

## **PRISON ESCAPES 8**



### **Amazing Prison Escape In France**

A gang used rocket launchers and heavy weapons to blow open the outer doors of a French prison and free one of the inmates in a spectacular jail break.

A group of at least four men in police uniform attacked the prison in Fresnes, south of Paris, to free Antonio Ferrara, an Italian national convicted of armed robbery who had already escaped from jail once.

The men fired repeatedly with rocket launchers at the prison doors to blow them open and at the watchtowers, causing serious damage but no injuries.

They entered the prison through two separate doors and then passed explosives to Ferrara, who used them to blast through the bars over his cell window and escape, in the third jail break this year in France.

The entire operation at the Fresnes prison, home to some 1,800 inmates, only lasted 15 minutes.

Ferrara, 29 -- who was sentenced in January to eight years in prison for two bank hold-ups committed in 1997 -- fled with his accomplices in a waiting car, which police believe had been stolen and fitted with false license plates.

The fugitive, also known as "Succo", escaped from prison in 1998 during a doctor's visit with the help of an accomplice, and unsuccessfully attempted to break out of La Sante prison in central Paris last summer by using explosives.

French Justice Minister Dominique Perben, who rushed to the scene immediately following the incident, deplored what he called a "military-type operation", saying the culprits had used "weapons of war".

Alliance, a prison workers' union, condemned a "new type of commando whose

members no longer hesitate to use 'weapons of war' to attack our institutions."  
A gaping meter-wide (three-foot-wide) hole marked one of the prison's metal doors.  
Police found a machine gun, a pistol, explosives and numerous spent cartridges at the scene.

Ferrara allegedly had close ties to 37-year-old Joseph Menconi, who escaped from a Corsican prison on Friday, police said, explaining that they suspected the two fugitives of collaborating on at least one robbery.

Meanwhile, police also announced that two suspects in connection with 17 armed robberies had escaped from police custody late Tuesday in the Paris suburb of Nanterre, where they had been taken from Fresnes for questioning.

One of the men, Laurent Soltani, faked an asthma attack, and when a police officer opened the door of the cell where he was being held, Soltani hit the officer, used his keys to open Rachid Bekhaled's cell, and the two fled.

Only Soltani has since been recaptured.

The two incidents were sure to embarrass the French government, which has since taking office last year put law and order at the top of its domestic policy agenda.  
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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvQ3Pa-sQJ8>

### **French 'Ocean's 11' prison breakers on trial**



**A French gang accused of one of the world's most audacious prison breaks – likened to Hollywood film Ocean's 11 for its precision and professionalism – have stood trial in Paris.**

Security was tight in and around the court as charges were read out to 22 defendants for involvement in a spectacular 2003 commando raid on a prison outside the capital, which freed the notorious bank robber Antonio Ferrara – nicknamed "Nino, the Escape King".

Smiling and giving a thumbs up in a hooded black sweatshirt, the Italian-born 34-year old stood next to men accused of helping him break out of the Fresnes jail south of Paris - reputed to be one of the country's safest.

One of them was his lawyer, Karim Achoui, charged with contributing to the escape plan by helping Mr Ferrara get transferred to a less-guarded part of the prison near the entrance on the eve of the break out. He was seriously injured in June by hit men.

At 4.30am on March 12, 2003, a half dozen heavily armed masked men, wearing gloves and police armbands, drove up to the prison. Two riddled the building's two manned watchtowers with AK-47 gunfire while the rest used dynamite and rocket-propelled grenades to blow down the armoured back gate and a second inner armoured door.

Simultaneously, the charismatic Ferrara, implicated in 15 bank robberies, blew open his cell door with a stick of dynamite believed to have been handed to him by a prison officer – also on trial.

Ten minutes later, they sped away from the jail in three "police" cars with sirens wailing and lights flashing. Before the prison siege, the accomplices had set on fire six cars near the prison as a diversion tactic. The assault was filmed by a resident whose flat overlooks the prison.

The justice minister of the time described the break out as a "military-style operation using weapons of war". Prison officials said it was a "millimetre-precision attack".

However, the clinical operation was not perfect. They had left behind them a hand gun, an assault rifle, a stick of explosives, detonators and blood; the group's explosives expert had lost an eye in the attack.

But most crucial of all, Nino had left behind in his cell a mobile phone that would eventually help police trace him and his accomplices.

Despite altering his features with plastic surgery, dying his hair and changing location every night, his jail break only lasted four months.

Police arrested him in a massive undercover operation involving false tourists and customers in a packed bar in Paris' 12th arrondissement . "You again?" he is quoted as exclaiming.

Nicolas Sarkozy, France's tough-talking interior minister of the time, declared him the most wanted man in France and made his capture a top personal priority.

Mr Ferrara made his name in the French underworld as the country's top explosives expert – able to provide just the right dose of dynamite to blow open a bank's armoured car without damaging the bank notes within. Police soon recognised his handiwork.

Nino – Spanish for "little" due to his diminutive size - was part of the so-called Dream Team, the "most dangerous gang in Europe" according to Interpol: a group of veteran bank robbers from Paris' southern suburbs and Marseille, southern France.

This was his second break out. The first was in 1998 when accomplices freed him during a hospital visit. He has been guarded in isolation by 30 prison staff since his arrest.

Some 50 witnesses will be called in the two-month trial. Most of the accused face life sentences for attempted murder or complicity in attempted murder.

The trial came amid heated debate over the safety of France's prisons. Last Sunday - in another incident reminiscent of a crime thriller film - a prisoner who faced interrogation over a murder was shot dead inside his French jail by a sniper positioned on a nearby hill.

The suspected gunman, whose rifle was still warm from the shooting, was arrested shortly afterwards as he tried to flee on a motorbike.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvQ3Pa-sQJ8>

### **Brotherly love helps ETA suspect escape**



A leading Basque separatist has managed to escape from one of France's best-known jails after his brother took his place in his prison cell.

The escaped man, Ismael Berasategui Escudero, is regarded by the Spanish authorities as one of the leading members of ETA.

The two managed to swap places during a prison visit last Saturday, but warders at La Santé prison in Paris only realised what had happened on Thursday morning.

BBC Paris correspondent James Coomarasamy says this was no small feat in one of the highest security jails in the country.

The escaped prisoner was arrested in the Ardeche in May and was being held in connection with a series of car bomb attacks in the Basque region of Spain.

His brother is said to bear a close resemblance to his sibling.

In recent years, France has seen a rash of spectacular prison escapes, most of which have involved helicopters.

Our correspondent says this one may have been less dramatic, but is perhaps rather more embarrassing for the French authorities.



### **'Tensions'**

France's national prison officer's union said in a statement that the escape should not come as a surprise because there were not enough staff in prison establishments.

It said the anti-crime campaign adopted by the recently-elected centre-right government had sharply increased prison populations, compounding the pressure.

"Prisons are on the verge of exploding, with lots of tensions between personnel and inmates," said the union.

It added that there were 55,000 inmates for just 48,000 prison places, and that six prison workers had been attacked in less than a week.

ETA has claimed responsibility for more than 800 deaths during its 34-year campaign to create an independent Basque homeland out of territory in northern Spain and south-west France.

Spain, the European Union and the United

### **Breakout from French 'sieve' jail**

**A murder suspect has walked free from a jail on the French island of Corsica after threatening guards with a fake gun, in the latest in a series of embarrassing escapes from the prison.**

Joseph Menconi, alleged to have links to organised crime, sawed through the bars of his cell in Borgo prison and climbed across roofs before brandishing what appeared to be a gun at guards on duty at the prison gates in the early hours of Friday morning.

Three accomplices armed with a fake rocket-launcher were waiting for him outside, officials said.

Mr Menconi is currently being prosecuted in several criminal cases, including three murders.

He also managed to escape from Borgo prison in 1998, with the use of ladders provided by accomplices, before being recaptured in Paris about two months ago.

### **Security fears**

French police officials are said to be furious at the news of Mr Menconi's escape, with police union Synergie saying it had repeatedly issued warnings about security in what it termed "this sieve of a prison," French news agency AFP reported.

In June 2001 drugs trafficker Louis Carboni was winched dramatically to freedom by a helicopter that had been hijacked earlier by two accomplices.

And one month earlier three prisoners managed to bluff their way out of the prison after their friends sent a counterfeit fax to the governor demanding their release.

Borgo prison currently houses around 180 inmates, and recently began holding Corsican nationalists transferred from jails on the French mainland.

There has been widespread criticism in the Spanish media of the escape of a suspected senior member of the Basque separatist guerrilla group, ETA, from French custody.

Ibon Fernandez Iradi, who was being held in the town of Bayonne in south-western France, was due to be transferred to Paris on Sunday when he climbed through a skylight in his cell and escaped over railings and a wall.

Spanish media reports say Mr Iradi's absence was not detected for at least six hours.



French officials are said to be furious at the latest escape



The French Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, has suspended five policemen who were on duty when the escape took place, and an extensive manhunt is under way.

A spokeswoman at the nearby Pau prefecture told Reuters new agency she could not comment on the Spanish reports.

"There is nothing we can say for the moment. An internal police inquiry has been launched to clarify the circumstances in which he escaped," she said on Sunday.

A BBC correspondent in Paris says his getaway is both an embarrassment for the French and a morale boost for ETA.

Mr Iradi and a woman were picked up at a police check-point on Thursday, in what was seen as an important coup.

Their detention led to the arrests of seven more people whom Spain says are ETA operatives living in France.

### **Slim chance**

Mr Iradi and the woman were placed in separate cells at a police station in Bayonne.

But Mr Iradi, who is described by police as very tall and thin, was able to squeeze through the skylight, which had no bars.

An investigation is under way to determine whether he may have been helped by policemen.

On Sunday, the authorities launched a major operation across southwestern France to find Mr Iradi.

Roadblocks have been set up and identity checks are being carried out.

But officials are pessimistic he will be caught again quickly.

### **Big fish**

Mr Iradi is suspected of being a logistics chief, responsible for organising back-up for teams who carry out attacks across the border in Spain.

The escape comes four months after another suspected ETA detainee walked free from a prison in central Paris.

His brother, who resembled him, succeeded in swapping positions during a family visit.



Iradi escaped through a skylight



ETA has killed more than 800 people

ETA has killed more than 800 people in the past 30 years during a campaign for an independent Basque state straddling the French-Spanish border.

### **New escape at Corsica's leaky jail**



Borgo jail's helicopter escape follows the fax fiasco  
A drugs trafficker has been winched to freedom from a French jail in a dramatic escape by helicopter.

Louis Carboni made his escape from Borgo jail on Corsica.

The same jail achieved notoriety earlier in June, when three prisoners walked to freedom after a fake fax ordering their release was sent to the prison.

The escape of 45-year-old Carboni was staged after two masked men hijacked an emergency services helicopter which had just delivered a patient to a hospital in Bastia, the island's second largest city.

The pilot was forced to fly to the jail at Borgo, in the north of the island.

As the helicopter hovered over the prison, a cable was lowered and Carboni was hoisted aboard.

The pilot flew to a nearby beach, where the gang are believed to have had a car or motorcycles waiting for them.

A representative of the Force Ouvriere union said the exact details of the escape were still unclear.

"We are waiting to find out exactly where this happened since there are anti-helicopter nets over the recreation yards in Borgo," said a spokesman.

"I know that there aren't nets everywhere, over patios in particular. We, at Force Ouvriere, have been calling for these to be installed over all open areas which can be accessed with an helicopter."

### **Laughing stock**

“  
**We are waiting to find out exactly where this happened since there are anti-helicopter nets over the recreation yards in Borgo**  
”  
**Union spokesman**



A prison official said no shots had been fired during the escape.

The first escape made the jail something of a national laughing stock, and a second escape will add to the embarrassment of officials.

This is the second time this year that a helicopter has been used in a break-out.

In March, three prisoners escaped from a jail in Draguignan, in the south of France, after a helicopter was hijacked from a nearby airfield.

### **Jail escape forces French rethink**

**The French Government is being forced to rethink its prison security policy after the most spectacular breakout yet in a series of daring escapes from French jails.**

In scenes reminiscent of a Hollywood film, gangsters used rocket launchers to blow holes in the prison walls, raked guardposts with gunfire and set fire to cars.

The operation successfully freed Italian gangster Antonio Ferrara, who was jailed for bank robbery but was also suspected of murder and a string of other offences.

The drama came less than a week after another murder suspect, Joseph Menconi, escaped from a prison in Corsica when accomplices used a fake bazooka to threaten guards.

French Justice Minister Dominique Perben said the methods being used were posing huge problems for the authorities.

"We are faced with a new type of escape that we haven't experienced until now, which are military-type operations... with the use of weapons of war," Mr Perben told Europe-1 radio.

A special panel was being convened by the government on Friday, Mr Perben said, to discuss how to prevent such escapes.



Watchtowers were raked with bullets

**“ We are faced with a new type of escape that we haven't experienced until now which are military-type operations... with the use of weapons of war ”**

Dominique Perben  
French Justice Minister



One prison trade union, Alliance, condemned a "new type of commando whose members no longer hesitate to use 'weapons of war' to attack our institutions." Nearby cars were set ablaze

France has suffered a string of embarrassing break-outs.

Some have used helicopters to airlift people to freedom.

One key ETA suspect escaped from a high-security prison after trading places with his brother during a visit.

Wednesday's breakout from Fresnes prison outside Paris left flames licking the prison walls.

The escape gang are believed to have set fire to nearby cars to provide a distraction.

"The commando gang entered the high-security section of the prison and gave Antonio Ferrara explosives which allowed him to blow open the bars on the window of his cell," said Christophe Marques, a prison officers' representative from the FO union.

Police believe six or seven gunmen were involved in the jailbreak. Some were apparently wearing police uniform.

The attack began at about 0430 local time (0530GMT) on Wednesday morning.

One group used automatic weapons to fire on the guardposts, while other attackers blew open the prison's metal gates and then blasted holes in the interior walls.

No prison guards were hurt in the raid.

The gang made their getaway by car only 15 minutes after the audacious raid began.

Police are investigating possible links between the breakouts of Ferrara and Menconi, who are believed to be gangland allies and had both escaped before.

Ferrara, whose previous escape came during a medical visit, was found last September to have got hold of explosives and detonators while in prison.

## FRENCH JAILBREAKS

March 2003 - murder suspect Joseph Menconi escapes in Corsica with aid of fake bazooka

Dec 2002 - ETA suspect Ibon Fernandez Iradi escapes from Bayonne

Aug 2002 ETA suspect Ismael Berasategui Escudero switches place with brother

March 2002 - helicopter swoops to airlift three men from Draguignan jail

May 2001 - guards taken hostage in failed helicopter break-out from Fresnes

June 1986 - Nadine Vaujour pilots helicopter to pluck husband Michel from Paris' La Sante jail

## Helicopter escape from French prison



The convicts abandoned the helicopter and transferred to a getaway car  
Three prisoners have escaped by helicopter from a jail in the south of France, prison authorities said.

An accomplice hijacked the helicopter from an airfield at nearby St Tropez and forced its pilot to fly to the prison in Draguignan.

The helicopter landed in a courtyard of the prison that had no protective netting overhead.

The three inmates - who are described as "dangerous" - jumped aboard and it took off before guards had time to react, prison officials and local police said.

"The whole thing was over in a flash," a prison guard said.

### Getaway car waiting

The helicopter landed some 60 kilometres (37 miles) from the jail near the village of Auribeau-sur-Siagne, where the pilot was released and a getaway car was waiting.

After the escape prison officials immediately dispatched search teams around the region.

The convicts have been identified as Emile Forma-Sari and Jean-Philippe Lecase - both of whom are Corsican - and Abdelhamid Carnous, whose nationality was not immediately known.

All three were convicted of armed robberies and other crimes and one of the men was serving a sentence until 2012, police said

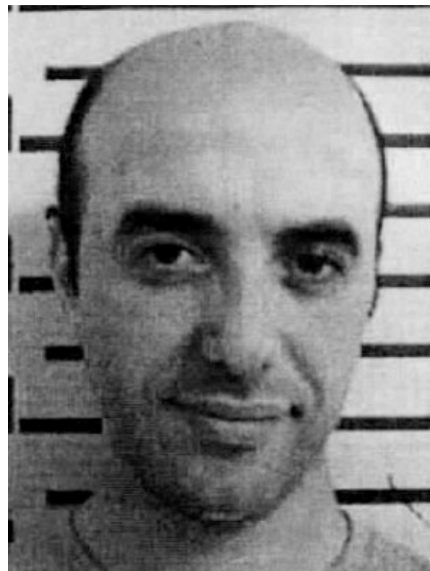


## How Frances most notorious criminal came to blast his way out of prison



PHILIPPE HUGUEN/AFP/Getty Images Members of the ERIS Police service stand guard in front of the destroyed door of the Sequedin prison, on April 13, 2013 in Sequedin, after one of France's most dangerous gangsters, known for brazen attacks on cash-in-transit vehicles, today blasted his way out of jail after taking several wardens hostage.

France's most notorious criminal is on the run again after blasting out of prison Saturday in spectacular fashion, triggering an international manhunt for a man officials say is both extremely dangerous and brilliant.



Interpol Redoine Faïd

Redoine Faid escaped from Sequedin prison in Lille, northern France, using dynamite to blow through five heavy doors. He used five hostages — including four prison guards — during the breakout, freeing two after exiting the prison, and the rest after taking off in a getaway car.

Officials later found the vehicle torched near the town of Ronchin, just outside the French-Belgian border.

The dramatic sequence left witnesses stunned and terrified.

“I thought my last hour had come,” Rose Lafont, a visitor at the prison, told France’s *Metro* newspaper. “Suddenly, everything started blowing up. The walls started shaking, as did the windows and the doors. I was really scared.”

The 40-year-old career criminal has been well known throughout France since the mid 1990s when he was implicated in a spree of armoured truck robberies.

The heists, Faid explained, were modeled after scenes from the Michael Mann film *Heat*, in which Robert De Niro leads a crew in a violent attack on an armoured vehicle containing over a million dollars.

“Movies for me were like a user’s guide for armed robbery,” he told the reporters in 2010.

Faid obsessed over the larger than life gangsters in *Scarface* and *Reservoir Dogs* and wore a hockey mask during crimes like De Niro’s in *Heat*. He seemed to crave the spotlight, which began to shine after his first prison break in 1995.

For three years, Faid alluded authorities in Switzerland, and then in Israel where he pretended to be an Orthodox Jew, even donning a skullcap and learning Hebrew.

But he was caught in 1998 and sentenced to 20 years. Released on parole after just ten, Faid wrote a memoir entitled *Robber: From Suburbs to Organized Crime*. It detailed his rise from juvenile delinquent in the Parisian suburb of Creil, known for rampant crime and downtrodden neighbourhoods, to Interpol’s most wanted list.

The book denounced his criminal past, sentiment he repeated over and over during an extensive media tour.

“When I was on the run, I lived all the time with death, with fear of the police, fear of getting shot,” Faid said on Europe One radio.

The act didn’t last long though. In 2010, police accused Faid of being the mastermind behind a botched armed robbery that left a 26-year-old policewoman dead.



On the lam yet again, Faïd avoided arrest for eight months. Finally, in June 2011, he was captured by French police, convicted for parole violations and sentenced to an eight year term.



PHILIPPE HUGUEN/AFP/Getty Images Police officers investigate around the destroyed door of the Sequedin prison, on April 13, 2013 in Sequedin, after one of France's most dangerous gangsters, known for brazen attacks on cash-in-transit vehicles, blasted his way out of jail.

Prosecutors were in the process of connecting Faïd to the fallen policewoman, charges which would have put him away for life.

But Faïd had no intention of facing the allegations.

“He is remarkably intelligent, and he is using his intellect to serve his ambitions,” his attorney, Jean-Louis Pelletier said on French television [BFMTV]. “[Faïd] cannot stand being imprisoned anymore.”

Officials believe Faïd’s wife may be involved in the escape by smuggling the explosives and a handgun into the prison inside tissue packets. Mr. Pelletier “vigorously” denied that allegation, claiming she had not visited the prison that day. He also told *Le Parisien* newspaper that he was not surprised by the escape.





Postmedia News files Jacques Mesrine, who became an outlaw folk hero in the 1970s after a series of spectacular heists, daring jailbreaks and wild shootouts with police in Canada and France.

“That a prisoner should escape is, in principle, not particularly surprising,” he said. “Especially when the prisoner is someone in his situation, and, if I may say so, someone with his social network. There was certainly the possibility that this could happen.”

The astonishing escape evokes the memory of Jacques Mesrine, the famous French robber who made headlines around the world during the 1960s and 70s for breaking out of prisons in France and Canada.

Both had a penchant for thievery, could outsmart authorities and even share the same attorney [Mr. Pelletier].

Mesrine’s story ended when he was gunned down on the streets of Paris in 1979.

With over 100 French special investigators on his trail, Faid’s tale could have a similar bloody conclusion.

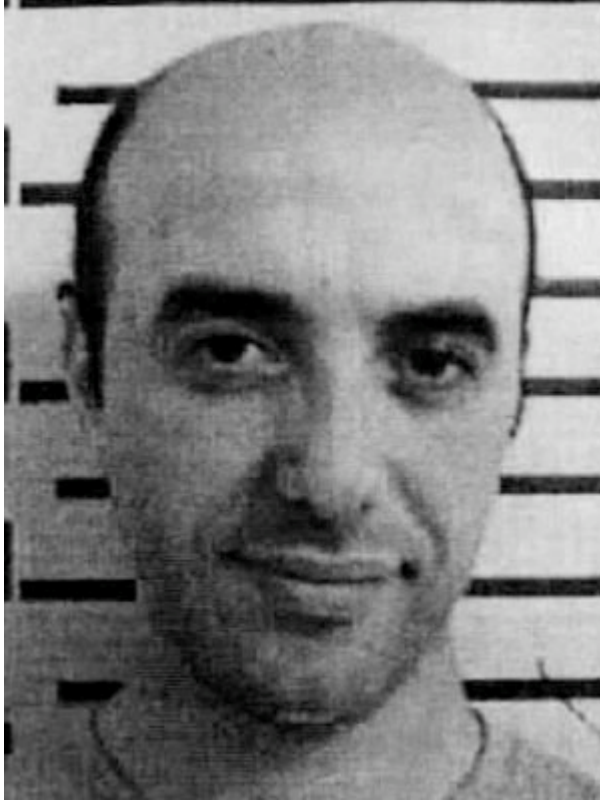
Gangster makes most-wanted list after blasting his way out of prison with explosives in tissue packages



Philippe Huguen / AFP / Getty Images Police officers investigate around the destroyed door of the Sequedin prison, on Saturday in Sequedin, after one of France's most dangerous gangsters, known for brazen attacks on cash-in-transit vehicles, blasted his way out of jail after taking several wardens hostage.

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PARIS – Redoine Faïd’s escape from a French prison landed him on Interpol’s most wanted list Monday, two days after he took four guards hostage and used explosives hidden inside tissue packets to blast his way out of a prison in Lille, near the Belgian border. Faïd freed his hostages along his getaway route.



It wasn't the first time that Faïd, an armed robber who was being held in the death of a police officer, had gone on the lam. He was arrested in 1998 after three years on the run in Switzerland and Israel, according to the French media. Faïd was freed after serving 10 of his 31-year sentence, then swore he had turned his life around, writing a confessional book about his life of crime and going on an extensive media tour.

“When I was on the run, I lived all the time with death, with fear of the police, fear of getting shot,” he told Europe 1 radio at the time.

Here's a look at other notorious prison escapes:

### **HIGH-RISE CRIME**

Two bank robbers, onetime cellmates at a downtown Chicago lockup, used a rope made from bed sheets tied together to drop 20 stories to freedom in December 2012. Authorities say they apparently broke a cell window, pulled out the bars then descended to freedom from the downtown Metropolitan Correctional Center. Hours later, the rope of sheets – at least 200 feet (61 metres) long and knotted every 6 feet (2 metres) – was still dangling down the side of the building. Both men were recaptured within weeks.

### **DIRTY LAUNDRY**

Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman spent months corrupting his guards at a Mexican prison, then tricked them into thinking they would get a cut of some gold being smuggled out of the prison the night of Jan. 19, 2001. Instead, he smuggled himself out on a laundry cart with the help of a maintenance worker on his payroll. Security camera footage from that night disappeared and computer records of the vehicles entering and leaving the prison were erased. Guzman has since risen to the top of the Sinaloa cartel, Mexico’s most powerful international drug trafficking network, and has been in hiding ever since. He is considered to be among the world’s richest men.



### **ESCAPE FROM SAN QUENTIN**

In 1979, bank robber Forrest Silva Tucker and two other San Quentin inmates built a kayak out of plastic sheets, wood, duct tape and Formica. The vessel held together just long enough for the three to paddle a few hundred yards to freedom. A few years later, police said, Tucker joined the Over-the-Hill-Gang – a group of elderly thieves who robbed Boston-area supermarkets. Tucker was visiting a girlfriend in Florida in 1999 when he was caught again.

### **KNITTING NEEDLES**



George Blake, a British double agent, used a ladder made of rope and knitting needles to escape Wormwood Scrubs jail in 1966, five years into his 42-year sentence for treason. With the help of accomplices, he made his way to the border of East Germany hidden in a secret compartment inside a camper van. Blake ended up in the Soviet Union and still lives in Russia, where he receives a KGB pension and last year celebrated his 90th birthday.



### **THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY**

Ronnie Biggs was part of a gang that stole sacks containing 2.6 million pounds sterling from a Glasgow-to-London mail train in August 1963. The haul from what was dubbed the Great Train Robbery would be worth more than 40 million pounds (\$60 million) today. Biggs escaped from prison in 1965 by scaling a 30-foot wall with three other inmates. Styling himself “the last of the gentleman crooks,” Biggs charged \$50 – later hiked to \$60 – for visitors to join a barbecue at his home where they could also buy the T-shirt: “I went to Rio and met Ronnie Biggs ... honest.” He spent decades thumbing his nose at British authorities from his home in Brazil before returning to Britain aboard a plane chartered by a tabloid newspaper. Biggs was freed from prison in 2009 on compassionate grounds after a series of strokes.

French fugitive evades police in global manhunt

Published: 21 May 13 12:47

**The French Interior Minister reassured the public on Tuesday that a global operation involving French and international police was underway to track down fugitive Redoine Faïd, who remains at large after blasting his way out of prison in April.**

"France is working with European police and on a global level to arrest Redoine Faïd," Manuel Valls told Le Parisien newspaper on Wednesday on the sidelines of a memorial service for Aurélie Fouquet, a policewoman killed three years ago in a shooting which Faïd is suspected of being tied to.

Valls added that all efforts were being made in order for "justice to be served with the greatest severity to those responsible".

The lifestyle criminal, born to Algerian parents in the Paris suburb Creil in 1972, was already notorious before being jailed for robbing a security truck. In his latest stint in jail, he was awaiting trial for complicity in Fouquet's murder and faced a potential life sentence.

According to media reports, Faïd staged his break-out by pulling a gun from his bag in the visitor's room of the prison near Sequedin and taking four prison guards hostage. A tissue-box in actual fact contained explosives, which Faïd used to meticulously blast his way through four gates on his way to the car park, where he released his prisoners and set off.

The torched car was later found by the side of a road near Lille.

A European Arrest Warrant (EWA) has been issued. Two days after his escape, global police agency Interpol put him on its red list, stating that he was wanted not only for his suspected involvement in the 26-year-old policewoman's death, but also "in connection with the attempted murder of an officer of the Gendarmerie Nationale".

Redoine Faïd's brazen escape and other notorious prison breaks

**Redoine Faïd escapes: It wasn't the first time that Faïd, an armed robber being held in the death of a police officer, had gone on the lam. Here are a few other notorious prison escapes.**





A special police officer stands guard in front the jail of Sequedin near Lille, northern France, April 14. Redoine Faid, an inmate, used explosives and took hostages to escape out of jail on Saturday morning, local media reported.

## PARIS

Redoine Faid's escape from a French prison landed him on [Interpol's](#) most wanted list Monday, two days after he took four guards hostage and used explosives hidden inside tissue packets to blast his way out of a prison in Lille. Faid freed his hostages along his getaway route.

It wasn't the first time that Faid, an armed robber being held in the death of a police officer, had gone on the lam. He was arrested in 1998 after three years on the run in [Switzerland](#) and [Israel](#), according to the French media. Faid was freed after serving 10 years of his 31-year sentence, then swore he had turned his life around, writing a confessional book about his life of crime and going on an extensive media tour.

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## KNITTING NEEDLES

George Blake, a British double agent, used a ladder made of rope and knitting needles to escape Wormwood Scrubs jail in 1966, five years into his 42-year sentence for treason. With the help of accomplices, he made his way to the border of [East Germany](#) hidden in a secret compartment inside a camper van. Blake ended up in the [Soviet Union](#) and still lives in [Russia](#), where he receives a [KGB](#) pension and last year celebrated his 90th birthday.

## THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

Ronnie Biggs was part of a gang that stole sacks containing 2.6 million pounds sterling from a Glasgow-to-London mail train in August 1963. The haul from what was dubbed the Great Train Robbery would be worth more than 40 million pounds (\$60 million) today. Biggs escaped from prison in 1965 by scaling a 30-foot wall with three other inmates. Styling himself "the last of the gentleman crooks," Biggs charged \$50 — later hiked to \$60 — for visitors to join a barbecue at his home where they could also buy the T-shirt: "I went to [Rio](#) and met Ronnie Biggs ... honest." He spent decades thumbing his nose at British authorities from his home in [Brazil](#) before returning to [Britain](#) aboard a plane chartered by a tabloid newspaper. Biggs was freed from prison in 2009 on compassionate grounds after a series of strokes.

## Catch me if you can: A history of helicopter-aided jailbreaks



Eurokinissi / AFP / Getty Images This picture taken on Feb. 24, 2013 shows police investigating by a helicopter in the northern Greece Trikala prison's yard. A helicopter swooped down on a prison courtyard on Feb. 24 as armed men on board fired on guards and lowered a rope to help a convicted killer make his fourth attempt to escape from a Greek prison.

Two Quebec inmates made headlines around the world Sunday with their dramatic jailbreak after they were whisked from the prison grounds by a helicopter.

As daring as the plan was, it's hardly unique in the history of prison escapes.

Although it was a first in Quebec, helicopters have been used for jailbreaks for decades. Here are five documented cases:



Graham Hughes / The Canadian Press  
Police vehicles block a road just outside the town of Chertsey, Que., Sunday during a search for escaped prisoners.

### **1. World's first helicopter escape**

**Escapee:** Joel David Kaplan

**Prison:** Santa Martha Acatitla, Mexico

**Date:** August 19, 1971

In what's recorded as the world's first helicopter escape, New York millionaire Joel David Kaplan had spent nine years of his 27-year sentence for the murder of his business partner when he made his move. The businessman fled from the Mexican prison via chopper in 1971. The escape inspired the book *The 10-Second Jailbreak: The Helicopter Escape of Joel David Kaplan* and the 1975 movie *Breakout*.

### **2. Foiled by a fall**

**Escapee:** Panagiotis Vlastos

**Prison:** Trikala Prison, Greece

**Date:** February 24, 2013

The most recent helicopter-jailbreak happened just one month ago in Greece. Although similar attempts had been made in the country before, it was the first time it failed. Panagiotis Vlastos, serving a life term after being convicted of murder, was shot by prison guards as he climbed into the chopper and fell into the courtyard. The plan was foiled and the helicopter was forced to land.

### **3. The "escape king" strikes again**

**Escapee:** Nordin Benallal

**Prison:** Ittre prison, Belgium

**Date:** October 28, 2007

The "escape king" Nordin Benallal had already fled from a prison van, walked right out of jail masked with a wig and sunglasses and even scaled a prison wall before using a chopper in one of his many breakout schemes. After the helicopter landed in the prison grounds, other prisoners crowded it, making it impossible to takeoff. Benallal and his partners then took warders hostage and escaped in a nearby parked car.

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### **4. Jailbreak via helicopter thrice with no luck**

**Escapee:** Pascal Payet

**Prison:** Luynnes prison, France

**Date:** 2001, 2003, 2007

Pascal Payet attempted to breakout of jail via helicopter thrice, only to be apprehended each time. After he was convicted in the death of an armored truck guard, he cooked up his first plan in 2001 and was successful until he was caught a week later. Then in 2003, he orchestrated a breakout for three inmates. In 2007, he managed to escape again and was caught months later.

## **5. For better or for worse**

**Escapee:** Michel Vaujour

**Prison:** Prison de la Santé, France

**Date:** May 26, 1986

Nadine Bourgain took flying lessons and rented a helicopter under an alias to help sneak her husband out of prison. Michel Vaujour was serving 17 years for armed robbery and attempted murder in a French prison, when he made his fourth escape from prison thanks to his wife.

Top French gangster in spectacular jailbreak

By Marine Laouchez (AFP)—Apr 14, 2013

SEQUEDIN, France — One of France's most dangerous gangsters, known for brazen attacks on cash-in-transit vehicles, blasted his way out of jail after briefly taking several wardens hostage, officials said.

Redoine Faïd, who risked a heavy sentence over the 2010 death of a policewoman, used explosives Saturday to blast through five prison doors and break free in the northern town of Sequedin.

Police and helicopters were trying to track the 40-year-old, who set fire to his getaway car in the south of the city of Lille before getting into a second vehicle.

State Prosecutor Frederic Fevre said Faïd, who had already been France's most wanted a few years ago, was a "particularly dangerous prisoner" and was still armed and in possession of explosives.

France's Justice Minister Christiane Taubira said Interpol had been called in to help track Faïd and added that a Europe-wide warrant had been issued.

"The hunt will initially focus on Belgium of course because we share a border but also extend to the entire Schengen area and beyond," she told reporters from Sequedin.

Fevre said Faïd had four hostages with him during the jailbreak. One was released just outside the prison, another a few hundred metres away and then the final two were left along a highway.

Wardens unions described the prison break as "an act of war" and also argued that the Sequedin jail was inadequate for such dangerous convicts.

"This escape and hostage-taking were methodically prepared," the CGT union said, complaining that searches on detainees were not thorough enough.

Taubira denied that there had been any "fault" on the part of the wardens in the dramatic episode.

A woman who was visiting her imprisoned son described the chaos caused by Faïd's sprint to freedom.

"I thought my last hour had come. Suddenly, everything started blowing up. The walls started shaking, as did the windows and the doors. I was really scared," Rose Lafont said.

Prison union leader Etienne Dobremetz said Faïd had received a visit from his wife earlier on Saturday morning.

Contacted by AFP, her lawyer vehemently denied any suspicion of involvement in her husband's escape.

"It happened very quickly, it was clearly very well organised, we are still busy putting the facts together," a local administrative official said.

Faïd is also known for co-authoring two books after a decade in prison for robbery, about his delinquent youth and rise as a criminal in Paris' impoverished crime-ridden suburbs.

He said his life of crime was inspired by American films such as "Scarface" and "Heat" -- where Robert De Niro's armoured car heist has been cited as the model for real life attacks in South Africa, Colombia and other countries.

"Movies for me were like a user's guide for armed robbery," he told the LCI news channel when his autobiography was released in 2010 relating his rise from petty thieving in his native northern Paris suburb to gangster stardom.

After his first robbery, Faïd, of Algerian extraction, fled to Israel where he wore the Jewish skullcap and picked up Hebrew to blend in.

Despite vowing he had turned his back on crime Faïd was in 2010 suspected of being the mastermind of an armed robbery in which a young policewoman was killed in a shootout.

Faïd, nicknamed "The writer", landed back in prison in 2011 for failing to comply with his parole conditions and was due to serve the remaining eight years of his original sentence.

He faced 30 more years over the policewoman's death however.

"I wasn't surprised when I heard about his escape although there were no signs that anything was in the works," his lawyer Jean-Louis Pelletier told AFP.

He described his client as an extremely intelligent and well connected person.

The Sequedin prison is designed for 638 inmates and currently houses some 800 detainees with 220 guards, according to the Ufap-Unsa union.



Hollywood-style helicopter jailbreak takes new twist as police probe mystery identity of accused man

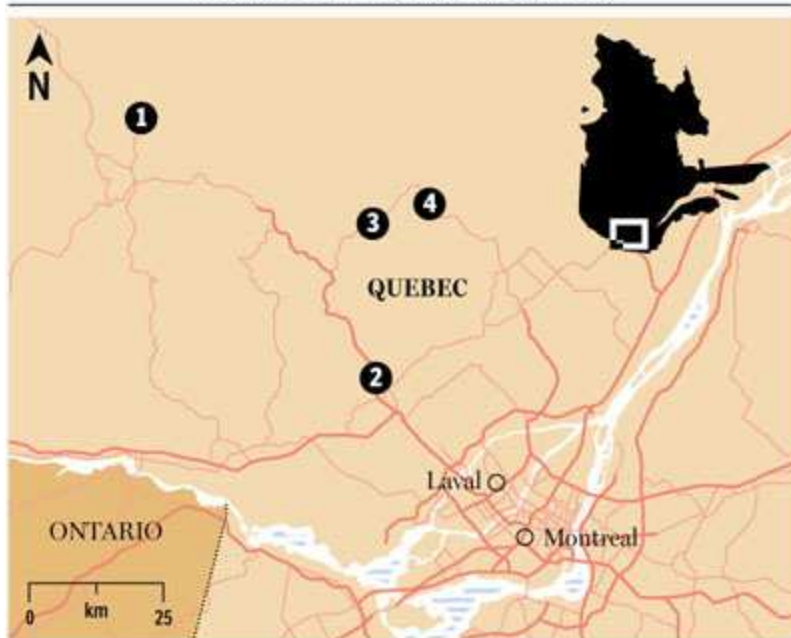


Graham Hughes/The Canadian Press Police vehicles block the road leading to a detention centre in St. Jerome, Que., where two prisoners made a daring escape by helicopter.

MONTREAL — The strange case of a jailbreak by helicopter just got stranger.

Authorities say one of the four people arrested this week gave them a fake name and, after having checked his fingerprints, they're now working to confirm his real identity.

## HELICOPTER ESCAPE



**1.** On Sunday March 17, two gunmen posing as tourists hijacked a helicopter from Passport-Hélico in Mont-Tremblant, Que.. The pilot flies the helicopter to Saint-Jérôme, Que., at gunpoint.

**2.** At around 2 p.m., the helicopter reached the Saint-Jérôme detention centre, where it lowered ropes into the courtyard and lifted two inmates, Danny Provençal, 33, and Benjamin Hudon-Barbeau, 36, out of the prison. The helicopter landed in a nearby field, allowing the two to board.

**3.** The helicopter continued on to Estérel, Que., where it landed in a hotel parking lot and the four men fled in a Cadillac Escalade.

**4.** The fugitives exchanged gunfire with police, before breaking into a cottage in Chertsey, Que. The cottage's occupants escaped unharmed, and Hudon-Barbeau and the two alleged accomplices were apprehended around 7 p.m. Provençal was tracked to a sugar shack, also in Chertsey, where he was surrounded and surrendered to police a few hours later.

SOURCE: NEWS REPORTS

JONATHAN RIVAIT / NATIONAL POST

A man who identified himself as Yage Beaudoin is accused of being one of two people who hijacked a helicopter and helped a pair of inmates escape last weekend near Montreal.

Then authorities got another surprise. Quebec provincial police say the suspect told them during fingerprinting that the name he'd given them was fake, and he gave them a second one which they're now checking.

The dramatic prison escape of Benjamin Hudon-Barbeau and Danny Provençal has already made headlines around the world.

Two accomplices, including the now-unidentified one, allegedly rented a helicopter, pointed a gun at the young pilot, and forced him to land on a tower at St-Jerome prison.

From there, they tossed a rope out the window, and the two inmates came climbing up from the yard and toward dreams of freedom.

However, that freedom was short-lived. All four men were arrested within hours and they now face nearly two-dozen criminal charges — including breaking out of prison, kidnapping, and pointing a gun at someone.

Helicopter pilot Sébastien Foray was unharmed.



GOOGLE PLUS Sébastien Foray, a native of the Savoie region of France who moved to Quebec in 2011 to learn to be a pilot.

From sedated guards to cell-key replicas: A history of famous Don Jail escapes

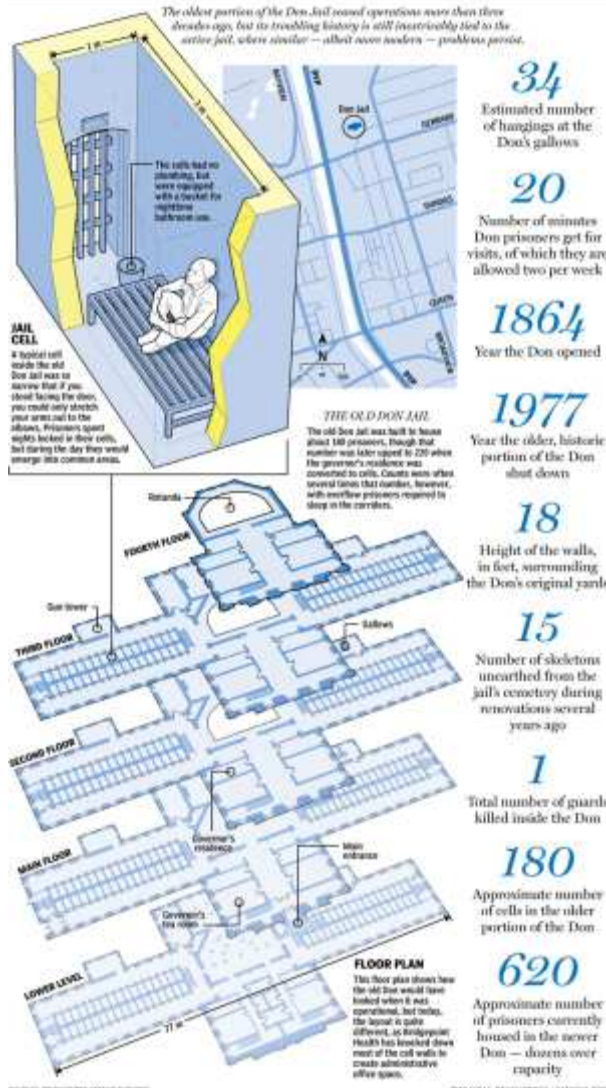


Tyler Anderson / National Post files A view of old solitary confinement cells at the new Bridgepoint Hospital Administrative offices which are being built in the historic Old Don Jail in Toronto, Ontario on March 8, 2013.

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## INSIDE THE DON

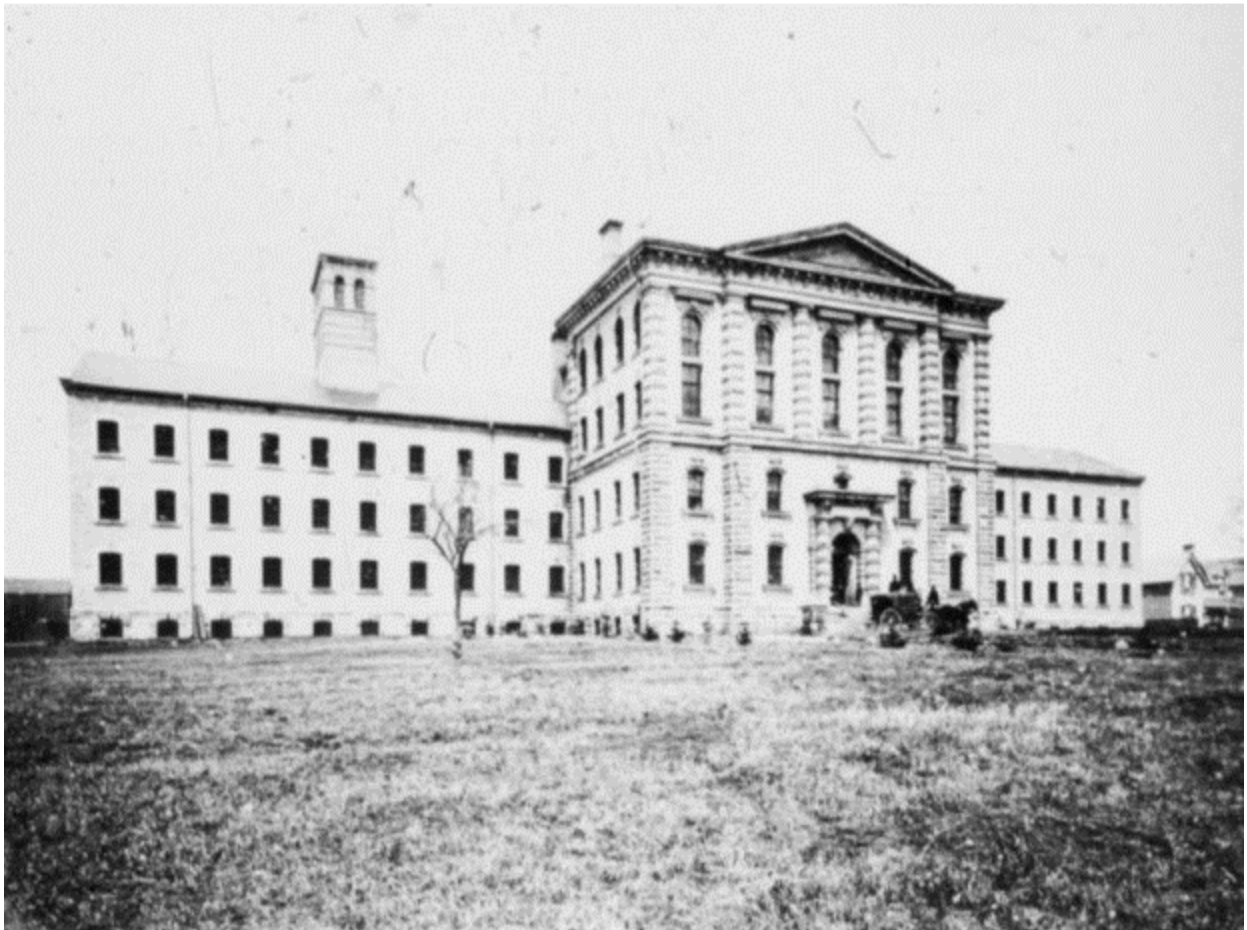


CLICK TO ENLARGE

Perhaps the most infamous pair of jail breaks involved the Boyd Gang, headed by bank robber Edwin Alonzo Boyd. In late 1951, Boyd and two fellow criminals busted out through a rear window using a hacksaw one inmate had hidden in his wooden leg. The group then hooked bedsheets over the jail's 18-foot walls and climbed into the surrounding Don Valley wilderness. They began robbing banks again and connected with a fourth member, but were separately apprehended within months and returned to the Don. This time, they were confined to death row, where the cells were considered more secure — but the gang had other plans. One member, a well-known prankster, grabbed a guard's key one night and squeezed hard enough to leave its imprint in his palm. Using tracing paper and some smuggled bits of metal, the gang then fashioned a replica key to exit their cells, and brandished another smuggled hacksaw to escape through a second-floor window. They were caught days later.

The biggest escape by sheer numbers came in 1908, when seven inmates escaped from a corridor adjacent to the new internal gallows. Dressed in civilian clothes for scheduled court appearances, the group — after successfully receiving a key from an unknown source — entered the gallows chamber and broke through a weak spot in the thin brick walls. They dropped down ten feet and entered the jail's east yard, a cemetery for hanged prisoners. The escape initially succeeded, but some of the American-born fugitives were caught in 1909 after entering the United States.

In April 1919, convicted cop murderer Frank McCullough escaped from death row through a second-floor window. With the help of his girlfriend, he procured a sleeping powder and slipped it into the night watchman's drink before exiting through the sawed-out window. McCullough wrote an explanatory letter, published by local media, to admit he had sedated the night watchman and to deflect blame from the man, who was later charged with aiding and abetting McCullough's escape. "I am sorry but you know life is sweet, old man," McCullough reportedly said in his letter. Shortly after his escape, McCullough — who claimed he was wrongfully convicted — was recaptured and executed in June 1919, despite a protest by thousands of supporters outside the jail.



ONTARIO ARCHIVES An undated archival image of Toronto's Don Jail.



Some inmates were stymied in their escape capers before they even got over the jail's walls. About 30 maximum security inmates — including the Polka Dot Gang, so named for the red-and-white polka-dotted handkerchiefs they wore to conceal their faces while committing robberies throughout Toronto and southern Ontario — made a daring attempt in the mid-1940s. First, they overpowered and tied up two jail officers in the exercise yard. Then, the group formed a human pyramid in an effort to scale the exterior wall. But before they made it over, another armed officer, who had heard one of his colleagues cry for help, ordered the inmates to climb back down. Reinforcements then arrived to escort the prisoners back to their cells.



A notorious French gangster is back on the loose after a brazen, movie-like escape from a north France prison using explosives and hostages.

“It happened very quickly, it was clearly very well organized, we are still busy putting the facts together,” an official told Metro.

Twenty-six different European nations are on high alert and have authority to arrest Redoine Faid, a 40-year-old who had been serving time at the Sequedin prison in Lille for several armed robberies.

Called a “particularly dangerous prisoner” by a state prosecutor, Faid added another incredible stunt Saturday to his long list of crimes.

He held five people, including four guards, hostage as he blasted through five different prison doors, setting fire to his getaway car and vanishing without a trace in another vehicle south of

Lille.

"I thought my last hour had come," said Rose Lafont, who told Metro she was visiting her son at the prison during the escape. "Suddenly, everything started blowing up. The walls started shaking, as did the windows and the doors. I was really scared."

No one was injured and no one knows where Faïd is.

"The hunt will initially focus on Belgium of course because we share a border but also extend to the entire Schengen area and beyond," France's justice minister Christiane Taubira told reporters.

Faïd fashions himself to be the real-life character Robert De Niro portrayed in "Heat," donning a hockey mask to carry out an armored truck robbery during one heist. He wrote in an autobiography that the De Niro role and the movie "Scarface" offered inspiration for his crime spree.

Like De Niro, Faïd's luck ran out after he was captured in 1998 following three years on the run for a series of armed robberies. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison, served 10 and was released on parole. But his alleged involvement in a 2010 robbery that left a young policewoman dead sent him back to jail to serve out his sentence.

"He is remarkably intelligent, and he is using his intellect to serve his ambitions," his attorney, Jean-Louis Pelletier told BFMTV. "(And Faïd) cannot stand being imprisoned anymore."

Faïd wrote an autobiography about his rise to notorious gangster with storylines similar to that of the life of Jacques Mesrine, whose streak of robberies and prison escapes ended in 1979 when he was gunned down in Paris, CNN reported.

### [French bandit's brazen escape adds to notorious getaways](#)



Redoine Faïd

*After Redoine Faïd blasted his way out of prison, he joined other notorious criminals whose escapes became legendary*

PARIS (AP) — Redoine Faïd's escape from a French prison landed him on Interpol's most wanted list Monday, two days after he took four guards hostage and used explosives hidden inside tissue packets to blast his way out of a prison in Lille. Faïd freed his hostages along his getaway route.

It wasn't the first time that Faid, an armed robber being held in the death of a police officer, had gone on the lam. He was arrested in 1998 after three years on the run in Switzerland and Israel, according to the French media. Faid was freed after serving 10 years of his 31-year sentence, then swore he had turned his life around, writing a confessional book about his life of crime and going on an extensive media tour.

"When I was on the run, I lived all the time with death, with fear of the police, fear of getting shot," he told Europe 1 radio at the time.

Here's a look at other notorious prison escapes:

### HIGH-RISE CRIME

Two bank robbers, onetime cellmates at a downtown Chicago lockup, used a rope made from bed sheets tied together to drop 20 stories to freedom in December 2012. Authorities say they apparently broke a cell window, pulled out the bars then descended to freedom from the downtown Metropolitan Correctional Center. Hours later, the rope of sheets — at least 200 feet (61 meters) long and knotted every 6 feet (2 meters) — was still dangling down the side of the building. Both men were recaptured within weeks.

### DIRTY LAUNDRY

Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman spent months corrupting his guards at a Mexican prison, then tricked them into thinking they would get a cut of some gold being smuggled out of the prison the night of Jan. 19, 2001. Instead, he smuggled himself out on a laundry cart with the help of a maintenance worker on his payroll. Security camera footage from that night disappeared and computer records of the vehicles entering and leaving the prison were erased. Guzman has since risen to the top of the Sinaloa cartel, Mexico's most powerful international drug trafficking network, and has been in hiding ever since. He is considered to be among the world's richest men.

### ESCAPE FROM SAN QUENTIN

In 1979, bank robber Forrest Silva Tucker and two other San Quentin inmates built a kayak out of plastic sheets, wood, duct tape and Formica. The vessel held together just long enough for the three to paddle a few hundred yards to freedom. A few years later, police said, Tucker joined the Over-the-Hill-Gang — a group of elderly thieves who robbed Boston-area supermarkets. Tucker was visiting a girlfriend in Florida in 1999 when he was caught again.

### KNITTING NEEDLES

George Blake, a British double agent, used a ladder made of rope and knitting needles to escape Wormwood Scrubs jail in 1966, five years into his 42-year sentence for treason. With the help of accomplices, he made his way to the border of East Germany hidden in a secret compartment inside a camper van. Blake ended up in the Soviet Union and still lives in Russia, where he receives a KGB pension and last year celebrated his 90th birthday.

#### THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

Ronnie Biggs was part of a gang that stole sacks containing 2.6 million pounds sterling from a Glasgow-to-London mail train in August 1963. The haul from what was dubbed the Great Train Robbery would be worth more than 40 million pounds (\$60 million) today. Biggs escaped from prison in 1965 by scaling a 30-foot wall with three other inmates. Styling himself “the last of the gentleman crooks,” Biggs charged \$50 — later hiked to \$60 — for visitors to join a barbecue at his home where they could also buy the T-shirt: “I went to Rio and met Ronnie Biggs ... honest.” He spent decades thumbing his nose at British authorities from his home in Brazil before returning to Britain aboard a plane chartered by a tabloid newspaper. Biggs was freed from prison in 2009 on compassionate grounds after a series of strokes.



**France, Belgium hunt convict after explosive jailbreak**



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**The online news portal of TV5**

LILLE, France - Police in France and Belgium were intensively searching Sunday for a dangerous convicted bank robber who dynamited his way out of a French prison on the weekend with the help of as-yet unidentified accomplices.

A Europe-wide alert for the fugitive, 40-year-old Redoine Faid, is in effect, as is an Interpol bulletin, and France has set more than 100 investigators on his trail.

Faid, who was serving time for past robberies and who risked a heavy sentence over the 2010 death of a policewoman, used explosives to blast his way out of the Sequedin penitentiary just 15 kilometers (10 miles) from the Belgian border.

Armed with a pistol, he briefly took four guards hostage for his escape.

All the hostages were released unharmed. The first getaway car was found burnt along the highway, where Faid is believed to have switched to a second vehicle.

The spectacular jailbreak was reminiscent of a Hollywood movie -- the sort of film Faid told an interviewer three years ago he used as an "instruction manual" on how to stage his equally dramatic heists.

French police, though, remain stumped as to how Faid got his hands on the weapon and the explosives.

His brother, who visited the prison the morning of the escape, was kept in detention for questioning all day Sunday, but was finally released when investigators confirmed he had had no contact with Faid.

"It's a painstaking investigation that has started. Obviously, he (Faid) had one or several accomplices. The role of the investigators is to work out how he was able to possess explosives and a weapon in prison," the prosecutor for the northern French city of Lille, Frederic Fevre, said.

A spokeswoman for Belgian Federal Police, Kaatje Natens, said roadblocks had not been ordered but that train stations and airports were being closely watched.

French officials have warned that Faid, who grew up in tough immigrant suburbs outside of Paris, is considered armed and "especially dangerous."

His lawyer said Faid was a very intelligent man with good connections.

Faid was in prison since mid-2011 for breaking the terms of his parole over past convictions for bank robberies and brazen heists of cash-in-transit vehicles.

He is suspected of being the mastermind of a May 2010 armed robbery that turned into a gunfight in which a young policewoman was killed.

Evidence was being gathered to try him for that crime, which would have kept him in jail for decades if convicted.

He had been released from a previous stint of a decade behind bars after convincing parole officials that he regretted his criminal past and was determined to start afresh.

Faid co-authored two books, about his delinquent youth and rise as a criminal in Paris's impoverished suburbs.

He said his life of crime was inspired by American films such as "Scarface" and "Heat" -- where Robert De Niro's armored car heist has been cited as the model for real life attacks in South Africa, Colombia, and other countries.

French authorities insist that there was no fault on the part of prison workers for Faid's escape, emphasizing its meticulously planned nature.

Faid launched his jailbreak early Saturday morning, while he was in a visitor's room. Armed with the firearm and explosives, he took four guards hostage and in about half an hour blasted his way out of the prison, where an accomplice was waiting in a vehicle.



## Ultimate Prison Break Outs



Redoine Faïd

Incase you hadn't heard cause you're Googling funny cats instead of watching the news (which I was until the head Chirpsers kindly alerted me to this one), some dramatic prison break shiyat went down in Lille, France last week. On Saturday, French conman **Redoine Faïd** literally busted out of prison using a shit load of explosives, taking four guards hostage in his stride and subsequently triggering a Europe-wide investigation.

40-year-old Faïd, in prison for the 2010 death of a police woman and notorious for his attacks on cash-in-transit vehicles, somehow obtained explosives in the clink (suspected accomplices are currently being questioned) and blew a hole in one of the prison walls. He then escaped in a waiting vehicle and it is now supposed that he switched to another when the initial getaway car



was found, burned out on the highway. There are fears that he has fled across the border to Belgium, just a few kilometres from the prison. Police have warned that he is armed and 'especially dangerous'.

Faid has previously said that his life of crime is attributable to the American films 'Scarface' and 'Heat', and that movies such as these were his 'users guide'. I'm hoping that he has been inspired by Starsky and Hutch and tries to land a car on a yacht at some point. The search continues.



### The Postcard Bandit

Now I have to include this naughty nelly, cause my old man actually arrested him back in the day. I'm struggling with things to bond with my Dad over, so I gotta make him a bit famous. **The Postcard Bandit** (real name **Brenden Abbott**) was a notorious Aussie bank robber during the mid eighties, who yielded as much as *six million bucks* by the end of his run, though the majority of the amount was never recoverable. He was a man that police both admired and utterly detested. Abbott spent most of the eighties and early nineties as Australia's Most Wanted Man, fleeing from state to state holding up banks, taking hostages and causing general mayhem. The Aussie media gave him the nickname of the Postcard Bandit as he'd send a postcard to the Western Australian Police from wherever he was in hiding. What a shit-stirrer.

Abbott managed to escape from jail twice, and also fled from a police questioning in 1986. In 1989, along with another inmate, Abbott escaped over the limestone walls of Fremantle Prison

(originally built in the 1850's as an immigration holding centre and hence has a long history of escapes) in uniforms similar to the guards' that Abbott had tailored in the prison sweatshop. He was then on the run for five and a half years, but was recaptured in 1995 and detained in a Brisbane Correctional Centre from which he again escaped in 1997. Six months later he was recaptured in the Northern Territory and is now serving a 23 year sentence for his many robberies and escapes in a high security prison facility in Queensland.

When asked if he was indeed a modern-day **Ned Kelly** as he had been described, former detective Snook replied 'No. He was just a slippery bloody bastard'.



Antonio Ferrera

Now this is some **Oceans Eleven** shit. Explosives expert **Antonio Ferrera** was a part of one of the most dangerous gangs in Europe, nicknamed the 'Dream Team'. He was notorious in this gang for his ability to blow up a loaded safe without harming the cash and other goodies inside. That's the real life equivalent of achieving the impossible **Crash Bandicoot** task of jumping on the box on top of the TNT and getting the apples and a new life before it explodes, no? One robbery too many landed this punk in jail for eight years in 1998; he was convicted of two armed robberies and suspected of at least fifteen more. Five years into his sentence he plotted the least-

subtle escape ever. Six of his mates posed as policemen and rocked up to the Parisian Fresnes Prison and half four in the morning, firing AK-47s and blowing off the front gates with rocket-propelled grenades. Ferrera blew open his own cell door with a stick of dynamite he presumably swapped for a bumming and fled with his chums. After earning the title 'France's Most Wanted Man' for four months, he was recaptured in a bar in Paris (you'd go further than that if you were doing the bolt you fool). As he came face to face with his arresting officer, he was quoted as coolly saying 'You again?' Ah, the French.



### The Texas Seven

You've probably heard of this one. The **Texas Seven** were a bunch of dudes who staged an escape from a maximum security state prison in Kenedy, Southern Texas back in December 2000. Leader of the pack George Rivas was serving 18 consecutive 15-to-life sentences, Michael Anthony Rodriguez was serving a 99-to-life term, while Larry James Harper, Joseph Garcia and Patrick Henry Murphy were all serving 50 year sentences. Donald Keith Newbury was serving a 99-year sentence, and Randy Halprin was serving a 30-year sentence. If you knew you were going to spend your eternity locked up, you'd have to plot an escape to keep from topping yourself. This was rather an elaborate plan. Mid-morning saw less surveillance of the maintenance room at the prison, where the seven managed to overpower and restrain nine maintenance supervisors, four correctional officers and three fellow inmates. This was executed carefully by one convict calling a person over, and another would appear behind them, smacking

them in the back of the head. The seven then stole identification, clothing and money from their victims. Disguised in their new threads, half of them made their way to the back of the prison, pretending to be installing monitors to those they encountered along the way. They then raided the guard tower and stole numerous guard weapons. The remaining four then nicked a prison truck, drove to the back of the prison and picked up the trio, before casually driving on out. A crime spree followed, whereby several armed robberies took place and a police officer was murdered. Upon being caught, Harper shot himself in the chest and the others surrendered and were subsequently sentenced to the death penalty. Rivas and Rodriguez have already been sent to the big house in the sky and the remaining four are on the lethal injection list.



### The Great Escape

You couldn't have a list of break outs without included the greatest of all. **The Great Escape** was the infamous escape of two prisoners of war, kept in the **Stalag Luft III**, the Luftwaffe-run POW camp during World War Two. Yes, they made 'that film' about it.

**Roger Bushel RAF** orchestrated the plan with the words, 'Three bloody deep, bloody long tunnels will be dug- called Tom, Dick and Harry. One will succeed!'

Previous escape attempts by groups of twenty or so POWs from the camp had failed, but Bushel was intent on getting around 200 of them out. The opening of tunnel "Tom" was obscured in a

darkened corner of one of the buildings, “Dick”’s entrance was carefully hidden in a drain sump in one of the washrooms and the entrance to “Harry” was hidden under a stove. Each tunnel was around 9 metres deep and 0.6 metres square and the escapees used the wooden slats from their beds to secure the sandy tunnel walls. Over 600 prisoners were involved in the plan. That’s a lot of dudes to keep quiet.

On March 24th, 1944, as it became dark, the men began their escape. There were literal shortcomings; the tunnel via which they were planning to free one man per minute didn’t end in the forest scrub as thought, but short of the tree line and close to a guard tower. Due to the setbacks and the need to be extremely careful, this number was reduced to ten men per hour. 76 of the planned 200 men were able to escape via the tunnels and hid within the trees of the surrounding forest. At 4.55am the following morning, the 77th man was seen emerging from the tunnel entrance by one of the guards. SHIT. As he surrendered, the other 76 fled but 73 were recaptured and 50 of which were executed, including Roger Bushel. The remainder was relocated to other German camps. The three men that went free were two Norwegian pilots and a Dutch pilot. The Norwegians made it to Sweden by boat, while the Dutch pilot travelled through France before finding a British Consulate in Spain. Luckiest guys in the world? I think so.



Pascal Payet

Catch him if you can. **Pascal Payet** is a Frenchman notorious for his Hollywood-blockbuster-style escapes.

In October 2001, he escaped from a French prison aboard a hijacked helicopter. Not something you'd do twice, you think. In 2003, he organized yet another helicopter escape for three other prisoners. After being recaptured and sentenced 30 years for murder in 2005, Payet staged one of the most dramatic break outs in history. A THIRD chopper was hijacked and flown to a state penitentiary in Grasse, where he was being held, and landed on the prison roof. Three of his comrades emerged and broke into the prison with sawed-off shotguns, piled the crafty Frenchman in the 'copter and flew off into the sunset. Stunned police underwent a massive search and he was pinged three months later in Spain. Now back in the clink and relocated to a new facility every six months, Payet is probably plotting his next badass escape.





Jay Junior Sigler

You know you're a pretty crap criminal when yo mama has to try and break you outta jail. **Jay Junior Sigler** was eight years into his 20-year sentence for armed robbery at Everglades Correctional Institute in Florida when his Mum decided she needed her boy back. 58-year old Sandra and two accomplices staged a not overly subtle break-in with a big-rig tractor, smashing through security fences and a prison wall. The accomplices were driving the tractor, while Sandra followed behind the path of destruction in her car. Jay ran out from inside the jail, jumped in Mummy's car along with the tractor maniacs and the four of them hauled ass out of town only to be caught two days later. Sigler's Mum has got it going on!



Billy Hayes

Heard of **Midnight Express**? It's about this dude.

In 1970, Hayes was caught smuggling four pounds of hashish out of Turkey and was subsequently sentenced to over four years in a Turkish jail. Just weeks from being released, he learned that it was being campaigned that his sentence become life, making him one of hundreds of Americans stuck in foreign jails for life on drug charges. Thinking, 'fuck that for a laugh', he decided to bail. Upon being transferred to an island prison, he continuously carved a hole in his wall and waited for a stormy night, knowing that row boats and life boats were brought to the island prison when the weather got rough. He stole a row boat and escape off the island in the middle of a storm and rowed to Turkey. He then 'spent three days running through Turkey and dying my hair' before crossing a minefield (which he didn't realise at the time) at the Greek/Turkish border and then swam the Marista river to Greece. He was picked up by the

American Embassy from Greek military custody and he was as good as home and hosed. And after all that, they didn't even include his escape scene in the film.



Frank Morris and Clarence and John Anglin

It was these three that were infamous in the June 1962 Alcatraz escape, which still baffles many.

**Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary** was known to be inescapable, as demonstrated by the 36 prisoners that had previously tried to flee and all of whom were shot or recaptured. All three men were serving lengthy sentences for some form of robbery and started to plot their escape in 1961. They made fake dummy heads fabricated from soap, toilet paper and real hair and left them in their beds in order to fool the guards going around the cells for a night time check. They'd spent a year chipping away at their cell walls with spoons and escaped through these holes, landing them in a vacant corridor. They proceeded to climb out of a vent and scale the almighty prison fence, finally assembling an untrustworthy raft from stolen prison raincoats and cement. Yes, cement. According to reports, they began paddling off at around 10pm on June 11th. A thorough search of Alcatraz and nearby island Angel Island was carried out the following day, to no avail. And after a seventeen year search with little conclusion, the FBI closed the case in 1979.

It is predicted that the men drowned on their way to Angel Island, however remains of the raft, paddles and some clothing were found on the island- but was it just the tide? The case is still being investigated by the US Marshal Service and as late as 2011, it was revealed that footprints were found leading away from the raft on Angel Island. Like any badass escape, a film was made about it, and like any badass film, it has Clint Eastwood in it.

**Antonio Ferrara** dit « Nino » ou « Succo », surnommé le « roi de la belle » ([Cassino](#), [Latium](#), [Italie](#), [12 octobre 1973](#)), est une figure du grand [banditisme français](#).

Né dans une famille modeste le [12 octobre 1973](#) en [Italie](#), à Cassino près de [Rome](#), ses parents émigrent pour la [France](#) avec ses six frères et sœurs en [1983](#) ; Antonio Ferrara a alors dix ans et il grandit à [Choisy-le-Roi](#) (*Cité Gabriel*) dans le [Val-de-Marne](#), en [banlieue parisienne](#). Comme le dira plus tard l'un de ses [avocats](#), le jeune Antonio Ferrara bascule dans la [délinquance](#) vers l'âge de 18 ans par « manque de perspective(s) » pour l'avenir, par « manque de diplôme(s) », mais également parce qu'il a toujours des « difficultés à maîtriser la langue [française](#) » après son arrivée en France.

Son père, qui travaillait comme carrossier chez [Fiat](#) en Italie puis à son compte, devient en France vendeur ambulant de sandwiches et de pizzas tandis que sa mère devient femme de ménage. Le responsable de la section d'éducation spécialisée de son collège se souvient « d'un jeune souriant, poli, mais qui jouait déjà les petits [caïds](#) ». Antonio Ferrara quitte l'école à 16 ans et travaille comme plombier (pendant un mois), puis comme nettoyeur de trains (moins de deux mois) et enfin comme serveur (deux mois).

Fiché au grand banditisme depuis le milieu des [années 90](#), soupçonné de nombreux braquages et d'une tentative de [meurtre](#) en [1996](#), il est surtout connu pour sa spectaculaire évasion de la [prison de Fresnes](#) dans le Val-de-Marne, le [12 mars 2003](#). Il est aussi connu pour ses compétences en explosif (formé à cette technique par le caïd marseillais Laurent Boglietti fin 1999) et sa technique dite « de la parabole » au moyen d'un cadre supportant l'explosif, utilisée principalement sur les fourgons blindés. En relation avec le milieu [corse](#) (notamment avec [Joseph Menconi](#)), peut-être avec les [frères Horneq](#), il est, jusqu'à son arrestation le 10 juillet 2003, la priorité numéro 2, après [Yvan Colonna](#), de [Nicolas Sarkozy](#), alors [Ministre de l'Intérieur](#).

## **Évasion et arrestation** [[modifier](#)]

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Le [12 mars 2003](#), Ferrara est incarcéré à la prison de Fresnes depuis le [13 juillet 2002](#), date à laquelle il avait été arrêté après quatre années de cavale. Dans la nuit, vers 4 heures et quart du matin, un commando lourdement armé et très bien organisé attaque la [maison d'arrêt de Fresnes](#) à l'[explosif](#) pour le délivrer. L'évasion de Ferrara est très bien préparée : ce dernier fait tout pour se retrouver au « mitard » de la prison, l'endroit le plus efficace pour l'opération

d'évasion. Il refuse donc une fouille à la sortie d'un parloir et de cette manière, se retrouve au [quartier disciplinaire](#) proche de la porte arrière de la maison d'arrêt. En milieu de nuit, ses complices incendient des voitures en banlieue pour occuper les pompiers et les forces de l'ordre. Lors de l'attaque, de nuit, les gardiens, dépassés, réagissent à peine depuis un mirador, attaqué au fusil d'assaut [AK-47](#) et l'opération, qui ne dure pas plus de dix minutes, est un succès. Le commando fait sauter deux portes blindées, à l'explosif et au [lance-roquettes](#), tandis que Ferrara fait exploser lui-même les grilles de sa cellule grâce à des explosifs fournis par ses complices. Ferrara fuit pour le sud de la France tandis que dans les mois qui suivent, quatorze auteurs et complices sont arrêtés, dont des bandits corses, comme [Dominique Battini](#).

En début de soirée du jeudi [10 juillet 2003](#), il est localisé dans un bar du XII<sup>e</sup> arrondissement (le Peanut's Café au 102 rue de Bercy) avec deux pointures du Grand banditisme, Malek Bouabbas et Hamid Hakkar, qui est en cavale depuis 1998 après son évasion de la prison de Villepinte. Ferrara a changé son apparence physique : il est aminci, porte un fin filet de barbe « à la d'Artagnan », a les cheveux décolorés et le nez refait. C'est l'OCRB (Office Central pour la Répression du Banditisme) et la [BRB](#) (Brigade de répression du banditisme) qui mènent l'opération d'arrestation. Quarante policiers issus de ces deux services sont mobilisés pour cette arrestation. Ferrara, armé et détenteur de faux-papiers d'identité, n'a pas le temps de dégainer.

Mis en examen pour « évasion avec usage d'armes et d'explosifs », « infraction à la législation sur les armes », « complicité de tentative d'homicides volontaires avec préméditation à la fois sur des surveillants pénitentiaires et sur des fonctionnaires de police », « destruction de biens avec explosifs en bande organisée », « association de malfaiteurs » et « détention de faux documents administratifs », il est incarcéré à la [prison de Fleury-Mérogis](#). Il est aussi mis en examen pour « port et transport d'armes de première catégorie », dans le cadre de son arrestation.

Après son arrestation, il est placé à l'isolement et a été jugé à partir du début de l'année [2006](#). En prison, il est régulièrement changé de cellule.

### **Procès du braquage du bureau de poste de Joinville-le-Pont [[modifier](#)]**

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Le lundi [6 février 2006](#) s'ouvre le procès de Antonio Ferrara devant la cour d'assises du Val-de-Marne. Il est poursuivi pour le braquage du bureau de poste de Joinville-le-Pont avec son complice Bilel Moujдин. Lors du procès, son avocat estime pourtant qu'« il n'y a rien dans ce dossier ». Il fait valoir qu'aucune confrontation n'a été réalisée et que les 25 agents de la poste séquestrés n'ont pas reconnu son client. Le 7 février, ceux-ci expliquent que les agresseurs sont la plupart du temps cagoulés. Les deux automobilistes pris ensuite en otage par Ferrara ne l'ont pas non plus reconnu à l'audience. « Vous n'avez absolument aucune preuve contre Ferrara, le plus petit doute que vous avez doit [bénéficier](#) à l'accusé », conclut l'avocat devant la [Cour](#). Le jeudi 9 février, Antonio Ferrara est reconnu coupable de « vol avec arme », « séquestrations », «



prises d'otages » et de trois des quatre « tentatives d'homicides volontaires sur policiers », dont il est accusé. Il est donc condamné à 15 années de [réclusion criminelle](#) pour le braquage d'un bureau de poste de [Joinville-le-Pont](#) en juillet 1999, et pour trois tentatives d'homicides volontaires sur policiers. Ferrara, à l'énoncé du [verdict](#), se montre détendu et souriant. Au moins 20 années de réclusion criminelle avaient été requises à son encontre. « Ils ont bâclé un dossier (...) je ne suis pas coupable dans cette affaire » avait-il déclaré à l'issue de la plaidoirie de la défense. Antonio Ferrara, a été acquitté le 16 mai 2012 en appel par la cour d'assises de Paris.

### **Procès du braquage d'un fourgon de la Brink's à Paris - Porte de Gentilly** [\[modifier\]](#)

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Le [22 décembre 2006](#), la cour d'assises de Paris condamne Antonio Ferrara et [Joseph Menconi](#) à onze années de réclusion criminelle pour avoir participé au braquage d'un fourgon de la Brink's le 26 décembre 2000 à [Gentilly](#) dans le [Val-de-Marne](#). Les deux hommes ont toujours nié leur participation aux faits, tout au long du procès qui s'est ouvert le 17 novembre 2006.

Le 9 avril 2009, Antonio Ferrara est [acquitté](#) en [appel](#) par la [cour d'assises](#) d'Évry dans le cadre de cette affaire.

### **Procès de son évasion de la prison de Fresnes** [\[modifier\]](#)

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Dans la nuit du 14 au [15 décembre 2008](#), Antonio Ferrara, 35 ans, est condamné à 17 ans de prison ferme pour sa spectaculaire évasion de la [prison de Fresnes](#) du [12 mars 2003](#). Vingt années de réclusion criminelle avaient été requises contre Ferrara, qui n'était pas présent au verdict. Plusieurs complices sont également condamnés dont un ancien surveillant de la prison de Fresnes, reconnu coupable de complicité dans l'évasion : il est condamné à 12 ans de réclusion criminelle par la Cour d'assises de Paris et placé en détention. Quant à [Karim Achoui](#), ancien avocat de Ferrara, il écope de sept ans de prison ferme pour complicité et son placement en détention a été ordonné<sup>16</sup>. En appel, Karim Achoui a été acquitté tandis que le roi de la belle a pris 11 ans.

### **Procès du braquage d'un fourgon de la Valiance à Toulouse** [\[modifier\]](#)

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Cette section **ne cite pas suffisamment ses sources**. Pour l'améliorer, ajouter [en note](#) des références [vérifiables](#) ou les modèles [{{refnec}}](#) ou [{{refsou}}](#) sur les passages nécessitant une source.

Le 23 novembre 2001, un fourgon blindé de transport de fonds de la société Valiance avait été attaqué à Toulouse, dans le quartier des Minimes, par un commando de huit à dix personnes équipées de [Kalashnikov](#) et de [Famas](#)<sup>[réf. nécessaire]</sup>, des armes de guerre, alors qu'il revenait de la Banque de France. L'un des assaillants avait été blessé tandis que le chauffeur du fourgon était parvenu à se défaire des cales installées par les agresseurs pour prendre la fuite. Le 10 décembre

2009, la cour d'assises de Paris a acquitté Antonio Ferrara et huit de ses co-accusés, qui étaient jugés pour la tentative d'attaque contre le fourgon blindé de transport de fonds à Toulouse. Lors de sa dernière prise de parole au procès, celui qui est surnommé El niño à cause de sa petite taille (1,65 m), avait clamé son innocence. « Je suis évidemment coupable d'avoir fait un certain nombre de choses dans ma vie et je les ai toujours reconnues. Dans cette affaire, je n'y suis pour rien et je ne paiera pas pour ça. Le dossier est vide, on l'a rempli de fantaisie », avait-il lancé aux jurés. L'accusation le soupçonnait d'avoir participé à l'attaque et de l'avoir préparée lors d'un déplacement à Toulouse, neuf jours auparavant. « Où sont les preuves, les charges ? Un ticket de [Flunch](#) le 14 novembre ? Vous allez envoyer [Antonio Ferrara] dix ou quinze ans en prison pour un café pris à 18 h 34, le 14 novembre, neuf jours avant la tentative ? Alors si c'est ça, la justice s'en va ! Ferrara coupable, c'est de la justice-fiction ! », avait plaidé, son avocat, Me Lionel Moroni.<sup>[réf. nécessaire]</sup> Le 10 décembre 2009, la cour d'assises de Paris acquitte Antonio Ferrara, ainsi que huit autres accusés.

### **Conditions de détention** [[modifier](#)]

Placé à l'isolement en 2003, Antonio Ferrara était encore en 2009 à la [Maison d'arrêt de Fleury-Mérogis](#), le plus isolé et le plus gardé des quelques 430 prisonniers français soumis à la solitude. Reclus dans une aile de la prison spécialement aménagée à son intention, il est placé sous la surveillance constante de vingt-trois hommes. Les cellules voisines sont vides, afin d'empêcher toute rencontre avec d'autres détenus. Il lui est interdit de parler à quiconque, d'étudier ou de travailler. Chaque jour, il change de cellule. Il ne voit pas la lumière du jour (son couloir de promenade, de douze mètres de long, est recouvert d'une double voûte métallique). Il ne peut pas se doucher sans être observé par des hommes vêtus de gilets pare-balles et équipés de bombes lacrymogènes, masques à gaz et [Taser](#). Sa cellule fait l'objet d'une fouille complète quotidienne tandis que lui-même subit une fouille corporelle intégrale. Il n'est pas libérable avant [2033](#).

Le 18 décembre 2009, il est transféré de la prison de Fleury-Mérogis vers celle de [Lille-Sequedin](#) dans le [Nord](#) ou il intègre la partie « maison centrale » de l'établissement. Depuis ce transfert à Lille, Antonio Ferrara n'est plus détenu à l'isolement<sup>21</sup>.

### **Brazilian cat caught in prison break plot doesn't rat on accomplices**



A cat, which was busted in a Brazilian prison with saws and drills strapped to its body, has remained silent on the details of an apparent jailbreak plot.

The feline was caught in a Brazilian prison while trying to deliver tools that could help inmates escape incarceration.

Inventive convicts in Alagoas jail in north eastern Brazil trained a friendly feline to deliver mobile phones and tools needed for tunnelling strapped to its body.

*"An agent saw the cat and went to look at it closely because something about it seemed wrong,"* Marcelo Avelino, the head of the prison guards' union, told the O Globo newspaper.

The cat, which was often noticed by guards going in and out of the compound, was caught with saw blades and a drill, along with a cell phone complete with battery and charger, Avelino added.

Prison wardens were surprised by the wit of the animal and the keen tactics of the inmates. *"We were very surprised by this new tactic of the prisoners,"* who trained the cat so that it returned to the prison with materials, the agent added.

All of the compound's 263 inmates are suspects in the smuggling attempt, but authorities say *"it will be hard to discover who is responsible since the cat does not speak."*



Greek prison break: Grenade and rifle assault leaves 2 wounded, 11 prisoners at large





At least 11 inmates escaped from a central Greek prison Friday after a bloody all-night AK-47 shootout with warders. Eleven Albanian inmates at Trikala Prison showered the watchmen with bullets before going on the run.

Some six gunmen wielding grenades and rifles approached the site at around 8:30pm local time, according to local news sources. The 'men on the outside' were concealed in a nearby field, and stealthily approached the prison in a pickup truck and a van, opening fire shortly afterwards.

Simultaneously, inmates climbed to the prison roof and began firing rounds, using guns that had been acquired under mysterious circumstances. Many of the men were of Albanian descent and were residents of the prison's C-wing.

The guards responded with their own barrage of bullets. At least five grenades were detonated during the course of the mayhem, which lasted throughout the night, only ending after police special forces succeeded in gaining entry to the prison at dawn on Saturday.

*"It was like a war was going on. There was so much gunfire,"* Trikala city councilor Costas Tassios told AP.

Two guards were physically injured in the shootout and admitted for urgent surgery. One of the injured, aged around 40, suffered a severe abdominal injury and heavy blood loss, and was later transferred to an intensive care unit, according to local news agency Trikalanews.gr.



Both are thought to have avoided serious, lasting harm. A correctional officer also required first aid.

After the carnage ended, several prisoners bolted. The morning count revealed that 11 had made a successful bid for freedom. It is thought that they escaped down a rope, descending from a guard tower that had been under siege. The men are now at large, says news agency Madata.gr.

Police roadblocks were set up shortly after their disappearance was noted. A manhunt has been launched and attempts are in action to trace one of the cars used.

Unprecedented security measures have been taken at prisons nationwide in an attempt to divert any potential widespread escape of prisoners. Security has been jumped up at Diabaton Thessaloniki and St. Stephen prisons in Patras and Corfu, and Korydallos prison in Athens, according to Madata.

Prisoners in Trikala have been being frisked and their cells searched, in the hope that any further concealed weapons will be unearthed. An investigation is underway into how prisoners managed to lay their hands on arms.

It is the latest in a series of breakout attempts from Greek prisons. Within the last week, Albanian inmate Alket Rizaj, took hostages as part of an escape attempt from a different central Greece prison. He was unsuccessful, following a 24 hour standoff with police.

Last month, four inmates tried to escape by helicopter from the same Trikala prison that was the scene of Friday and Saturday's unrest. However, they were unsuccessful. Among them was Panagiotis Vlastos, who is serving life for murder and racketeering.

Third breakout attempt fails: Convict at Greek prison surrenders, releases hostages



A convict who had taken six people hostage at Greek prison has surrendered after a 24-hour standoff. Notoriously known for his two successful helicopter-aided prison escapes, the man was demanding his release in a third breakout attempt.

Prison officials have announced that that Alket Rizai gave up on Sunday evening after realizing he was surrounded and there was no way he could break through special force's cordons, local media reports. All of the remaining five hostages were released and are in good shape.

One hostage reportedly escaped earlier on Sunday. However, it was unclear whether he was released by Rizaj, or managed to flee on his own.

Police have also reportedly apprehended two other inmates who are believed to be Rizai's accomplices.

The 36-year-old Alket Rizaj, took four guards and two other inmates hostage late on Saturday night. The standoff continued into Sunday as police launched an operation using full riot gear and gas masks, according to local news agency NewsIT.

"He is holding a knife and claims to have hand grenades and 200 grams of C4 explosive on him," a police official told Reuters.

Rizaj threatened to detonate the explosives, killing himself along with the hostages if he was not freed. He was rumored to be under the influence of drugs.

His lawyer implored him via telephone to put an immediate end to the situation, NewsIT said. Rizaj was asked to stop risking the "lives and physical integrity" of his hostages, and to protect his own life.

Rizaj demanded a car to aid him in his escape, but did not impose a time restriction for its arrival. He was told that providing the car would take several hours.

Two fellow prisoners were with Rizaj, the official said; it was ambiguous whether they were his accomplices or victims.

Photographic evidence of the standoff originally emerged after a prisoner captured an image showing Rizaj standing beside his initial six handcuffed hostages, apparently holding one of the hand grenades, according to AP reports.

Authorities said that the incident began at around 9:00pm local time after the lights went off in parts of the prison.

As the standoff continues, authorities have deployed additional police to the scene and summoned the convict's lawyer for negotiations. General Secretary of the Ministry of Justice Marinos Skandamis has also arrived at the scene to monitor developments.

Police blockades have been set up in the region of Phocis in order to apprehend his suspected getaway car, a silver Opel.

The 36-year-old Albanian was convicted of murder in 2003, and sentenced to life in prison. He is infamous for two successful escape attempts from Korydallos maximum security prison in Athens.



In 2006, two accomplices landed a hijacked helicopter on the roof of Korydallos prison picking up two convicts, Alket Rizai and Vassilis Paleokostas, who was sentenced to a 25 years for kidnapping and bank robbery. They flew to a nearby cemetery and escaped on motorcycles. While Rizai was recaptured a few months later in September, Paleokostas remained at large for two years.

His second escape in 2009 used similar tactics, the night before a court appearance over their first escape attempt. Rizai and Paleokostas climbed a rope ladder thrown to them by a passenger in the helicopter as it was flying over the prison courtyard. The men had been transferred back to Korydallos just one day before the attempt.

While Rizai was recaptured again in November 2009, Paleokostas is still at large.

In 2011, Rizai virtually announced his third prison break attempt, saying in an interview with an Albanian newspaper that Greece is taking away his "best years" and that he would rather die than stop trying to escape.

### **Security in doubt after inmate's escape**

#### **Officials still trying to explain first break-out since 1934**

Prison officials spent Friday trying to explain how a Corpus Christi killer became the first man to escape Texas' death row since a member of Bonnie and Clyde's gang shot his way out with three other inmates.

Martin E. Gurule escaped early Friday. He and six other death-row inmates cut through the fence of an outdoor recreation area, climbed onto the roof of Ellis Unit I's H Wing, where they hid wearing long-underwear dyed black with felt-tip pens, until jumping down and making a break for freedom.

Only Gurule got away. He remained at large late Friday.

"Right now we are interrogating the other six inmates and trying to figure out exactly how this happened," prison spokesman Larry Fitzgerald said.

The escape wasn't immediately discovered because the inmates fashioned dummies from pillows and blankets and placed them in their beds so it appeared to guards that they were sleeping, prison officials said.

Prison officials said they don't think Gurule and the other inmates had any help.

"We have reason to believe that he did not have outside help at this point," Fitzgerald said,

declining to elaborate.

## **Questionable security**

Fitzgerald said the escape has caused security on death row to be questioned. "Next we put together a team to review this incident and see what we can do to improve our security measures," he said.

Texas death row inmates enjoy more relative freedom than most of their counterparts across the nation.

Texas is the only state that allows its condemned men to work in a prison garment factory, Fitzgerald said. Gurule, who had in the past worked at the garment factory, had been given more freedom to move about the wing as a janitor, Fitzgerald said. This would have allowed him to communicate any plans among the group of inmates involved in the escape who all were in H Wing, he said.

Nueces County Sheriff's Department Capt. Paul Rivera, who arrested Gurule for a double murder in 1992, said he was amazed Friday that Gurule was allowed to work as a janitor. "He's dangerous, and he's arrogant," Rivera said. "He was smart and pretty slick, but he was a real cocky dude."

Fitzgerald said the reasoning behind allowing condemned men a little freedom, along with perks like an air-conditioned workshop, is that it gives them incentive for better behavior.

## **24-hour observation**

Nationwide, the trend in high-security prisons is just the opposite, said Neil McCabe, a professor of criminal law at South Texas College of Law in Houston. Many prisons routinely keep prisoners locked down 23 hours a day.

"I'm surprised that these guys had the opportunity to do this," McCabe said. Fitzgerald said the Thanksgiving holiday had staff levels at the unit lower than normal, but that likely wasn't a factor in the escape.

Fitzgerald said security on Texas's death row is adequate, and others familiar with the unit said they were shocked that anyone - let alone seven men - could escape or come close to escaping. "It's an understatement to say that it's extraordinary that they would be able to do that," said Austin-based freelance journalist Suzanne Donovan, who was allowed to spend six months of 1993 with unprecedented access to Texas's death row doing research for a book, "Texas Death Row."

"One of the things about death row is that those inmates are observed and watched on a 24-hour basis," Donovan said. "A number of them describe it as the safest place they've ever been in prison because there was constant observation."

## **`Truly an anomaly'**

Gurule's successful escape early Friday was the first ever from the Ellis Unit, where the state's condemned have been kept since the early 1960s, Fitzgerald said.

"An escape is truly an anomaly - they just doesn't happen that much. We've got 144,000-plus inmates under lock and key and at any given time, we know where every one of those 144,000 are," he said.

That record, Fitzgerald said, is evidence enough that the security at the unit is adequate. "We've had some attempts before, and we've had them in tight chases and got them inside the prison itself, but nobody's ever made it outside."

Fitzgerald said that the exact number of escapes from the state prison system last year was unavailable Friday, but added "it was about eight or nine total."

## **Quite a splash in 1934**

Texas' last death row escape was in 1934, long before the Ellis Unit was built, when Raymond Hamilton, a member of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow's crime gang, escaped just months after being recaptured following another prison break, said historian Sid Underwood, who wrote Hamilton's biography.

Shortly after being sent to the Walls Unit with a death sentence, Hamilton bribed a guard to smuggle a .45-caliber pistol into the Walls Unit.

"The guards weren't allowed to carry weapons into the prison, so it was easy for them to overpower them," Underwood said.

As the guards' attention was distracted by a mid-afternoon prison softball game on July 22, 1934, Hamilton and five other inmates made their break, ordering a guard to release them. "Once out, they convinced a tower guard to drop his weapons. Then they went over the wall," Underwood said.

That escape, in which three made it outside of the prison, made the front page of *The New York Times*, he said.

"In his day, he was every bit as well-known as `Pretty Boy' Floyd," Underwood said. "His escape made quite a splash."

Hamilton and another escapee were recaptured and put to death. The other was killed in a shootout near Amarillo.

## **Few plans beyond wall**

Gurule's ability through Friday night to elude a force of more than 500 men, hounds and helicopters searching an 8-mile area for him, was astounding, Fitzgerald said.



"As a rule, escapees last about 45 minutes until we get them back," he said.

"At this present time, my best guess is that he's probably on the ground, not moving but hiding, because there's helicopters everywhere. If I were him, I'd certainly lay low."

Just about everyone in the surrounding community is in some way associated with the prison, McCabe said. "It's a law enforcement community," he said.

Fitzgerald said prison officials doubt Gurule will get far.

Inmates are kept ignorant of the area surrounding the prison, he said. Maps are contraband. "When somebody goes over the wall in most cases, they spend an extraordinary amount of time planning how to get over that wall, but little planning on what they are going to do once they get on the ground outside," Fitzgerald said.

### **A threat to the community**

Regardless of the outcome, Donovan said, Gurule's escape will make him a hero to the other inmates on death row.

"He will be held up as a man who has beat the system," she said.

But Fitzgerald says Gurule and the others will be seen as the men who brought a loss of freedom to death row. "Those guys are now under lock-down, and may lose some privileges because of this," he said. "I don't think they made any friends in there today."

McCabe of South Texas College of Law described Gurule's escape as an embarrassment to prison officials, although they're saying it will only help tighten gaps in security.

"But it's more than an embarrassment, it's a threat to the community," McCabe said. "It's pretty hard to believe that anyone could escape from Texas death row, but that many - even though all but this guy were quickly captured - that's just unbelievable."

Murderer Martin Gurule's desperate bid to escape the executioner's needle ended when he drowned in a turbid, fast-flowing creek only a mile from Texas' Death Row, autopsy results show.

"We believe he might have been driven into the creek in an effort to escape from the dogs," prison spokesman Larry Fitzgerald said on Friday. "It appears that he wasn't a very good swimmer."

Gurule's bloated body was found late Thursday afternoon by two off-duty prison employees who were fishing.

Only one wound was detected on the body -- a shallow, "graze-type" bullet injury on the back just below the neck. Harris County Medical Examiner Dr. Joye Carter, whose office performed the autopsy, said the bullet wound was not lethal.

Authorities think that Gurule, 29, who was sentenced to die for the 1992 murder of two men during a Corpus Christi, Texas, robbery, met his death only hours after escaping from the Ellis Unit early Nov. 27. The body was identified through dental records.

Six other Death Row inmates were captured as they attempted to reach the double razor wire-topped fences that line the prison's perimeter.

On Friday, Fitzgerald stood in front of prison system headquarters and ripped to shreds a wanted poster bearing Gurule's photo and vital data.

"You all have seen this," Fitzgerald said. "Gurule is no more. Our record is clear of escapes."

Texas Department of Criminal Justice Executive Director Wayne Scott praised the hundreds of prison system employees who scoured the dense forest that adjoins the Ellis Unit, where Death Row inmates are housed, in a seven-day search for the fugitive.

Prison spokesmen said the cost of the manhunt has not been calculated.

Gurule's decomposing body was found about 5:30 p.m. Thursday floating in about 12 feet of water in Harmon Creek. The corpse still was swaddled in several layers of clothing and armored with sheets of cardboard and magazines held in place with elastic bandages -- apparent protection from the razor wire-topped fences.

Doug Smith, 41, and Mark Humphrey, 39, the off-duty employees who found him, said the creek, filled with tangled fishing line and brush, would be treacherous for swimmers at the best of times.

They initially thought they were viewing a floating mannequin until they noticed Gurule's fingernails.

A spokeswoman for Texas Gov. George W. Bush said they will not be eligible to claim a \$5,000 reward posted in the case.

The 1998 escape of death-row inmate Martin Gurule shook the Texas prison system to its core. Prison officials responded with wholesale security improvements and personnel changes.

The response to Mr. Gurule's escape, a high-publicity affair, may provide some insight into how aggressively prison officials respond to Thursday's report on the Dec. 13 escape at the Connally Unit in South Texas.

In both cases, prison officials insisted that their investigations

revealed "one-time" situations and not "systemic" problems in all 114 state prisons.

The Gurule escape was the 1st from death row since 1934. It began about 7 p.m. Nov. 26, 1998, when Mr. Gurule and 6 fellow death-row inmates put dummies in their bunks to fool prison guards at the Ellis Unit near Huntsville.

The seven climbed from a recreation yard to a cellblock roof, where they remained undetected until after an 11 p.m. bed check, when guards failed to ensure that men, not dummies, were sleeping in bunks.

Then, the inmates jumped from the roof and began climbing perimeter fences. Only Mr. Gurule cleared the fences. Guards pinned down the other 6 with rifle fire before they could escape.

The prisoners had darkened their prison uniforms with magic markers and had worn cardboard underneath their clothing for protection against razor wire on the fences.

Mr. Gurule, a 29-year-old killer from Corpus Christi, was found dead a week later. With a bullet wound in his shoulder, an autopsy said he had drowned in a creek about 3 miles from the prison.

2 months later, the scathing investigative report led to a wholesale shake-up at the Ellis Unit. Warden M.B. Thaler was demoted to an administrative job. His 2 assistant wardens were transferred and several corrections officers were reprimanded.

More important, the Gurule escape spelled the end of the work program for death-row inmates. Officials decided that jobs in a garment factory provided the inmates too many opportunities to plan their escapes.

Ponchai Wilkerson, one of the Ellis escapees, had tried to escape in the 1980s. But his record had been clean for 3 years and he qualified for the work program.

By comparison, 2 of the Connally escapees - San Antonio killer Michael Rodriguez and Austin armed robber Donald Newbury - had escapes on their records but had worked themselves into a minimum-security status that allowed them to hold jobs in the prison maintenance department.

Texas prisons use inmate labor for construction, growing crops, and making shoes, uniforms and other products. Corrections officials say the system couldn't function without inmate labor.

"You gotta have it," said Larry Fitzgerald, a state prison spokesman.  
"But if you committed an aggravated crime [with a weapon], you don't work outside prison walls."

Death row has moved from the Ellis Unit to the Terrell Unit outside Livingston since the Gurule escape. The Terrell system is designed to minimize inmates' contact with one another, Mr. Fitzgerald said.

At Ellis, space limitations allowed 2 death-row inmates to live in 1 cell. At Terrell, only 1 inmate inhabits a cell. Condemned killers can no longer worship together. They have no physical contact with one another in the recreation yard.

The Gurule escape and recommendations in the following investigative report also led to many changes at the mid-1960s-vintage Ellis Unit, Mr. Fitzgerald said.

Better lights were aimed at the roofs and fences.

"You could read a book out there now," he said.

Motion detectors were placed on the long, narrow roof where Mr. Gurule and his confederates had waited to make a break for the fences. Razor wire also was placed on the roof and between the 2 perimeter fences.

Nancy Patton, a Lubbock businesswoman and member of the Texas prison board until last year, said expense was not an issue when the board decided to implement Gurule report recommendations.

"Safety was the top issue," she said.

The report came out 2 months after the escape. It was 38 pages long and included 59 recommendations for improving security on death row and at the Ellis Unit. Most of them ultimately were adopted, Mr. Fitzgerald said.

The Connally report was issued less than a month after the escape. 6 of its 16 pages are a narrative describing the escape. The report includes 9 recommendations, which mostly point out that employees should adhere to existing security policies and procedures. It does not single out anyone for punishment.

Mr. Fitzgerald said the Gurule escape "transformed" death row and the Ellis Unit.

"If what happened with the Gurule report happens with the Connally report, we will make the changes," he said.

(source: Dallas Morning News)

## **The Getaway**

The first inmate to break out of death row in 64 years was a cold-blooded killer who exposed dangerous lapses in prison security. Yet there was something romantic about Martin Gurule's escape—and disappointing about his inglorious death.

THE LAST TIME ANYONE SAW MARTIN GURULE ALIVE, HE WAS running in the late November moonlight through the pine thickets surrounding Ellis Unit's death row, having scaled first one, then a second chain-link fence topped with coils of razor wire, and disappearing into the low-lying fog. Behind him, while shots rang out and spotlights skimmed the prison's perimeter fences, a night-shift guard on H wing began a head count, hurriedly calling out names as he moved from cell to cell. "Gurule," the guard called into the shadows of one cell, which remained still. "Gurule!" Reaching to nudge the sleeping figure, he found only a pile of rolled-up bedding and jerked the limp sheets through the bars in frustration.

Beyond prison walls, Gurule continued to tear through the woods, ducking branches and stumbling over tree roots, his body stiff with the cardboard and magazines he had fastened around himself with elastic bandages to blunt the effects of the razor wire. Intent on putting as much distance as he could between himself and the tracking dogs who bayed not far behind him, he fled with little regard to destination. A bullet had grazed his back, and the wound, raw and bleeding, stung as he moved through the cool air. He kept running until he reached a small incline where the underbrush thickened and the pines yielded to a scattering of cottonwoods and willows, beyond which lay a wide expanse of water. He had reached a river bottom, and with little choice as to his next move, he plunged into the frigid creek that spread out before him. If he realized his miscalculation, it was only for a moment; the water seeped into the layers of cardboard and magazines that clung to his body as well as the double layer of long johns he wore over them, their dead weight pulling him under the surface, beneath the dark green islands of lily pads that blanketed the creek, down twelve feet to its muddy bottom.

One week later, after more than five hundred lawmen had scoured the 11,672-acre Ellis Unit grounds for Gurule and come up empty-handed, Mark Humphrey, a 39-year-old who drives a truck for a nearby prison, went to Harmon Creek in search of catfish. After a few false starts with a balky outboard motor, he and fishing buddy Doug Smith pattered out to the middle of the creek, a lonely place with few reminders of civilization: From the south comes the occasional

rumble of freight trains bound for Huntsville, and from the north, the wails of sirens, six times during the day, signaling a head count at Ellis. “It was fixing to get dark, and we started heading back toward the pier,” Humphrey said from beneath the brim of his camouflage-print hat, pulled down low against the wind, as he and I retraced his path. “Doug saw it first. All the years we’ve been running this river, I’ve never seen anything like it.” Cutting the engine, he eased up to a spot where the creek water stood still, the place where they had peered down into the water and seen two hands floating along the surface. “We used the gaff to lift up the head so we could see the face,” Humphrey recalled, “but we were pretty sure we already knew who it was.”

Their discovery ended one of the largest manhunts in Texas history, and if there was a twinge of disappointment among those who had followed Gurule’s escape, it was that a plot of such daring—carried out by a condemned man, no less, who had thumbed his nose at the vast Texas prison system and tried to cheat the executioner—had ended so predictably. “I hope he makes it,” Gurule’s high school sweetheart, still doing time herself, had told America’s Most Wanted, and she wasn’t the only person who had felt a certain admiration for him. A Time columnist confessed to having hoped Gurule got away: “I felt a little better,” he wrote, “when I found out a co-worker and several other friends were secretly rooting for him too.” Rumors had circulated that Gurule had floated down the Trinity River and was long gone to Mexico or that he was hiding out in a deer blind, living on nuts and berries, waiting to make his next move. Wanted posters featuring his mug shot were distributed along the border from Juárez to Matamoros. In Corpus Christi, Gurule’s hometown, police officers in an unmarked car staked out his grandmother’s house, and assistant district attorney Mark Skurka, who had prosecuted Gurule’s capital murder case, circulated photos of the fugitive around the courthouse in case he had retribution on his mind. Newsweek likened the Gurule sightings to those of Elvis, and the New York Times jokingly speculated that perhaps he had “slipped through a crease in the space-time continuum and disappeared into the eighth dimension.”

All the while, Gurule’s body was slowly twisting its way down Harmon Creek, floating toward the spot where the creek water stood still—a place that an army of dogs, men, and horses had overlooked. On making their discovery, Humphrey and Smith had tied a rope around the fugitive’s swollen wrist and dialed 911 on a cell phone, sitting in the fading twilight until lawmen came, their spotlights shining from a distance as their boats skimmed across the creek toward the dead man’s body. News that Gurule had been found quickly spread and the sounds of the manhunt—the far-off howling of the dogs, the droning of helicopters overhead—were replaced by a celebratory chorus of honking horns as sheriff’s deputies, state troopers, prison guards, and Texas Rangers headed home for a good night’s sleep. “I kept on thinking that if Doug and I had turned back any earlier, Gurule probably would have been fish food,” said Humphrey, “and those old boys would still be standing out there looking for their convict, thinking he was the one that got away.”



RINGED BY SEVEN PRISONS AND HOME TO AN EIGHTH, HUNTSVILLE is a place whose express purpose is confinement, its greatest threat those who dream of running. The urge to escape is an accepted fact of life here, as alluring to men behind bars now as it was when gunslinger John Wesley Hardin tried to break out of the Walls Unit, just two blocks east of the town square, more than a century ago, or when Fred Gomez Carrasco staged the longest prison siege in U.S. history at the Walls in 1974. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) has been headquartered here since 1848, and the business it generates has become this town's bread and butter; the dark side of the bargain is the constant reminder that danger lurks close by. Few of the nearly fifteen thousand men who are imprisoned in and around Huntsville actually try their hand at escape and even fewer succeed, but their longing to be somewhere—anywhere—other than here is as much a part of the texture of life as the gray-uniformed prison guards eating cheeseburgers at the Dairy Queen or the freshly turned graves at the Joe Byrd Cemetery, where inmates without families are buried beneath small white tombstones that bear inmate numbers instead of names. This is a place dedicated to the idea that crime does not pay but, as Gurule's jailbreak proved, also a place where the romance of escape still has enormous appeal. For seven days and seven nights, Martin Gurule became a hero of sorts to all those behind bars here, a man who acted upon their collective dreams of running.

Nowhere is the struggle between those who must keep men behind prison walls and those who want to flee from them more vividly on display than Huntsville. TDCJ vans often mingle with afternoon traffic, their shackled passengers staring through the windows at the outside world; trustees on work details, who sweep prison grounds and till prison farms, often stop to gaze at that which lies just beyond their grasp. The chamber of commerce once used "Escape to Huntsville" as its tourism slogan before wisely scrapping it nearly a decade ago. Mock escapes are regularly staged at outlying units, and at the Wynne Unit, north of town, forty or so tracking hounds are kenneled below hand-painted signs bearing names such as "Hank" and "Hitman." Inmates who volunteer to be "dog boys" are given up to six hours lead time to run through the woods to a predetermined site before the hounds catch up with them.

At the Texas Prison Museum, a musty gallery of jailhouse memorabilia on the town square, sit the crude tools that inmates have fashioned to aid their flight: handmade keys, lock-picking kits made out of melted-down silverware, shanks, Chinese throwing stars, monkey knots, shoe soles that conceal blades, and zip guns made out of metal pipes and screws—reminders that even in the most closed of systems, there is room for at least the imagination to roam. In an adjoining case are the tools that guards have used to thwart escapes for 150 years: Thick metal leg yokes, shackles, belly chains, horse hobbles, balls and chains, slap jacks, and a three-foot-long leather switch are all proudly displayed on a piece of red velveteen. On one wall hangs a framed photo of Black Betty, the bus that transported shackled inmates to and from Huntsville for decades, and her driver, Bud Russell, from whom only one man successfully fled. Behind a nearby glass

window sits Old Sparky, the retired electric chair, its polished oak slabs laced with the thick leather straps from which there was no escape.

At the center of town is the Walls, Huntsville's oldest prison, whose brick ramparts measure forty feet high and are fringed with razor wire, above which guard towers and floodlights brighten the night sky. It is Huntsville's best-known landmark and a symbol for all that Huntsville believes itself to be: a place from which escape is practically impossible. But even the Walls, where the execution chamber is housed, inspires images of flight; for years Bustin' Loose Menswear was located one block from the prison, and the recently closed Desperado Club still sits down the street. For inmates who have dreamt of life on the outside but have never run, the Walls is where they get their first taste of freedom; all TDCJ inmates who are scheduled to be released are first bused into Huntsville from prisons across the state, then given \$50 and a one-way Greyhound ticket home. Dozens of men in prison-issue work clothes are released from the Walls every weekday, starting just before noon, some walking solemnly with their eyes fixed on the sidewalk, others high-fiving each other, letting out boisterous whoops and hollers. A few occasionally run along Twelfth Street, sprinting all the way up the hill that takes them away from the prison as if they must move as fast as humanly possible to prevent the redbrick walls from pulling them back inside.

Huntsville has seen its fair share of escapes over the years—some no more complicated than a trusty throwing down his hoe in the field and trying to outrun the dogs—and the community is sufficiently nervous that housepainters are thought to have the unluckiest job in town: Their white cotton jumpsuits have been mistaken more than once for prison-issue uniforms, the painters themselves for men on the run. In the early part of this century, prisoners who tried to escape were whipped mercilessly upon their recapture. Even so, there was no shortage of men willing to try. They stole keys from night watchmen, they hid in slop wagons headed for the hog farm, and on one occasion, they crawled out through a hole under the grandstand of the prison rodeo, kidnapping two Huntsville high school football stars and their dates in exchange for the boys' shirts and a ride to Beaumont. In 1934 Bonnie and Clyde sidekick Raymond Hamilton and two other condemned men staged an escape from death row (then housed at the Walls), climbing up a fire ladder, dodging gunfire, and catapulting over the side to two waiting getaway cars. Hamilton, the last of the trio to remain at large, was recaptured nine months later. In the summer of 1974 came the bloody standoff with Fred Gomez Carrasco, the San Antonio drug lord who took sixteen people hostage in the prison library after a trusty smuggled pistols and a bandolier to him inside a can of peaches and a hollowed-out ham. Eleven days later, after negotiations failed, Carrasco and two inmates exchanged fire with lawmen in a shootout that claimed the lives of Carrasco, another inmate, and two women hostages.

It was an awful lesson for Huntsville—one that illustrated that despite all the appearances of security, there are no guarantees—but one that occurred 25 years ago, a time that many prison

guards here are too young to remember. Night after night, year after year, guards had stared out into the darkness from their towers and scanned the corridors of their cellblocks, looking for an escape that never came, and if their vigilance had flagged, Martin Gurule had certainly made the most of it. For the TDCJ, his flight was deeply humiliating, and in the days that followed the breakout, prison officials stared helplessly into the woods, as if held captive themselves. “We have a perfect record with escapes, and we plan to keep it that way,” announced Texas Board of Criminal Justice chairman Allan Polunsky five days into the manhunt, standing grim-faced before a group of reporters while hounds bayed in the distance. “We will bring back this fugitive, dead or alive. It doesn’t make any difference, in my opinion, which that will be.”

THE MAN WHO WOULD BREAK OUT OF DEATH ROW and lead prison officials on one of the largest manhunts in Texas history was not, as one might have imagined him to be, someone whose only hope was a life of crime. A polite, even-tempered boy, Martin Gurule had at first seemed full of promise, taking several honors classes in junior high. He grew up in a modest frame house on Corpus Christi’s Hispanic west side, having been raised by his grandmother since he was an infant. His mother died of an aneurysm when he was one year old, and his father was stationed elsewhere in the Army. But by the time Gurule entered W. B. Ray High School, he had grown restless with the limitations that an ordinary life presented, and after committing a few petty crimes with mixed results, he robbed a neighborhood bank at the age of sixteen. Walking into the bank at lunchtime, he presented a teller with a handwritten note. “I have a gun,” it read. “Give me all the money.” He had no gun, but he did have a gift for seeming sincere, and the teller stuffed \$2,500 worth of bills from her cash drawer into a manila envelope while Gurule smiled pleasantly and made small talk about the weather. Soon afterward, he robbed the same bank again but received only probation after a friend turned him in.

Gurule had an easy way about him and dark-eyed good looks, and during his junior year in high school, he set his sights on Malisa Smith, a soft-spoken girl with hazel eyes and long honey-colored hair, introducing himself to her one chilly afternoon after school by wrapping his jacket around her shoulders. Over the course of their romance, Gurule would acquire a few belongings that seemed beyond his means—among them a black Chevy pickup, a black leather jacket, snakeskin boots, and a 10mm Colt Delta Elite handgun—but initially neither Malisa, nor his friends and co-workers at the Corpus Christi State School, where he held a part-time job, suspected that the meticulously dressed, well-mannered Gurule led a life of crime. “If he had a double life, he didn’t want those two lives to cross,” Smith explained from the Sycamore Unit in Gatesville, where she is now serving 25 years for being an accessory to the crime that sent Gurule to death row. “He didn’t tell me his business, and I didn’t ask questions.”

Gurule was sentenced to death in 1993 for robbing the U & I Restaurant, a family-owned Greek diner where Malisa had briefly worked before being fired for cash-register irregularities. On October 12, 1992, while Malisa waited in her car outside, Gurule went to the diner shortly after

midnight, cutting the phone lines and forcing co-owner Mike Piperis and custodian Tony Staton at gunpoint into the back room, where he stole \$9,000 from the safe and shot both men execution-style, each with one bullet to the head. The police would arrest Gurule less than a week later after tracing the bullets back to the handful of Corpus Christi residents who owned Colt Delta Elite handguns and piecing together the relationship between Gurule and Malisa Smith. “Both the physical and circumstantial evidence against him were overwhelming,” concedes even his defense attorney, Edward Garza. “They literally found the smoking gun.” But Gurule insisted on testifying on his own behalf, spinning a wild story about how Piperis had called him down to the diner that night to dissuade him from reporting the business to the IRS for tax fraud and how, after a struggle, his gun had accidentally gone off.

“He had always been able to talk his way out of anything,” recalled prosecutor Mark Skurka, “and he thought he was going to be able to talk his way out of this one, but the jury thought they were being flimflammed. He was happy, casual, throughout the whole trial, but when they handed down their sentence, that was the first time the smile was wiped off his face.” Gurule, whose greatest phobia was needles, learned that he was to be put to death by lethal injection.

His first escape attempt took place when he tried to flee the Corpus Christi courthouse during a lunch break at his trial. Locked inside a holding cell, he waited for bailiff Lilia Ann Gutierrez to walk down the hall to the court reporter’s office for lunch, then leaned his back against the cement wall for support and kicked the door of his cell until the deadbolt broke. Gutierrez found him red faced and panting, his efforts foiled by another locked door that was beyond his holding cell. “I felt like I couldn’t breathe anymore,” he told her. He would express similar sentiments to Malisa Smith. “He felt like he was in a cage, waiting to die,” she explained. “He said, ‘I’m not going to let them kill me.’”

But if Gurule had escape on his mind when he arrived at death row, it would prove to be a more difficult task. A rectangular redbrick building ten miles north of Huntsville, Ellis is surrounded by long stretches of bare, well-lit grounds, as well as six guard towers and two 12-foot-tall fences, spaced eight feet apart and topped with razor wire. Motion detectors are installed along the prison’s outer fence, and heartbeat detectors are used to scan vehicles leaving the prison. There are few opportunities to hatch a complex escape plan; all mail and phone calls are monitored, all inmates may be patted down or strip-searched at any time, and all five-by-nine-foot cells—where inmates can keep only a few approved belongings—are open for observation and are always subject to a shakedown.

When he first arrived at Ellis, five and a half years ago, Gurule had little freedom of movement; locked inside his cell for 23 hours each day, he was allowed out only to shower and exercise and was always escorted in handcuffs and leg shackles by guards. As he grew accustomed to Ellis, he made do with what few materials he was given—he tailored his prison clothes and lifted makeshift weights to keep in shape—and with his good disciplinary record, he was given a job in

the prison's garment factory in 1996. Classified as "work capable," Gurule could walk unfettered around Cellblock H-17, coming and going between his cell, the dayroom, and the fenced-in recreation yard as he pleased.

For a man who wanted to escape, it was a windfall. Gurule presumably learned from Ponchai Wilkerson, a 27-year-old thief and convicted murderer who occupied a neighboring cell, about Wilkerson's use of a hacksaw blade to cut through a prison recreation-yard fence in a thwarted escape attempt several years earlier. He was also in a position to ask other inmates about the prison's layout, learn guards' schedules, and trade contraband. In December 1997 Gurule's motion for an appeal was denied, and what lay before him began to take on a sense of inevitability. "Nobody gets strapped down and lives to tell," he wrote in a letter to a fellow inmate. "As far as one gets is the death house. I've not yet received a date . . . but I have been affirmed and I can tell you of one emotion that comes strongly to mind. Desperation."

Shortly after Thanksgiving dinner on the evening of November 26, Gurule, Wilkerson, and five other death row inmates in Cellblock H-17 stuffed their beds with makeshift dummies and strolled into the recreation yard, which is covered on top and on all sides by chain-link fencing. Climbing to the top of the fencing, the escapees cut the metal—with a hacksaw, according to published reports—then peeled one corner back, squeezed through the hole, and clambered onto the prison roof, which was flat and partially obscured by a low retaining wall that ran along its perimeter. Gurule and the other six inmates had darkened their prison-issue long underwear with black markers and went undetected as they crawled roughly one thousand yards from the north end of the roof to the southern end, where the chapel is located. The men would hide there for several hours while fog crept in; meanwhile, a guard who walked his rounds through Cellblock H-17 and saw the sleeping figures of the dummies reported the men present and accounted for. At a quarter past midnight, the inmates descended the chapel's sloped roof to the ground and bolted 75 yards to the perimeter fences, with Gurule leading the pack. He easily scaled the first perimeter fence, then the second. When shots rang out from the guard towers, the other six men dropped to the ground in surrender. Ahead of them, Gurule kept on running.

A WEEK AFTER MARTIN GURULE WAS found floating in Harmon Creek, having drowned less than a mile from death row, he had been all but forgotten. The biggest news in Huntsville was the opening of a tractor store, an event that graced the front page of the Huntsville Item. Christmas decorations hung from the antique shops along the town square, and at the Cafe Texan, where ranchers and county courthouse employees gathered for their morning coffee, conversation centered around the cold front that was moving in. The reporters who had descended upon Huntsville from around the country for the manhunt's denouement—"Gurule is no more," announced public information officer Larry Fitzgerald to the assembled television cameras, ripping the fugitive's wanted poster to pieces and tossing them to the ground—were long gone, as were the Canadian reporters who had stood outside the Walls to cover the

scheduled execution of a fellow citizen. Huntsville had resumed a certain sense of normalcy, settling into the quietness of Christmas.

At the Ellis Unit, which had been classified as a crime scene and was off-limits to the media, there were plenty of unanswered questions, which TDCJ officials declined to address until the internal affairs division completed its investigation in late January. It was clear, however, that significant changes would need to be made; Gurule's escape was made possible not by an isolated instance of human error but by multiple mistakes throughout the prison, and while speculation had initially centered on whether he was assisted by someone on the inside, a more likely scenario is that prison guards at Ellis had simply grown complacent. "For months now there has been a steady evaporation of security on the 2nd shift," one death row inmate wrote to me in a recent letter. "It had gotten so bad that inmates complained about it, partly for our own safety, and partly because we knew we'd lose a lot (which we all did) because of someone else's failed scheme."

Security at the Ellis Unit indeed had grown remarkably lax: Gurule and his fellow escapees apparently were able to obtain a hacksaw blade and to enter a recreation yard unattended, and their failure to return to their cells went unnoticed. Moreover, guards gave their beds such cursory glances that they failed to notice that men did not lie under the covers. And six guards in watchtowers surrounding the prison did not see the inmates scale the rec-yard wall, traverse the length of the prison's roof, and remain there for nearly four hours. For those who assumed that death row was escape-proof, Gurule's breakout provided ample evidence to the contrary; even the motion detectors along the perimeter fences reportedly were not tripped when he made his escape.

No one followed Martin Gurule's escape more intensely than other inmates, who clustered around television sets in prison dayrooms and listened in their cells to hourly news updates on their radios. During the week that followed the discovery of his body, few of them believed the reports that Gurule had drowned. "Hell, everybody knows there's more to it than that," a man in a release work shirt said as he stood by the register at the Surplus Store, a drab clothing outlet next to the Huntsville bus station, the first stop for men just released from the Walls. "They probably beat him or shot him and dumped him out there in the river for someone to find." A thin man in his twenties with a crooked grin nodded in agreement. "Kind of strange that two prison guards found him, don't you think?" Behind them, several men rifled through piles of blue jeans and faded T-shirts and, upon finding a few things to their liking, tore off their prison-issue clothes as quickly as they could, stepping into pants that hung loosely about their waists and studying themselves in the mirror. Savoring the pleasures of the free world, one man surveyed the store with a broad smile, then fished in his pocket for a quarter and helped himself to a gumball. "This is lovely. This is lovely," a lanky black man said softly, running his hands



along the glass counter and eyeing the rows of cigarettes, sucking in his breath when he saw the prices. "Three dollars and thirty cents?" he whistled. "I've been gone too long."

Outside, where men wearing their new ill-fitting jeans leaned in the shade, sipping beer from paper bags and waiting for the next bus to Fort Worth, I asked a short black man in his twenties if he had ever contemplated escaping. He had spent the past six years at the Beto Unit for cocaine possession. "Two years ago, we were working the fields, and I saw a drainage ditch that looked like it led to the other side," he recalled. "The grate was loose, and I thought about it for a minute or two, but I didn't do it. They put you back in the joint for twenty-five years if they catch you, you know." Squinting in the bright sunlight, he cupped his hand over his eyes and watched the bus to Fort Worth roll up, a sprinting greyhound painted along its side. "Six years I waited for this moment," he said quietly, "and now it's here." Condemned murderer Martin Gurule couldn't wait for freedom to come to him; his only hope, however scant, was to run.

### Texas Death Row Inmate Pulls Off Escape

For the first time since the Dust Bowl days, when fedora-wearing G-men battled backroads bandits like Bonnie and Clyde, an inmate has escaped from Texas's Death Row using a daring, low-tech scheme involving dummies and a desperate sprint through a hail of bullets.

Martin E. Gurule, 29, became the first Death Row inmate since Floyd Hamilton, a member of the Bonnie and Clyde gang who escaped in 1934, to have successfully broken out. There have been several attempted escapes, but no one since Floyd Hamilton made it out of the vast prison complex in Huntsville and into the surrounding woods.

"All of the others who got out of Death Row were caught somewhere else inside the complex," said Larry Fitzgerald, a spokesman for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. "He's the first to get all the way outside."

This afternoon, hundreds of police officers and tracking dogs were picking their way through the rough, marshy woods east and north of Huntsville, about an hour's drive north of Houston, hoping to catch the trail of Mr. Gurule, who was convicted and sentenced to death for the 1992 murder of a Corpus Christi restaurant owner and a cook during a robbery. Helicopters equipped with infrared telescopes were also buzzing over the Walker County treetops near the Trinity River, which runs along the prison's east side.

Texas correction officials said that Mr. Gurule and six other Death Row inmates at the Ellis Unit, which has 454 Death Row inmates, cut through a fence surrounding an outdoor recreation yard

and were able to clamber to a rooftop before the other prisoners were taken back to their cells at 8:45 Thanksgiving night.

Prison guards did not notice the men were missing because they had transformed pillows and sheets into makeshift dummies, making it appear they were asleep in their bunks, Mr. Fitzgerald said. The inmates had also used black-felt pens to darken their prison uniforms, making it more difficult to be spotted at night.

A guard noticed the men dropping off the rooftop at around 12:20 A.M. today, immediately sounded the alarm and began firing as many as 20 rounds.

When the shooting began, the other six inmates gave themselves up, Mr. Fitzgerald said, but Mr. Gurule kept running and made his way over two exterior fences topped with razor-barbed wire and into the woods. The guard said that he saw Mr. Gurule fall to the ground briefly after he shot at him, but that officials found no evidence of blood so it was unclear if the prisoner was wounded.

Nevertheless, Mr. Fitzgerald said that prison officials were confident that the escaped inmate remained somewhere in the surrounding woods, which he said were so thick and soggy and unforgiving that Mr. Gurule would have been unable to move quickly.

By early this morning, officials had the countryside surrounded at an eight-mile perimeter, which they believed was well beyond the range that Mr. Gurule might have run in that time. Police officers stood side-by-side along all the roads leading into the Ellis Unit, making it difficult for Mr. Gurule to cross out of the dense woods.

Prison officials described Mr. Gurule as dangerous but said they had no reason to believe he was armed.

The unit is one of several that make up the vast Huntsville prison complex. It is in the Wall Unit, closer to the center of the town, where the state's executions take place.

Texas has the busiest Death Row in the nation. At Huntsville, officials said today, there have been 17 executions this year.

Mr. Gurule was convicted of murder in the shooting of Mike Piperis, 46, the co-owner of the U & I Restaurant in Corpus Christi, and Anthony Staton, 31, one of the restaurant's cooks, on Oct. 12, 1992. Also convicted was Malisa Smith, Mr. Gurule's girlfriend at the time, who had worked at the restaurant. She received a 25-year sentence.

Mr. Fitzgerald said the search would continue until some sign was found of Mr. Gurule's path of flight. Officials were confident it would not take long.

"Often when something like this happens, they make all sorts of plans for what might happen inside the prison," Mr. Fitzgerald said. "But then they find themselves standing outside in the woods and wonder what they should do next."

