edge of the city, holding the 30 remaining residents of the large home under virtual house arrest.

Four residents there, Sharon Amos and her three children, were found dead, with their throats cut, inside the house Saturday night at about the same time the violence was occurring in Jonestown and Port Kaituma. Guyanese authorities said the Amos deaths were being investigated as murder or murder-suicide.

The U.S. Embassy prepared yesterday to send home the bodies of the airstrip shooting victims — Rep. Ryan, NBC news correspondent Don Harris, San Francisco Examiner photographer Greg Robinson, NBC cameraman Robert Brown, and defecting Peoples Temple member Patricia Parks. Autopsies were performed by the Guyanese authorities.

The U.S. Embassy, augmented by State Department employees and military technicians, plus a dozen helicopters, being flown into this capital city, now faces the task of identifying the hundreds of victims in Jonestown and notifying their next of kin. Relatives of Peoples Temple members already have flooded the embassy here with telephone and telegraph inquiries.

Officials of both governments also have been besieged by a burgeoning international press contingent of about 100 reporters, photographers and television technicians, who have virtually taken over this city's two largest hotels.

Guyana's minister of information, Shirley Field-Ridley, said yesterday morning at a press conference, "I really can't find words to describe our reaction to this terrible thing that has happened in Guyana."

She said the Guyanese authorities first heard about the mass suicides in Jonestown Saturday night when a man who had escaped from the compound and walked 20 miles to the outpost of Matthews Ridge told police there that he had seen hundreds of people being administered poison in Jonestown.

The first Guyanese investigators reached Jonestown later Saturday night, and found everyone inside the compound dead. The Guyanese government did not make any announcements of that fact until early Monday morning a few hours before Field-Ridley's press conference.

Although Guyanese authorities also were aware of the shootings at the Port Kaituma airstrip eight miles from Jonestown on Saturday night the Guyanese military did not move in to secure the area and remove the wounded and survivors until Sunday morning. The State Department said in Washington the delay was due to the lack of lights at the Port Kaituma airstrip.

Mark Lane said yesterday that he sensed an undercurrent of danger as soon as the two chartered planes from Georgetown carrying Ryan's party landed on the grass airstrip Friday.

Lane recalled that Jones, who had asked Lane to come protect him from harassment from Ryan and his group, at first was not going to let anyone into Jonestown.

Lane said Jones had become "paranoid" about stories in the U.S. press that people had been impressed into the cult and were being held against their will under terrible conditions in Jonestown. He said Jones had threatened to have all the Jonestown residents commit suicide about a year ago, but that Jones was talked out of it by long distance pleas from Black Panther Huey Newton, Angela Davis and others.

Once Ryan's party had arrived in Georgetown last week, Lane, communicating with Jones by radio from the Georgetown headquarters of the Peoples Temple, thought he had talked Jones out of his objections to Ryan's visit.

But when the planes landed on the Port Kaituma airstrip on Friday, Lane said they were met by a "group of angry men and women" and a man with a gun.

"This had a chilling affect on the people on the plane," Lane said. More negotiations took place before everyone on the planes was allowed into Jonestown.

On Friday and Saturday morning, things went better at Jonestown, Lane said. Ryan and the others discovered the settlement's clean, modern buildings, good medical care, advanced farming methods and racial harmony.

Ryan drew sustained applause when he told a gathering of Jonestown residents Friday night that the trip had changed his mind about the community. Ryan later told Jones, Lane and Garry that his only concern was free exit for people who no longer wanted to stay in the commune.

Jones eventually became agitated, Lane said, by a number of snowballing incidents on Saturday. A reporter wandering the compound found that he was not allowed into one building where Lane later saw residents living as close together as "slaves on a slave ship." Jones became angry, Lane said, when he insisted Jones allow reporters to tour the building.

Later, NBC correspondent Harris "made a peripheral tour and people approached him about leaving Jonestown," Lane said. As Harris and then Ryan gathered their names, Lane and Garry said, Jones grew more distressed.

When a family of six announced early Saturday afternoon that they were going to leave with Ryan, Garry said Jones told him: "They never stop. This is the finish. It's finished."

Garry and Lane said yesterday they both tried to persuade Jones that even with the defections, he was "going to get a favorable report" from Ryan.

"But Jones was so paranoid," Lane said. "He saw it as a betrayal if anyone wanted to leave."

Then, shortly after most of Ryan's party and those residents Jones allowed to leave

ad started down the dirt track from Jonestown to the airstrip in a falling rain, came the knife incident.

Lane gave the following account:

One of Jones' top lieutenants, Don Sly, suddenly grabbed Ryan around the neck with his left arm, placed a knife against Ryan's neck with his right hand, and shouted: "Congressman Ryan, you motherf-----."

While Ryan struggled to push the man's hands away from his neck, Lane grabbed Sly's arms from the front and Garry, 69, grabbed Sly from behind.

Finally, "all kinds of people from the temple moved in," Garry said, and pulled Sly away from Ryan as the congressman fell to the floor. Sly's hand was cut in the struggle and blood from that cut was all over the congressman's clothes. Some Jonestown residents gave Ryan a clean set of clothes to change into later on the plane.

Jones calmly watched this incident from some distance, making no move. Lane and Ryan told Jones that police and a doctor must be called at once. Jones said they would be, but no one came.

Jones, visibly shaken, than sat down to talk to Ryan.

"Does this change things?" Jones asked Ryan, who told Jones that he still saw many positive things in Jonestown but that the knife incident did change his impression.

Ryan then asked Lane, "Are you mad at me?"

"No," Lane said. "I'm so grateful that you came here."

"I'll always be grateful that you saved my life," Ryan told Lane.

Lane responded by joking with the congressman: "Now no one can call this trip a junket."

After Ryan left to join the others at the air strip, Jones took Lane aside and kept repeating, "This is terrible, this is terrible, this is terrible." Lane said he tried to calm Jones down.

Jones then told Lane, "There are things you don't know. Those men who left a little while ago to go into the city are not going there. They love me and they may do something that will reflect badly on me. They're going to shoot at the people and their plane. The way Larry [Layton] hugged me, a cold hug, told me."

Then a woman came over and whispered something to Jones, and Jones told Lane to take Garry and go the East House on the far side of the compound.

Lane objected because he feared Jones was gathering residents of Jonestown for a mass suicide attempt, but Jones assigned a very tall, tough lieutenant to escort the lawyers away.

Lane and Garry saw eight or ten young men remove automatic rifles from storage near where they were taken. They also heard Jones speaking over a loudspeaker to

the Jonestown residents about the "beauty of dying . . . it's an important part of what we've done . . . let's not fight among ourselves."

The guard watching Lane and Garry was then replaced by two young men with automatic weapons. Garry said yesterday that he recognized one of them as a man he had frequently helped when he was in trouble back in San Francisco.

"They all kept saying," Lane said , "We're all going to die . . . There is a great dignity in dying . . . It is a great way to end our struggle."

When he tried to argue them out this, they merely smiled calmly and repeated, "We're all going to die."

Lane worried that he and Garry would be shot but Garry said he knew these particular men would never do that even if they had been sent there to do so.

Lane asked the two young men: "At least Charles and I will be here to tell the story of what happened, won't we?"

Lane said the men agreed to that, hugged him and Garry and turned to leave, either to join the death ritual or escape.

"Wait," Lane called out, "first how do we get out of here."

The men told them where to run over a hill and into the forest where Lane and Garry were to spend the next 12 hours in darkness, soaked and chilled by rain, cut by the rough underbrush and bitten by insects.

Lane said they could still hear Jones shouting over the loudspeaker and eventually repeating just one word over and over: "Mother, mother, mother . . ." Jones' mother died about a year ago and she was buried in Jonestown.

Finally there was a period of silence and then a large number of shots rang out. The lawyers moved deeper into the underbrush and heard screams and shots around them but saw no one except three Jonestown men rushing down a road out of the compound carrying a large trunk.

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