

## RIOT

55, 119

By James Collins

If you have ever been in a riot, you have been in a war with all of its aspects except armor. There are screams, panic, chaos and blood. Individual combats arise between people unknown to each other using whatever is at hand including tables, chairs, chair legs, bottles and in some cases knives. There are people already wounded who are being carried out by friends as if they were medics in a combat situation. Missiles fly through the air in a random fashion including bottles, beer pitchers, glasses, rocks and shoes. Panic and fear are actually palpable. Women are screaming, crying, and frantically looking for friends or members of their family. A group starts running and carries others along with them, trampling anyone underfoot. People lie comatose on the floor and under tables some bleeding and others obviously bruised and beaten.

The origin of a riot appears to be completely random. However, there are a few common elements, which appear to be part of most riots. These include liquor and a large number of teenage or young 20s males who are aggressive and overexcited after some event. I have been involved in at least two major riots in which the police had to come to restrain the rioters and to free those trapped inside the venue. Each case was different. One involved about 100 people in the Dublin House down at Rockaway on a Saturday afternoon; the second was a parish reunion held at the Concourse Plaza with about 3000 people in attendance. The sizes of the locales were significantly different and the cause of the riot in one case was known while the larger one just occurred, but the results of both were horrendous.

At the Dublin house there were a dozen people standing at the bar including myself and my best friend. The man to my left was drinking a beer out of a glass while the man to his further left was doing the same. The man next to me had turned to watch the dance floor and he turned back and took his beer and drank it. Unfortunately, he inadvertently took the beer of the man to his left. That man took offense, threw a punch, and knocked the first man down to the dance floor igniting four or five individual fights. All of the bartenders, in unison, leapt over the bar carrying truncheons and started hitting all the combatants. Simultaneously, the riot squad, which had been waiting outside in the Black Marias, came pouring in through the unobstructed windows and doors. Apparently, this type of event occurred on a regular basis in this facility. My best friend and I survived the mele by freezing and not moving a muscle. Police and bartenders passed on either side of us, striking people who were moving and ignored us like we were not there. When the riot terminated and the police were dragging the unconscious out of the facility to put them in the police wagons, we used that opportunity to leave and never return.

The Concourse Plaza riot, on the other hand, was a parish event that had taken three or four months to set up and involved a few thousand people from the neighborhood. The local bus line carried people from their home to the facility so there was no need to have a car and everyone brought their own liquor. The organizers planned it to be a quiet friendly event with everyone knowing everyone else. The concept was good but the execution was flawed. All the local girls brought their boyfriends who were from other neighborhoods. These men were automatically viewed as outsiders and were at a significant disadvantage to the number of hoodlums that lived in the neighborhood. I did not view where the riot started, but after the fact, it appeared that a couple of outsiders were obnoxious or were viewed as being obnoxious by the locals. On one of the balconies in the far side of the wall fight started and the priest rushed over to act as a calming factor to break up the altercation. Unfortunately, one of the felons, who did not care for the priest, threw him down a flight of stairs. This infuriated many of the older members of the parish who rushed to the priest's aid pulling some of the local hoodlums out of the fray. This ignited the entire inferno. Within minutes, the place was a shambles. Tables were overturned; women and children were screaming and crying while rushing to the exits. This caused them to jam up doorways while glasses, bottles, ashtrays, and whatever were flying through the air hitting people. The injured or the drunk lay on the floor, calmly bleeding or sleeping. The hotel management called the police and sirens arose in the distance from both the squad cars and the ambulances.

I was carrying my brother-in-law, who had much too much to drink to one of the exits. Luckily, in each altercation that I passed, I knew the majority of the dissidents, as they were neighborhood personnel. I witnessed a couple of brutal events where people were slammed against brick walls until blood ran down their clothes. Once we reached the outside, sanity seemed to reappear.

Never again did the parish convene a parish reunion. They learned that that the size made managing this type of an affair untenable. Later they held dances in the local gymnasium or the local VFW where the number of participants did not exceed about a hundred individuals. There were no more riots.

**THE END**