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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/07/24/suicide-in-solitary-the-death-of-alex-machado/>

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | July 24, 2012



Alexis Alex Machado was a prisoner at Pelican Bay State Prisons isolation units for nearly two years when he took his own life on October 24, 2011.

According to the autopsy report, Machado was last seen alive at approximately 12:15 AM as he was examined and then cleared by medical staff for a complaint of heart palpitations. Thirty minutes later, at 12:45 AM, an officer found Machado and reported that Machado [was] hanging inside his cell. He was seen sitting on the floor with a sheet tied to his neck and the sheet tied to the top bunk.

Concluded the autopsy: The decedent died as a result of asphyxiation due to strangulation by hanging. Toxicology reports were negative.

As institutional records and letters from Machado in the year leading up to his death show, he had been suffering severe psychological problems in response to his prolonged isolation. Once a jailhouse lawyer whose writings were both clearly and intelligently composed, his mental state would decline at Pelican Bay.

Machado had been incarcerated since 1999 on a robbery charge and a related shooting. He was sentenced to an 80-to-life prison term. Described as an intelligent and thoughtful man with a warm smile by his sister, Cynthia, he generally experienced no problems in his initial 11 years of incarceration. For most of his time, he was held at Kern Valley State Prison.

Things began to change in late 2007, when a race riot took place. The prison said he was the one who started the riot, according to Cynthia, when he really had nothing to do with it.

His involvement in the riot would result in his being placed in Administrative Segregation Unit (ASU) in December 2007. Though he was never officially found guilty for the riot, prison gang investigators would begin to build a case for his validation as a gang member. In December 2008, he was placed in the ASU again for manufacturing a weapon; in January 2009, a confidential informant was officially cited by prison officials as evidence of his gang activity.

He was finally validated as a gang associate, in large part due to the confidential informant, on February 4th, 2010. In his appeal of the validation, he argued that the source items used in his validation were insufficient, saying that these allegations are not true and I initiated nothing.

He further charged in his appeal that his validation as a gang member was in retaliation for his acquittal in the racial riot case.

He was sent to Pelican Bay to serve an indeterminate SHU sentence on February 17th, 2010 from the Kern Valley ASU.

Being screened into Pelican Bay, he reported no psychological problems.

Soon after arriving, however, he reported in letters that he was consistently harassed by the guards. In a letter dated March 10th, 2010, he wrote that when I first got here an officer told me that he was being pressured to make a bogus psychologist referral on me I guess they want to make it look like I am going crazy. He reported that guards took him to debrief in an attempt to make him look like an informant. Further, he was told that a green light (hit order) had been placed on him; a claim that he didn't believe.

An ASU classification document indicates that he received some mental health services in May 2010, and previously in October 2009.

A mental health chronos indicates his first significant problem at Pelican Bay surfaced on January 24, 2011 with a mental health referral from a correctional officer for paranoia. Also beginning in January, he was noted to have decreased the number of showers he took, from a regular of three a week to only once or twice a week.

He received a 115 (rules violation report) on March 1, 2011 for willfully resisting officers after a fishing line for communication with other inmates was found and he refused to cuff up. He told the health care worker who saw him after his extraction with pepper spray that I want you to put down that they are denying my legal mail.

On May 31st, a mental health referral reported that he stated he is being watched, listened to, cell has bugs and cameras. He also stated he hears knocking on all his cell walls.

Things would decline significantly in June. On June 5th, a mental health record reports that he was depressed, anxious, poor hygiene/grooming, hallucinations, paranoia and delusion. He reported that his presenting complaints were listed as hearing voices, can't sleep anxiety attacks, someone/something controlling thoughts, hasn't cleaned cell in three days.

Days later he would receive another referral for anxiety and reporting increased heart rate and breathing. On June 12th, he was placed in a crisis room for threatening to kill himself.

The following is from a Counseling Chrono dated June 21, 2011:

On Thursday, June 16, 2011 at 1440 hours I was summoned to the cell of Inmate Machado by Registered Nurse. Upon looking in the cell window, I observed a noose hanging from the air duct. I observed the No-Tear Mattress lying on the cell floor torn apart. I ordered Machado to submit to handcuffs, to which he complied. After handcuffing Machado I placed him in holding cell #136 so Dr. N could speak with him. I returned to cell 188 and observed feces smeared on the right wall. It appears Machado had torn off the outer layer of the mattress, fashioned a noose from it, and tied the noose to the vent.

Just days after the incident, he was issued a notice that he would be placed in Pelican Bay's Administrative Segregation Unit:

You were endorsed by the CSR on 02/04/10 to serve an indeterminate SHU term, due to your validation as an Associate of the prison gang. On 06/22/11, your Mental Health Level of Care (LOC) was elevated to Correctional Clinical Case Management (CCCMS), PBSP-SHU Exclusionary; therefore, your placement in PBSP-SHU is no longer appropriate. Due to the above, on 06/22/11, a decision was made to place you in the PBSP Administrative Segregation Unit. Single celled due to prison gang validation.

By June 30th, he was deemed to have active psychotic symptoms but had a low risk of suicide.

On July 6th, he threw his breakfast through his food port and refused breakfast the next day. On the date of the incident a referral indicated inappropriate behaviors, hallucinating and poor impulse control. The referral notes that he believed electromagnetic pulses are interfering with his thoughts.

A mental health document says later that [he] is believed to be in a desperate situation with an equal amount of anxiety. During ICC in Ad Seg, he refused the debriefing process; hence his situation appears to be deteriorating possibly leading to [his] current state of mind.

In June and July, he was variously diagnosed with Antisocial Personality Disorder and Brief Psychotic Disorder. According to his sister, though he was officially granted a vegetarian diet for religious reasons, he would primarily subsist on an unhealthy cheese-only diet due to his being allergic to peanuts, the other primary component of a prison vegetarian food tray. This is believed by his sister to have been one of the factors that contributed to the already physically and mentally stressful environment.

Machado's sister noticed her once coherent and seemingly adjusted brother decline in his time at Pelican Bay. I noticed he started writing strange things, about seeing things, she says. Around this time, she and her mother called Pelican Bay after receiving a despondent letter from Alex. I'm afraid for my sons life, Machado's mother told one of his mental health counselors.

Though CDCR has previously gone on the [record](#) to say that he was not a participant in the hunger strikes, the Machado family believes that he in fact did participate in the strikes. He reportedly mentioned the strike many times in letters sent to his family.

In late July or early August, he sent a letter to his sister claiming that he saw someone I know and I saw another in pieces and demons I don't know the significance of it I hope it was a hallucination. He wrote that was taken to the infirmary for leg pains, where he further wrote:

I was handcuffed in a cell and was being watched by two officers I never seen before I was handcuffed for what seemed like an eternity. I felt like I was in that room handcuffed for days but it was only an hour the shooting in my case flashed in my mind and they suggested I died that day in the shooting and that I was now in purgatory or in Dantes Inferno. I felt trapped. I thought I was condemned to be handcuffed in that cell forever. They made me believe I was killed in real life. I thought I was caught in another realm. I saw insects in the cell and demons. It was way out I don't know what happened.

Also written while at Pelican Bay, Machado reflected on his decade long incarceration, writing I wish my life was different and that we

could all be out there together I don't know what to do. I'm stuck and I have been away from home for a long time now.

In the final months of his life, he would continue to spend over 22 hours a day in a small cell. His letters came less and less frequently. During his time at Pelican Bay, he told his family not to make the over 700-mile trip to visit him. He didn't want them to see him in chains.

Though his letters in the two months leading to his death were increasingly distorted, he did have some glimmer of hope. He had secured a lawyer who was in the process of challenging his original criminal conviction.

His sister describes his plight this way,

It takes one inmate informant to report you falsely. Then you are in solitary confinement. When you want to fight to get out it is impossible because of all the torture that goes on in there physically and mentally.

After years of isolation, paranoia, and gradual deterioration, he took his life.

He was a loving brother, son, and unclerished by a single mother and got lost in the system, says Cynthia. He wanted to be treated fair.

The Machado family welcomes any assistance in getting Alex Machados story out. If you'd like to contact the Machado family email the author of this article at: Sal_SolitaryW@yahoo.com.

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watch's first and most prolific intern. Based in Los Angeles, he served as an editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register and the Press-Enterprise, and is now the opinion editor for the Southern California News Group.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

To get validated you need three points.. there had to be more than a picture to get this man validated as a active gang member.. And once validated you can get an indeterminate SHU which means you sit back in a cell for years upon years until you die, go insane, or debrief.. which means tell on everything you know! Pelican Bay has up to a year long waiting list for people wanting to debrief to get out of the SHU. after debriefing an inmate cannot go back to general population they go to at SNY yard sensitive needs yard.. which is filled with rats, child molesters and pukes.. thats why some convicts choose to stay in the SHU & go insane or die before they debrief.. Because they don't want the rat label, and be forced to program with child molesters.. unless you've done a shu term at the Bay or Cocoran u don't know what hard time is.. Its a soap opera filled with madness violence and paranoia ..my heart goes out to this man and family may you rest in peace brother.

Hello to all of you that have sent prayers and comments to our family, I pray for all of the Men/Women that are being tortured in our Prison system. Thank you All. Thank you Sal.
Cynthia Machado

Did Alex go by Gizmo from east L.A

This is so sad and to think there are many people fighting the same battle this man fought.

My son is also in segregation and is having difficulties, This story made me so sad as it is so similar to my sons life. They also want to send him to Pelican Bay he is in there also from an informant that was placed in the SNY yard from the mainline 7 men were sent to the Ad Seg as a result from a piece of paper with no back up, no evidence no nothing, even the DA did not want the case yet he was given 2 years. He is 6 tall and now weighs 125 lbs from 170 that he weight 6 months ago. People please unite together we can make changes why do we wait till people die? It is torture, its inhumane I cry at the thought that my son might die and not make it through this. He was never in any trouble before, he was working, not a gang member, not on drugs just hanged out with the wrong people they were minors the DA gave them a deal and convicted my son.

I spent about eight years in Ad-Seg in one prison or another and one is not different from the other only the shift changes. Upon release I was all paranoid and filled with anxiety, I had spent over 24 years in one prison or another, I was a paralegal right after the Santa Fe Prison Riot in New Mexico, I was the President of PUMA, Pintos Unidoo Mexicanos Americanos while in Lompoc California, a Chicano

cultural group, and so on and so forth. At one point or another we all kid in lock up and state, them walls gonna sound like they talking to you but its cool just as long as they dont answer you back. My prayers to the Machado family and May Gods peace be with you, thats the only thing that kept my sanity was my relationship with God. Now Ive been out here 24 years, I finish my parole next year after being on parole for 25 years, no violations no nothing. Today I am the Chairman of an ex-offender peer group helping them in their transition back into the community, I also facilitate Anger management and Cognitive Intervention groups at the Parole office for recent releases. Si se Puede. My e-mail is disciplesvision@yahoo.com Be blessed.

wow, just surprised that someone has almost the same name, im not alexis, just plain Alex. I feel for all the family members..my heart goes out to all of you. God bless you

What a horrendous story, and my heart goes out to Cynthia Machado and the rest of his family.

As a designer, I was struck by the detail that even though the prison provides a No-Tear Mattress to prevent suicide, Alex was still able to tear it up. Was it perhaps this product: <http://www.mtjameric.com/suicidedet.html>?

It seems that no amount of design details can stop human determination. The real design problem here is that the SHU drove Alex to be desperately suicidal, not the inability of the SHU to keep people from killing themselves.

My son has spent over 2 years in isolation. He has schizophrenia and the extreme cruelty of isolation is taking a serious toll on him. My prayers are going out to this family.

@glenn thomas langohr -u know what. every time i read a story about someone in the shu, u are one of the first comments. and quite frankly. it is really quite disrespectful to these men who have died and who are going thru such utter pain and turmoil to have u exploiting what they r going thru on a daily basis with ur manipulation tactics to sell ur books and whatever else u r selling. its really sad that u need to stoop to such a low level. i mean so u were in prison. a lot of men were. so u wrote about it and are trying to make money off ur experience. do u need to promote ur own agenda on every site and page related to the shu? and ad seg. we see right through u. dont think we dont. and if u think u are helping these men?? come on now. u dont care about these men. u only want to sell ur books and its wrong and really disgusting to use these mens experience and the pain them and thier families are going thru. u are out. and these men are not. i think it would be much more appropriate to sell ur material somewhere else and not use the pain of the men and thier families to do it.. u feel me.. ?? from a family member..

Cynthia thank you for not giving up and for sharing Alexs story! I believe Alexs story will reach the right persons and there will be justice!

Could this be a case of Dj vu? Either way the system is responsible for those it confines.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_MKULTRA

Project MKUltra, or MK-Ultra, was a covert, illegal human research program into behavioral modification run by the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) Office of Scientific Intelligence.

MKUltra, began in 1950 and was motivated largely in response to alleged Soviet, Chinese, and North Korean uses of mind-control techniques on U.S. prisoners of war in Korea.

MKUltra involved the use of many methodologies to manipulate peoples individual mental states and alter brain functions, including the surreptitious administration of drugs (especially LSD) and other chemicals, hypnosis, sensory deprivation, isolation, verbal and sexual abuse, as well as various forms of torture.

The research was undertaken at 80 institutions, including 44 colleges and universities, as well as hospitals, prisons and pharmaceutical companies.

Experiments included administering LSD to mental patients, prisoners, drug addicts and prostitutes, people who could not fight back, as one agency officer put it.

Three prisons are known to have participated in MKUltra.

Boston mobster James Whitey Bulger volunteered for testing while in prison.

On 26 April 1976, the Church Committee of the United States Senate issued a report, Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operation with Respect to Intelligence Activities,[58] In Book I, Chapter XVII, p 389 this report states:

LSD was one of the materials tested in the MKUltra program. The final phase of LSD testing involved surreptitious administration to unwitting non-volunteer subjects in normal life settings by undercover officers of the Bureau of Narcotics acting for the CIA.

I just learned of MK-Ultra program yesterday and read this mans claims today. Makes me wonder is someone reviving these prohibited techniques?

The article said that the sheet was tied to the top bunk which implies there was a lower bunk. Where was his cellmate then?

I feel for the family and having lost my own brother this way I fully understand their pain.

Yes, I do know that if a person informs others, That is all the systems needs to go do what they want to and to whom. It is the family that suffers and the minds in Solitary Confinement are dissolved. Thanks to the family for sharing their story. My heart goes out to all.

Disgusting <3 Prayers 4 The Machado Family

More torture at Pelican Bay comes out in horrific detail. Incredible reporting. Thanks for pointing out that he reached out to other

inmates as a jail house lawyer. What people who havent lived in prison dont understand is, that is all it takes to become an enemy of the prison administration. The validation process isnt just if it can hinge on the testimony of an informant, when that informant is being used as a chess piece by the administration as the only way out of isolation in the SHU, for the informant. Having lived through enough of it myself, it reminds me why I write what I write. My novella Underdog delves into the problems mentioned, especially how a race riot can turn into improper validation and solitary confinement.

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