

## Who is Joe-Joe Bowen?

Joe-Joe Bowen is a Black Liberation Army (BLA) Prisoner of War, serving two life sentences for actions carried out against a prison warden and deputy warden, as well as, an attempted prison break, which resulted in a five-day standoff.

As a teen, Joe-Joe Bowen was a member of Philly's 30th and Norris Street gang. While serving a five-year prison sentence for a social crime, Joe-Joe was introduced to revolutionary politics. From this point on he was determined to dedicate his life to the people's liberation movement.

Joe-Joe was released in 1971 and intended to join the struggle on the streets. His involvement, however, would be short lived when a week after his release, on February 21, 1971, he found himself in a gun battle with the Philadelphia police. In the end a cop



laid dead and Joe-Joe was sentenced to 10 to 20 years in prison.

**“I ain’t no angel. I’ll do my time.  
All we want is to be recognized  
as what we are, human beings.”**

**- Joe-Joe Bowen**

During those days Philadelphia police had a reputation of corruption and brutality, especially against the emerging Black Liberation Movement. In 1970, police engaged in a 2-hour assault against the Philly Black Panther cadre, after which, the police forced the captured combatants to strip naked while the press took pictures. This was also the police force who years later, pinned a murder of cop on a former Black Panther and journalist, Mumia Abu-Jamal.

### 1973 Attack on the Warden

On May 31, 1973, Joe-Joe and Black Liberation Army POW, Fred Muhammad Burton, assassinated the warden and deputy warden and hospitalized the guard commander at Philadelphia's Holmesburg prison. This attack was in response to intense repression and Muslim religious persecution. He was sentenced to two life sentences for this action.

After his sentence, he was held in solitary confinement. In an interview with a Philadelphia reporter, Bowen stated, “You reach a point of rage in the hole, and then you got to come out of there. That’s when you move to the

extreme left, the extreme right, or you self destruct.”

“I used to teach the brothers how to turn their rage into energy and how to understand their situation,” he said. I don’t threaten anybody. I don’t talk to the pigs. I don’t drink nothing I can’t see through, and I don’t eat anything that comes off a tray. When the time comes, I’ll be ready.”

### 1981 Prison Standoff

In October 28, 1981, Joe-Joe lead a mass liberation attempt from the state's largest prison at Graterford, after arming other prisoners with two shotguns and two revolvers. Bowen and three others attempted to scale the prison's 40-foot wall and were stopped by a rifle shot from a guard tower. After returning fire, they captured three guards and retreated in the prison kitchen where they captured three kitchen employees and 29 inmates. Three other inmates joined in the action.

Bowen and the six others held off the prison's guards, State Police and FBI for 5 days until an agreement was struck.

The standoff ended only after prison officials agreed to several demands: 1) All seven of the men involved in the



**COME AND TAKE IT**

standoff be permitted to transfer, including to Federal prison, if they so desired; 2) they were not required to pay for any damages they had caused; 3) any disciplinary time in solitary confinement be limited to six months.

In the end the men were charged with assault, attempted escape, kidnaping and other offense. Joe-Joe was sent to the Federal Prison in Marion, Illinois, where he met up with other political prisoners and prisoners of war such as Sundiata Acoli, Hanif Shabazz Bey and Ray Luc Levasseur.

Joe-Joe was later transferred back into the Pennsylvania prison system. Since his return, he has been kept in the control units in every prison he has been transferred to. He currently is kept in the control unit at the State Correctional Institution at Coal Township, with no prospects of ever being released into general population.

Despite his current condition, his commitment to the struggle remains strong. He has raised the consciousness of literally thousands of Pennsylvania prisoners through his powerful history and political/military education classes. Many of these prisoners become aware of his story just by arriving at Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility, named after the warden and deputy warden killed in 1973.

Despite his name being known in the Pennsylvania prison system, Joe-Joe does not have the cause-celeb status of some of other political prisoners. Financial support is desperately needed for Joe-Joe to help with his legal fees.

## Free Joe-Joe Bowen

Write to the Joe-Joe Bowen at:

**JOSEPH "JOE-JOE" BOWEN**

#AM-4272

1 Kelley Drive

Coal Township, PA 17866-1021

Local groups working with Joe-Joe:

**Jericho Amnesty Coalition**

PO Box 34186

Los Angeles, CA 90034

**Anarchist Black Cross Federation  
(ABCF)**

PO Box 11223

Whittier, CA 90603

email: [la@abcf.net](mailto:la@abcf.net)

YOU CAN HELP BY GIVING POLITICAL  
PRISONERS A VOICE AND VISIBILITY

THE TRUTH CAN SET THEM FREE!

## Joe-Joe Bowen A BLA Soldier

