UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY Civil Action No. 09-953

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DEC - 9 2009

JOEL SCHMEIDER U.S. Magistrate Judge

In Regard to the Matter of:

Bayside State Prison OPINION/REPORT Litigation

OF THE SPECIAL MASTER

HENRY MITCHELL

-vs-

WILLIAM H. FAUVER, et al, Defendants.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2009

BEFORE THE HONORABLE JOHN W. BISSELL, SPECIAL MASTER

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                     Transcript of proceedings in the above
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     matter taken by Theresa O. Mastroianni, Certified
 7
     Court Reporter, license number 30X100085700, and
     Notary Public of the State of New Jersey at the
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     United States District Court House, One Gerry Plaza,
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     Camden, New Jersey, 08102, commencing at 1:27 PM.
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Page 3 1 2 APPEARANCES: 3 4 LOUGHRY & LINDSAY, ESQUIRES 5 BY: JUSTIN T. LOUGHRY, ESQUIRE 330 MARKET STREET 6 CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY 08102 856-968-9201 7 ATTORNEYS FOR THE PLAINTIFFS 8 9 ROSELLI, GRIEGEL, LOZIER & LAZZARO, PC 10 BY: MARK ROSELLI, ESQUIRE - and -11 JAMES LAZZARO, ESQUIRE BY: - and -12 BY: STEVEN GRIEGEL, ESQUIRE 1337 STATE HIGHWAY 33 13 HAMILTON SQUARE, NEW JERSEY 08690 609-586-2257 14 ATTORNEYS FOR THE DEFENDANTS 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

- 1 JUDGE BISSELL: I am reopening
- 2 proceedings in the case of Henry Mitchell, docket
- 3 number 09-953.
- 4 This opinion/report is being issued
- 5 pursuant to the directives of the Order of Reference
- 6 to a Special Master and the Special Master's
- 7 Agreement and the guiding principles of law which
- 8 underlie this decision to be applied to the facts
- 9 upon which it is based as set forth in the jury
- 10 instructions in the Walker and Mejias jury charges to
- 11 the extent applicable to the allegations of Mr.
- 12 Mitchell.
- 13 As finalized after review under Local
- 14 Civil Rule 52.1, this transcript will constitute the
- 15 written report required under paragraph seven of the
- 16 Order of Reference to a Special Master.
- 17 Henry Mitchell was assigned to Trailer
- 18 Number One upon his arrival at Bayside State Prison
- 19 from Saint Francis Hospital on or about the 14th of
- 20 July, 1997. At the time of the lockdown on
- July 30th, he was still awaiting classification in
- 22 Trailer Number One. At a later point he went to
- 23 Trailer Number Five.
- Mr. Mitchell brought a cane with him
- 25 from Saint Francis based upon the medical condition

- 1 which may have been diagnosed as a stroke, but in any
- 2 case left him disabled on one side and required the
- 3 assistance of a cane for walking.
- I find, as he testified, that upon his
- 5 exit from Trailer Number One to the gym, when Trailer
- 6 Number One was searched, which I'll explore more
- 7 fully in a few minutes, his cane was confiscated.
- 8 Under the circumstances of the lockdown, the cane
- 9 could have been considered a weapon at that point.
- 10 He was not permitted to use it on his way to and from
- 11 the gym.
- I have considered the testimony of
- 13 Officer Beck which I find quite credible in other
- 14 respects, but Officer Beck testified that under no
- 15 circumstances would Mr. Mitchell have had a cane in
- 16 Trailer Number One.
- I find that we had here a situation
- 18 which was an exception to the general rule because he
- 19 had only just arrived at BSP, had needed a cane
- 20 because of diagnoses and treatment at Saint Francis
- 21 and that in addition, he was awaiting classification
- 22 to another one of the trailers or units. Presumably
- 23 the question of his cane would have been dealt with
- 24 at that time. So I do find that in this case Mr.
- 25 Mitchell did have a cane when he arrived and the cane

- 1 was confiscated at the time that the unit was
- 2 evacuated for search.
- 3 Mr. Mitchell alleges that on the date
- 4 when Trailer Number One was searched, he was
- 5 assaulted in two ways and in two fashions by SOG
- 6 officers. He alleges that he received blows to the
- 7 head while lying on his bed as ordered in his
- 8 residential area before being strip searched and
- 9 removed for transport to the gym. I find, however,
- 10 that those allegations are unproven and they are
- 11 adequately contradicted by the testimony of Officer
- 12 Beck.
- Officer Beck was the housing officer on
- 14 the unit on the occasion of Mr. Mitchell's extraction
- 15 for the purpose of the unit search. And I'm going to
- 16 quote from some of her testimony, because I think
- it's telling here with regard to the question of
- 18 whether Mr. Mitchell was struck by SOG officers at
- 19 that extraction or not.
- Begin at page 82, line 13 of the
- 21 transcript of March 9th, 2009. I note
- 22 parenthetically that this removal and search of the
- trailer occurred on the 12th of August, 1997.
- Now, undertaking that quotation.
- 25 "Question: Okay. And when the inmates

- were taken out of the trailer -- well, let me ask
- 2 you, how are the inmates taken out of the trailer, do
- 3 you remember?
- 4 "Answer: They were told by myself one
- 5 wing at a time to get up and go outside.
- 6 "Question: Now, where were the SOG
- 7 officers at that time?
- 8 "Answer: They were on the wings. And
- 9 there was like one in the dayroom and then maybe ten
- 10 foot later there was another one in the dayroom out
- 11 to the door and down the walkway.
- "Question: Now, when SOG was in the
- 13 Trailer One and they were taking the inmates out of
- 14 the wings, were you able to see down the wings?
- 15 "Answer: Yes.
- "Question: How come?
- 17 "Answer: Because I went down the wings
- 18 to clear them.
- "Question: And on that particular day
- 20 do you have any recollection of seeing -- let me step
- 21 back. I'm sorry.
- Were you able to see the inmates as
- 23 they were made to get off their bunks?
- 24 "Answer: Yes.
- 25 "Question: And do you remember SOG

- 1 striking any inmate with their batons?
- 2 "Answer: No.
- 3 "Question: Did you ever see any SOG
- 4 hit any inmate on that day in the head?
- 5 "Answer: No.
- 6 "Question: Do you have any
- 7 recollection of the SOG hitting Mr. Mitchell in the
- 8 head with their batons on that day?
- 9 "Answer: No."
- Then in response to a question from me
- 11 when I asked what clearing the wing meant, he said it
- 12 didn't mean unlocking any doors because there weren't
- 13 locks there. She said, so I would just go down and
- 14 tell them to get off their beds and let's go. So I
- 15 find the testimony of Officer Beck credible that she
- 16 was actually in the wings assisting with instructions
- 17 for the inmates to clear their beds for purposes of
- 18 extraction and witnessed no such beating as the
- 19 plaintiff testifies. And I find the testimony of
- 20 Ms. Beck credible in that respect.
- 21 Mr. Mitchell also testified about being
- 22 hit and struck by sticks repeatedly while on his way
- 23 to and from the gym by SOG officers. However, his
- 24 testimony both before the court and otherwise
- 25 reflects significant discrepancies regarding the

- 1 amount and the nature of the hits by SOG in coming
- 2 and going from the gym. I find that at the most he
- 3 has established, and this is evident from a film clip
- 4 which was viewed, he did walk with a slight limp.
- 5 And I find it would be credible that he would be
- 6 prodded by the SOG from time to time to keep up the
- 7 pace remembering that he had to walk without his
- 8 cane. However, under the circumstances, I would not
- 9 find such prodding or directives to keep up with the
- 10 pace of other inmates as amounting to excessive
- 11 force. In fact, it was minimal force and also not
- 12 any punishment.
- I note further that the credibility of
- 14 Mr. Mitchell is also impacted here by his rather
- 15 categorical statements from time to time that during
- 16 the lockdown the residents of Trailer Number One
- 17 where he was had had a complete absence of showers,
- 18 access to phones or mail. However, a review of the
- 19 log book reveals that these programs were in place on
- 20 or before August 5, 1997 when Officer Beck returned
- 21 to duty. And furthermore, reviewing the log
- 22 indicates that some of them began as early as
- 23 August 1st. So that Mr. Mitchell's credibility or at
- least the accuracy of his recollection of events in
- 25 my view is significantly impacted by his testimony

- 1 regarding the unavailability of showers, phone
- 2 contact and mail in the trailer.
- 3 He also alleges that once reassigned to
- 4 Trailer Number Five, he made himself a homemade head
- 5 rag out of a sweat shirt, (I believe using the sleeve
- 6 if I recall correctly), and that one of the
- 7 corrections officers came in, snatched that head rag
- 8 from his head and pushed him back onto his bunk. He
- 9 claims that in falling back on to his bunk, he was
- 10 injured because he ran into a corner or a hard part
- 11 of the bunk structure. I find that at the very most
- 12 that injury, about being pushed back onto the bunk,
- 13 was a result of the officer's negligence. It does
- 14 not indicate that there was any intentional or
- 15 excessive use of force, any effort to punish or
- 16 anything beyond what might be necessary merely to
- 17 prod the plaintiff, Mr. Mitchell, back onto his bed.
- 18 The question of whether or not the head rag could
- 19 properly be seized is not an issue that is within the
- 20 confines of the assignment of this matter to me as a
- 21 Special Master.
- Accordingly, I find that Mr. Mitchell
- 23 has failed in his burden of proof to sustain his
- 24 allegations of any of the assaults and/or uses of
- 25 excessive force against him concerning which he

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      testified here.
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                     Finally, although not every item of
      evidence has been discussed in this opinion/report,
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      all evidence presented to the Special Master was
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      reviewed and considered.
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                     For the reasons set forth above, I
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      recommend in this report that the district court
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      enter an order and judgment of no cause for action
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     with regard to Henry Mitchell.
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1	CERTIFICATE
2	
3	I, Theresa O. Mastroianni, a Notary Public and
4	Certified Shorthand Reporter of the State of New
5	Jersey, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a
6	true and accurate transcript of the testimony as
7	taken stenographically by and before me at the time,
8	place, and on the date hereinbefore set forth.
9	I DO FURTHER CERTIFY that I am neither a
10	relative nor employee nor attorney nor counsel of any
11	of the parties to this action, and that I am neither
12	a relative nor employee of such attorney or counsel,
13	and that I am not financially interested in the
14	action.
15	
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18	
L9	Theresa O. Mastroianni
20	Theresa O. Mastroianni, C.S.R. Notary Public, State of New Jersey
21	My Commission Expires May 5, 2010 Certificate No. XIO857
22	Date: November 20, 2009
23	
24	
25	

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