

## Talladega Rescue

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### Body

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CORRECTIONS professionals have learned a great deal about how to handle prison riots since the bloody storming of the Attica Penitentiary in New York 20 years ago this month. That was made clear during the dramatic rescue of hostages at a federal prison in Alabama on Friday. Cuban detainees who had been convicted of crimes in this country, served their sentences and were awaiting deportation at the Talladega Correctional Institution had taken over a section of the facility 10 days earlier. They originally held 11 hostages, employees of the Bureau of Prisons and of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Two decades ago, New York officials talked to the rioters for only three days before moving in with heavy deadly force. The assault killed 29 inmates and 10 hostages. This time, the U.S. Justice Department, of which the immigration and prison services as well as the FBI are a part, demonstrated that preparedness and patience pay off. Over the course of the siege, government officials firmly and consistently rejected the inmates' demand that deportations be ended. At the same time, they talked, securing the release of two hostages -- a man who was wounded during the takeover and a woman in deteriorating health who was set free in exchange for giving the inmates access to a newspaper reporter of their choice.

Early Friday morning, the time for action came, and the special training of the rescuers paid off. Instead of a frontal assault with guns blazing, the FBI sent in specially trained hostage-rescue teams aided by a Bureau of Prisons unit. Deadly weapons were not needed. Instead explosives were set off to confuse and frighten the inmates, and stun grenades creating shock waves, smoke and flashes of light were used. All the hostages were rescued unharmed, and only one inmate suffered minor injury. The entire event took three minutes.

This ordeal was acting Attorney General William Barr's initiation in office. He made the right calls. Concessions to inmates under conditions of terrorism and hostage-taking would have jeopardized prison employees everywhere. An immediate and perhaps poorly planned assault might have caused many casualties. In Alabama, a frightening situation was handled well.

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## Talladega Rescue

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