

Graterford prison, like other state lockups, was a 'cesspool' ripe for violence even before rebel convicts took hostages 'The system is bad,' Stone said. 'Graterford is a cesspool. They (the captors) kept telling me how bad it was. They just couldn't take it.'

In the end the men were charged with assault, attempted escape, kidnapping 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. However, recently he has been placed in a step down program with the hope of being placed back in 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.

In 2004 Bowen was diagnosed with coronary artery disease. He was transferred to an outside hospital where a stent was inserted into his blocked artery.

Although Joe-Joe's name is well known within the prison system of the state, He is not well known outside the prison walls. As such, financial support is desperately needed for Joe-Joe to help with his legal fees and day-to-day assistance.

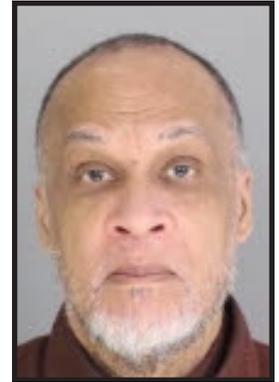
Any letters sent to Bowen must be in bright white envelopes and other color or shade of white (egg white or off white) will more than likely be returned due to strict guidelines by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.

If you wish to write Joe-Joe, you can send letters to the following address:

Smart Communication/PA DOC  
**Joseph Bowen** #AM4272  
SCI Fayette  
PO Box 33028  
St. Peterburg, FL 33733

# Joe-Joe Bowen

## Black Liberation Army Prisoner of War



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 activities beyond the prison wall only lasted five days. Bowen was arrested for a February 21, 1971 shootout with a Philadelphia patrolman after being stopped for question-

ing. In the end the patrolman laid dead and Joe-Joe was sentenced to 10 to 20 years in prison for second-degree murder. 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 Philadelphia Black Panthers, 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

After his arrest, Joe-Joe was being housed in Holmesburg prison waiting to be tried. Conditions in the prison were severe. Between 1951 until 1974 in-

mates were used as test subjects for medical experiments. The prison had been a scene of recent rioting due to the overcrowding and conditions. While the inmate population was estimated at 1,200, the prison itself was built to hold 700 inmates.

On May 31, 1973, Joe-Joe and Black Liberation Army POW, Fred Muhammad Burton, requested a meeting with the warden regarding concerns of Muslim prisoners having more time for prayer. The requests put forward by the two men fell on deaf ears and the warden denied the request. In response, Joe-Joe Bowen attacked the warden and deputy warden. During the attack another guard was injured when he attempted to intervene. Bowen received a ruptured spleen, a broken arm and possible concussion during the attack. Burton received head injuries, multiple bruises, cuts and an arm fracture.

Investigations claimed that the attack was premeditated and the meeting regarding having more time for prayer was nothing more than a ruse. The investigation further claimed that the warden was targeted because his policies alienated Black Muslims and that he "said 'no' to the Muslims once

too often." The investigation further claims that the order to take out the warden was given the night before the attack.

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**"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

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In March of 1974, Joe-Joe was found guilty of first-degree murder of the police officer in 1971. He was sentenced to life in prison. One year later, a jury found Bowen guilty of two charges of murder and another charge of assault with the attempt to kill. He was sentenced to two life sentences for this action. In June of 1976, a jury found Burton guilty of one count of murder of the second degree. Bowen testified on behalf of Burton, stating that it was he who had attack the two prison officials and that Burton was an innocent bystander. The prosecutor, however, attempted to discredit Bowen by questioning him about crimes for which he was never found guilty.

After his sentence, Bowen 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."

Nine days after the attack a total of 203 inmates were transferred out of the prison due to overcrowding. However, many of the prisoners felt the transfers were retaliatory because of the amount of Black Muslims that were being transferred out. Attempts to stop the transfers failed and prisoners were transferred to the various other prisons throughout the state.



## 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 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.

Chuck Stone, a Philadelphia journalist, acted as an outside negotiator because the inmates had no confidence in the integrity of the system. Authorities knew