

Jonestown Is an Eerie Ghost Town Now

Soldiers Patrol Amid Rotted Cheese Sandwiches and Scattered Clothing

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Washington Post Foreign Service

JONESTOWN, Guyana—Just four weeks after the murders and suicides of more than 900 people here stunned the world, the jungle community that the Rev. Jim Jones created in his image is a ghost town.

Only a small and jumpy contingent of Guyanese troops—still afraid that Peoples Temple gunmen may be lurking in the surrounding rain forest—occupies the settlement where hundreds of men, women and children lived just a month ago.

The mounds of bodies that once littered the grounds around the community's central pavilion are gone now, shipped to the United States and awaiting burial.

But reminders of what happened here—the attack at nearby Port Kaituma that killed Rep. Leo Ryan (D-Calif.) and four others and the suicide-murder of more than 900 members of Jones' cult—stand out far more strikingly in the jungle quietude.

I returned to Jonestown the other day, the fourth time I had been there in less than a month.

The first two times, I accompanied Ryan and saw Jonestown alive and well—but unknowingly on the brink of its destruction. The third time I returned to see the aftermath of the tragedy, the bodies piled atop one another, many linked arm-in-arm, the agony of their poisoning evident on their contorted faces.

This last time, Jonestown was still, except for the troops. An eerie silence had replaced the music, the talk and the tension that marked the first two visits, and a kind of emptiness had replaced the bodies and the gore that were so much a part of the third.

This time, only physical reminders of what had happened here on the afternoon of Nov. 18—when Ryan spent

long hours trying to learn the truth about Jonestown from its residents and leaders—were present. But they were enough to bring back memories of what I had seen and smelled and heard then.

In the communal kitchen were hundreds of cheese sandwiches, uneaten and rotting, part of the meal that had been prepared for Ryan and his party before they left for their rendezvous with death at Port Kaituma. These were the cheese sandwiches that Peoples Temple's lawyer Mark Lane later said he had refused to eat because someone told him they might contain tranquilizers or more frightening drugs.

In the small, two-bedroom wooden house where Jones lived with at least two of his mistresses, shirts belonging to the Peoples Temple leader still hang in the walk-in closet, almost as if Jones—dead nearly a month now—were coming back to collect them.

Along the muddy path that served as a sidewalk for much of the commune, other reminders of the life and death that were Jonestown lie half buried in the fertile soil. A pair of woman's eyeglasses, a towel, a pair of shorts, packets of unopened Flavor-Aid lie scattered about waiting for the final cleanup that may one day return Jonestown to the tidy, if overcrowded, little community it once was.

The Guyanese government of Prime Minister Forbes Burnham was unpopular before the events of Nov. 18 and it is more unpopular now because of charges that Jones had special ties

to the ruling party that enabled him to skirt the law. Burnham's government has not yet decided what to do with the commune that Jones' followers carved out of the rain forest.

Indeed, Burnham and his government do not seem to know how to explain crucial questions about Jonestown—how it was that gold and diamonds and currency worth more than \$1.5 million were found among the ruins, how Jonestown became filled with guns and ammunition, in apparent violation of Guyanese laws, or how it was that the Peoples Temple regularly brought from abroad food and other goods whose import is strictly prohibited, because of a serious economic crisis here.

Burnham has granted a couple of interviews to foreign journalists after what was, for him, more of a political than a social or human crisis. But he has yet to issue a statement explaining Jonestown to his own people.

Neither the government nor the government-controlled press here has told the country's citizens that as many as 10 Guyanese died with the Americans at Jonestown. So far, the Burnham government has only announced that one Guyanese was among the dead.

Thousands of pages of documents and scores of tapes recovered from Jonestown have yet to be released, in part, many observers here believe, because some of the Peoples Temple records may be embarrassing to the government.

Nonetheless, the police, under the direction of Assistant Commissioner C. A. (Skip) Roberts, are continuing their investigation of the killings at Port Kaituma and the mass suicide-murder at Jonestown, trying to deter-



By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

Cult members' bodies that lay in mounds around Jonestown's pavilion have been flown to the United States.

mine whether any of those who survived may have committed criminal acts.

Three inquests related to the Jonestown tragedy are under way.

The first, at Matthew's Ridge, about 35 miles from Jonestown, will officially determine the causes of death

of the 909 persons whose remains were found here a month ago. This will allow authorities in the United States to issue death certificates for the bodies taken by military airlift to Dover, Del., Air Force Base.

The other inquests will determine whether two Peoples Temple members charged with murder and attempted murder should be brought to trial in connection with their alleged roles in the Port Kaituma killings and the deaths of four members of the Peoples Temple who were found in Georgetown with their throats slashed shortly after the suicide-murder at Jonestown.

Meanwhile, a federal grand jury in San Francisco has been impaneled to determine whether a conspiracy to kill Ryan extended beyond Guyana to the United States.

Early next year the House International Affairs Committee will investigate whether the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Georgetown were derelict in their efforts to uncover what the real conditions were at Jonestown.

It appears that the Rev. Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple will not fade from memory soon. Trials here and

possibly in the United States, the congressional investigation and the unending details that continue to fascinate much of the world ensure that the Jonestown tragedy will remain alive for months, if not years, to come.

The central questions—whether Jones ordered Ryan killed, why he ordered his own followers poisoned and why so many of the 909 who died apparently did so willingly—may never be answered completely.

But a host of related questions, such as Jones' flirtation with the Soviet Embassy here, his ties to the Guyanese government and the culpability, if any, of those who escaped the suicide-murder rite, will probably eventually be put to rest.

For the past month, a bizarre rela-

tionship has existed in Georgetown among those who survived, in one way or another, Jones' final desparate hours.

Twelve of those who left Jonestown with Ryan, known locally and abroad as "the defectors," continue in limbo at the Park Hotel. Several of them have testified as material witnesses to the killings at Port Kaituma and they

are expected to be allowed to leave Guyana this week.

Five Peoples Temple members who escaped the suicide-murder rite, either immediately before it began or while it was under way, continue to live at the same hotel, unsure whether the Guyanese intend to charge them with a crime or whether they eventually will be let go.

The defectors are hardly willing to talk to the escapees, believing that they are still loyal to Jones, even though he is dead. The escapees fear that if they are repatriated to the United States, they may be killed by irate relatives of persons who died at Jonestown.

Meanwhile, a third group, now numbering about 20, continues to live at the Peoples Temple headquarters in Georgetown, where they were the day Ryan was murdered and Jonestown was consumed by cyanide. Most of those still at the Georgetown house were among the elite when Jonestown was functioning and some of the defectors have charged that this group is the most dangerous of all.

In this group is the Jonestown basketball team, which some defectors have said was composed of trained marksmen whom they believe may return to the United States determined to kill "enemies" of the Temple, whom they blame for destroying it.

None of these groups fully trusts the others, reflecting the paranoia that consumed Jim Jones at the end. All of them know, as Tim Carter, one of the escapees said the other night, that "Jonestown will haunt us all until we die."