

Black Fighting Formations



By,
Russell Maroon Shoatz

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their strengths, weaknesses, and potentials
by Russell "Maroon" Shoatz
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A study of the various black political organizations in the United States between the years of 1960-1994 will reveal a number of "fighting formations." These formations were usually subdivisions or offshoots of larger organizations which were not primarily envisioned as fighting groups. This lack of original dedication to a "fighting mission" will go a long way toward helping explain their strengths, weaknesses, and potentials (or lack of them).

Not included in this study are the non-political black fighting formations found amongst the street gangs or those dedicated to criminal activity. However, mention will be made of them in regard to the loss of the black political fighting formations' potential.

We must look to Sun Tzu (ca. 5th Century BC) and Karl Von Clausewitz (19th Century AD) for the most concise writings on the philosophy of warfare, the ultimate reasons for engaging in it, and the main dynamics controlling its many changeable parts. *The Art of War* and *On War* by the aforementioned authors respectively are mentioned by military practitioners around the world as two of the best, tried and true volumes available on the subject. There have been many outstanding military practitioners of African descent as well: Thutmose III (the first imperial conqueror); Ramses II and Ramses III (consistent subduers of the barbarian and savage hordes of Europe and Asia); Queens Ann Nzinga and (the) Candace(s) of Ethiopia and Angola; Hannibal Barca (of known fame); Shaka Zulu (warrior par excellent); Toussaint L'Ouverture and Antonio Maceo (who out-generated and out-fought vastly superior European armies in Haiti and Cuba). Finally, we must add to these the outstanding guerilla leaders amongst the Maroons and the African anti-colonial fighters. Although guerilla warfare is often sufficient, it must be kept in mind that "guerilla warfare" is only a subdivision and sometimes a forerunner of "total war." Despite the successes of these African warriors, there is very little written work available on them; thus we must rely on that by SunTzu and Karl Von Clausewitz.

Sun Tzu in his *The Art of War* (1) instructs: "War is a matter of vital importance to the state [it is] the providence of life and death [and] the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied." In *On War* (2) Karl Von Clausewitz states: "War is an extension of politics, politics by different means." Both of these authors demonstrate the connection between politics and warfare and the relative importance of both. (Politics here is simply the science and art of

governing people.) It follows that those who are involved in shaping political affairs must recognize that they will, at some time, be required to pursue their political objectives "by different means" (Von Clausewitz as "the road to survival or ruin (Tzu)." Warfare! 3

For the revolutionary, warfare cannot be a haphazard or belated consideration, as denying these principles (non-violent pacifism) will ultimately lead to total destruction. Therefore, all of our black political organizations should have had a military component right from the beginning. From their inception it would have been the mission of these military components to study and prepare for war. This presupposes that the political and military leadership is sagacious enough to discern both the long-range interests of their people and the potential conflicts that they will invariably encounter by pursuing these interests. In other words, our black political organizations should have known, right from the beginning, that they had to build a military component which was capable of defending our people from the attacks they were undergoing as a result of working to free themselves from oppression. Sadly, this was not the case.

In order to understand better what must be done now, we need to learn from the mistakes of the past. When 1960 dawned, there were no black fighting formations—with the exception of the Nation of Islam's paramilitary wing known as the "Fruit of Islam," which was formed largely in response to Malcolm X's tireless efforts. The Fruit of Islam, however, was dedicated to internal security and static defense of the Nation of Islam's leadership and property. It was further hobbled (in qualitative development) by the group's unwillingness to become actively involved in the Civil Rights struggle where most of the action was taking place. They were not much better than department store security guards, as they were far removed from the dictums of "total war." Subsequent events would expose their weaknesses.

To their credit, however, the Fruit of Islam had perfected a method of recruiting, organizing, and training (to the extent that training was done) unparalleled to this day. The secret of their success was that they concentrated their main recruiting efforts among the most downtrodden segments of the black community: drug addicts, prison inmates, prostitutes, and destitute poor. Although it took a lot of effort to recruit and organize these people, once they were fully brought into the organization they became steadfast and loyal members of their new (psychological) family. By the time the Nation of Islam had "fished" them out of the mud, they had no other family to stand by them, as they had burnt their bridges. These recruits were kept under extremely close supervision and were always provided with the means to acquire food, clothing, shelter, security, and entertainment (which was usually social fellowship in religious garb). The Fruit of Islam provided everything that

a functioning family would provide its members.

The organization itself had a nationalist-sounding program but no grand strategy for achieving such ends. The first dictum of war: "war is a matter of vital importance to the state . . . and it is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied (Tzu)" was not observed. This statement is not just a matter of opinion, as events have proven this to be so, as it does not take long to build military capability. Of course, the organization has not had a free ride as they continue to fight the government's infiltration and manipulation in addition to the petty jealousies and rivalries existing among their leaders. Nevertheless it is clear that, with a few exceptions, they have missed the boat when it comes to being an important black fighting formation.

The Civil Rights movement was launched in 1955 with the Montgomery Alabama bus boycott, and it spread quickly throughout the South. In addition to the local groupings, which in some cases had already been active in their communities, a number of other organizations began to emerge on the national scene by 1960: the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Urban League, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC aka "Snick"). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had been around since the early 1900s. From 1955 until 1965, all of the major actions taking place in the black freedom struggle occurred in the South, and the aforementioned organizations led these struggles. Each of these organizations professed non-violence as their strategy but ultimately relied on someone else's armed force to protect them, usually the U.S. Government—with disastrous results. These groups would call ahead to the FBI to alert them to their plans and request protection. The FBI, in turn, would contact members of the local police force, who were often card-carrying Ku Klux Klansmen, or they would contact their undercover agents/operatives in the Klan who would subsequently organize a shooting, burning, bombing, or killing. These organizations were violating every rule in the "art of war." Instead of observing the rule "destroy your enemy and preserve yourself" they were actually aiding their enemy in their own destruction! This exact pattern was repeated, to one degree or another, when the U.S. Government provided Marshals or federal troops. Despite this short-sighted and disastrous strategy, and the heroic sacrifices suffered by the rank-and-file (largely black men, women, and children), this cowardly and ignorant strategy did force a number of changes during this period of time. These groups gave rise, albeit belatedly, to a few armed fighting subdivisions and offshoots.

The Monroe County North Carolina NAACP branch was headed by a black man named Robert F. Williams, who saw early on that his chapter

of the NAACP would suffer countless casualties and could not survive unless they abandoned the non-violent approach and adopted a strategy of armed self-defense. This brother strongly advocated that all blacks in the U.S. adopt armed self-defense. Williams walked his talk, his Monroe County NAACP branch was both armed and trained, and because of this they survived a number of shootouts with the local KKK (citizens and police). Unfortunately he was unable to effect any widespread acceptance of his methods, and his chapter was isolated as a result. After a so-called "kidnapping" of some white people, he was forced to leave the country. He continued his work while in exile by traveling throughout Africa and visiting China in an attempt to raise support for the struggle in the U.S. He became a nationalist and published a paper known as "The Crusader," in which he advocated the overthrow of the U.S. government through guerilla warfare. After a number of years, he was able to return to the U.S. as the head of the revolutionary group Republic of New Africa (RNA). He avoided prison, as RNA was able to expose and squash the trumped-up kidnapping charge.

At the same time, the organization "Deacons for Defense and Justice" was organized in Louisiana and rural Alabama and Mississippi. Unlike Williams's Monroe County chapter, the Deacons were not a subdivision. Rather they were an offshoot and thus autonomous from the national non-violent leadership. The Deacons recruited, organized, and trained solely from this perspective. Because of this fact, they were more sophisticated than any other part-time militant black organization during the Civil Rights struggle. It was the Deacons, for instance, who provided a tightly organized security and communications net around some of the most important Civil Rights marches. While the Civil Rights groups provided their posted marshals with armbands, the Deacons had roving patrols armed with automatic rifles! After a few skirmishes and firefights with Klan and Night Riders (part-time Klan who were afraid to show the faces during the day), the "crackers" gave the Deacons a wide berth. Ultimately, however, the Deacons' potential for growth was relatively circumscribed due to the Civil Rights movement's overall strategy of reliance on the U.S. Government for protection.

Rural Mississippi had also made believers out of the young SNCC cadre. SNCC had started its "Mississippi Freedom Summer" campaign in 1964 as non-violent activists. After experiencing the death of several of their comrades and supporters (Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner to name a few) and the raw terror that the police and Klan/Night Riders inspired, all of the SNCC cadre was armed by the time they left Mississippi. SNCC leader H. Rap Brown was arrested after a rifle and banana clips were found in his luggage following a flight from Mississippi. SNCC eventually changed its name to the "Student National Coordinating

Committee," dropping the "Non-Violent" description. Yet it was too little too late, as the momentum was already shifting to the cities of the North and West. SNCC's last effort in 1965 was to organize the Lowndes County Freedom Organization whose emblem was a black panther (no direct association to the Black Panther Party founded in October 1966). The Lowndes County Freedom Organization adopted armed self-defense from the beginning. Although they experimented with the slogan "Black power," they did not make any far-reaching progress, as their political goal was still "civil rights."

The Watts California rebellion in 1965 was the signal that the momentum in the black struggle was shifting to the cities. Within two years, a number of rebellions occurred in other major cities and small towns. This was a qualitatively different situation. Rather than peaceful demonstrators seeking to acquire "civil rights," these events were massive and widespread rebellions (Watts: 34 dead, New York, Philadelphia, Birmingham, and Newark: 26 dead, Detroit, 43 dead; and in each case hundreds were wounded and massive property damage occurred. The keen political observer could not miss the parallels between these rebellions and those that had preceded revolutions and armed struggles in other countries. But what was missing from the equation? No urban-based black political groups had armed components (3). There were no black fighting formations to organize, control, and direct these rebellions. The Fruit of Islam was clearly not up to the job because they had not been able to properly respond to the killings and shootings of their members by the local police. Nor could the rural-based groups lend any support, as they were still involved in life-and-death struggles with the Klan and Southern police. SNCC made a half-hearted attempt to transfer their operations to urban areas. However, aside from H. Rap Brown and a few others, it seemed that after their Southern experience, SNCC was scared off.

The urban rebellions brought forth scores of new political formations and these formations generally and in theory adhered to the idea of armed self-defense. Along with this shift in tactics came the new nationalist (sounding) politics, which were usually of the separatist bent, although the rediscovery of pan-Africanism began to occur as well. Unfortunately, these new formations adopted the "high profile" strategy of the Civil Rights movement, which brought them excessive media coverage. In reality, these organizations were no longer part of the Civil Rights movement and were now involved in the "Black liberation struggle." The Civil Rights people needed this type of exposure to get their message across and to help protect themselves against the most flagrant abuses. The Black Liberation struggle, however, demanded a more clandestine way of handling affairs. They had to prepare for a guerilla war and to take on this preparation in secret.

This was lost on the new, younger organizations. They were impressed by Malcolm X and the fiery orators and did not realize that Malcolm had served as a motivator and educator. They did not understand that they were embarking on a new phase that demanded quiet, patient organizing and training. The tens of thousands of potential recruits were showing, through the massive rebellions, that they were already sufficiently stimulated and were waiting for someone to show them how to get the job done. ("Rattling a sword makes a lot of noise drawing one is silent.") There was still a good amount of agitation, propagandizing, and education that needed to be done, but not by those who saw their mission as forming black fighting formations. This mistake was usually made because these groups tried to combine the activities of the military and political workers in each cadre. They did not realize that the situation demanded specialization: political workers (motivators, educators, marchers, etc.) on the one hand, and military workers (armed self-defense and assault units) on the other. The Deacons had had it right!

An outstanding practitioner of this new form of resistance was the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) which began an intensive organizing campaign in the Northeastern states in 1966 and 1967. Much of their activity was centered in Philadelphia. RAM was militant, nationalist, and high profile. Their cadre spray-painted the "Join the Black Guard" slogan on walls in the communities. (The Black Guard was their public military arm.) RAM's leaders were in front of the cameras on all the important issues and the Black Guard cadre could often be seen at their "cultural centers" wearing fatigues and black berets. The sisters and brothers in RAM's youth group, "The Liberators," dressed in black with black berets. These activities helped members of the black community feel good and that revolution was right around the corner. (Ironically, no one in Philadelphia had heard of the similar group the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, begun in California.) RAM's activity scared white folks, especially because some members of RAM went out of their way to ensure this. They reasoned that they had been kept down long enough and it was time to strike back!

But it was the white establishment that struck back in 1967 and over a period of months, H. Rap Brown and other leaders and key cadre were arrested. While RAM advocated self-defense and owned weapons, they did not carry them in public. Consequently they were arrested for everything from jaywalking to conspiring to put cyanide in the police department rations at a major holiday celebration (4). Although RAM had not fired a shot, some alleged members and supporters were arrested for bringing dynamite back from Canada (allegedly to blow up the Statue of Liberty!). These arrests crippled RAM and they never regained their former vitality as their leaders and cadres

were forced to deal with trumped-up charges for years afterward. Nor was RAM the only group facing this scenario, which played out in black communities around the country. In fact, the FBI—the original coordinators—relayed the attack on RAM and its results to police forces throughout the country. The government's success in carrying this out was due to the fact that all these groups were inexperienced and had not had time to get grounded after they publicly demonstrated their militancy. These black fighting formations never had the chance to fight, and many of their members became discouraged after such experiences and turned to crime and/or drugs.

The situation with the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPP) was somewhat different. This group, founded in 1966 in Oakland, CA, followed the same pattern as RAM but had an advantage in that a clause in the California State law allowed citizens to carry arms in public as long as they were not loaded. The BPP took full advantage of this clause in order to brandish weapons wherever they went. At the time, this seemed to be the height of militancy, and they received more attention than any other group by the community, media, and police. Despite this attention, they could not be dealt with as easily as RAM, because they always carried their weapons, which were loaded. It became apparent, after a few confrontations with the police, that the police could not bluff or intimidate these young blacks. Because of this, BPP members were provoked into gun battles with the police, and within a year the co-founder Huey Newton had been shot and was imprisoned for killing the cop who shot him. "Li'l Bobby" Hutton was the first BPP member to be killed after two carloads of Panthers were ambushed by the police. Others were wounded and jailed. Bobby Seale, the co-founder, had been jailed for marching into the state capital with other Panthers to protest the new law prohibiting the carrying of guns in public. The top three leaders: Newton, Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver (who was captured after the shootout with the police in which Hutton was killed) as well as other key leaders and cadre, were all in prison.

There was a positive side to all this: membership in the BPP skyrocketed! Chapters were formed up and down the West Coast, in the Midwest, Northeast, and South. The BPP became a magnet that attracted most of the smaller local organizations of a similar mindset. The assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968 inspired even greater numbers to join. At this time the BPP was not carrying guns in public, yet the police onslaught continued. BPP offices and homes of Panthers were raided from coast to coast, police agents infiltrated their ranks, provoked deadly confrontations with local police, and instigated rivalries with other black organizations. BPP members were actually hunting and killing each other due to these "agents provocateur." The Panthers were a potentially strong black fighting formation, but they were forced to take to the

streets before they were ready. ("The field of battle is a land of standing corpse Panthers were dying in the streets, in raids, and in prison (Soledad, San Quentin, Attica, and Atmore-Holman, to name a few). It was a "war to the knife"! (5)

The Panthers were not the only black fighting formation. There were other revolutionaries and "free shooters" who were every bit as committed, armed, and involved in the Black Liberation struggle. Examples of these include:

*The case of Fred Ahmad Evans and his squad of black guerillas who were able to trap the Cleveland Ohio police in a deadly ambush in which a number of police were wounded and killed. Some guerillas were killed as well and others were wounded. Evans was imprisoned where he later died. In response to the ambush, the police demanded more men and guns and displayed a .50 caliber heavy machine gun that raked their squad cars.

*Mark Essex, a "freeshooter," held off an army of police from atop a high-rise hotel in Louisiana and inflicted many casualties. A helicopter gunship had to be called in to kill him.

*Jonathan Jackson walked into a courtroom in San Rafael, CA and pulled out a sub-machine gun from his duffel bag, disarmed all the sheriffs, and gave pistols and shotguns to James McClain, William Christmas, and Ruchell Cinque Magee, who were comrades of his brother George Jackson. They rounded up the white judge, district attorney, and a number of jurors as hostages. After forcing their way past the rest of the sheriffs and other police, their getaway van was riddled with bullets, killing Jackson, McClain and Christmas. Magee was wounded but survived. Before they died, they shot the judge in the head with the shotgun they had taped under his chin. The DA and a juror were also shot, but survived. Jonathan Jackson's brother George was a Field Marshal in the BPP and was killed the following year in San Quentin, although not before he was able to kill three prison guards and two inmate snitches. As it turned out, all of these brothers were set-up by agent provocateur Louis Tackwood, who had married one of their sisters. (6)

*The Revolutionary Republic of New Africa (RNA) that Robert F. Williams once headed, gunned down a number of Detroit police after they tried to storm a meeting that RNA's leaders were holding in a church. A few years later they killed a sheriff after their headquarters was raided in Jackson, Mississippi. That raid sent their entire leadership to prison. (7)

*"Free-shooters" killed police in sniper attacks in projects in Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, and New Orleans.

*H. Rap Brown became a fugitive after a bomb went off outside a court building in his comrade's car, and a year or so later he was

wounded and captured after a gun battle between his "liberators" from East St. Louis and the police in New York City. A number of the liberators were captured. 10

Police were being raided while they sat in their cars and while they directed traffic. It was war. There were sisters and brothers hijacking passenger jets to Cuba and to Algeria where the BPP had a branch of fugitives headed by Cleaver. (Cleaver had left the country to avoid going back to prison for the Li'l Bobby Hutton shootout.) All this was very sobering for the BPP members. The early flash and profile was giving way to a desperate search to find a way to regain the initiative and plug the security gaps. Finally it was decided that what was needed was an autonomous strike force that would handle all of the armed actions while the rest of the BPP would keep up and expand the Community Programs, such as free breakfast, education, sickle-cell testing, clothing drives, etc. In reality it was, again, too little too late.

Most of the mistrust had been instigated by the actions of the agents and their handlers (FBI, police) and this was only possible because the youthful leadership had no firm understanding of intelligence and counterintelligence activities, or how to combat them. More importantly, they did not have a firm grip on the "art of war" which included instructions on how to deal with all that troubled them. Unfortunately there was no turning back. Orders went out to the field marshals to begin organizing the separate guerilla group known as the Black Liberation Army.

A very important piece was missed at this point, and that was the recruitment of the street gangs. The BPP had made a half-hearted attempt to reach them, but their lack of experience hindered their efforts. The fact of the matter is that the street gangs were susceptible only to a program where fighting was the main component. The street gangs told the old BPP, who wanted cadres which were both political and military workers, "Come back when you're ready to fight." Now the time for fighting had come, but in their haste to begin this new phase, they ignored the gangs again. It must be recognized that events were happening at such a rapid and desperate pace that it was hard to do anything but proceed full steam ahead. Nevertheless, a little foresight would have indicated that there were benefits to thinking out their strategy in a more developmental manner.

A major stumbling block in the launching of this new phase was the growing unrest among the rank-and-file because of the leaders' belated effort to deal with these problems. Despite this, the "new phase" was launched with the BPP cadres studying texts on guerilla warfare, refusing to be arrested for any reason, and launching planned attacks on various targets. In New York City a gun battle broke out between the police and BPP members after they tried to arrest them for carrying concealed

weapons. When the smoke had cleared, a cop was dead, along with BPP member Harold Russell. Two other BPP members, Robert Ra'uf Vickers and Anthony Kimu White, were wounded, and Kimu was arrested. Ra'uf escaped and went underground where doctors helped him heal his wounds and he was then able to return to the field. In California, // Geroimo Ji Jaga Pratt was out on bail in connection with the 1969 gun battle that resulted from a police raid on their LA headquarters. He went underground and formed a guerilla group. In Philadelphia, a guerilla group raided a police station killing one cop and wounding another. BPP guerilla groups were raiding banks for funds, hijacking food to give to the community, and acquiring sophisticated military weapons.

This intensified activity was bringing the pressure down on the BPP political workers, and after the raid on the Philadelphia police station, the police raided every BPP office in the city. The BPP, however, was ready for them.

After gun battles at two of the offices, the Panthers were forced to surrender. This activity also provoked gun battles between the police and other blacks. In a 48-hour period the score was: 6 cops in the hospital with gunshot wounds and one cop in the morgue. Panthers and guerillas in prison and other guerillas on the run. They were learning! All the Panthers were released because the police could not officially justify the raids in the face of massive protest from the black community.

It is unfortunate that groups in the Black Liberation struggle had not operated in this way from the beginning. The growing awareness of how to attack their problems was not being digested by the larger movement, and a split developed between those who advocated the new phase of resistance and other leaders who advocated taking armed struggle out of the movement altogether. The latter group was moving backwards, failing to learn the lessons from Philadelphia which were crystal clear: Police were killed and wounded while the Panthers were released from prison, and there were no Panther casualties. There was also heightened community support and participation. A few weeks after the Philadelphia incident, BPP members held a major convention in the city without any police interference. Also the convention was held in spite of the police intelligence sources within the BPP informing them, correctly, that the guerillas accused of the raids had been regularly seen at the BPP offices, and that one of them, Robert Saeed Joyner, was there every day. The Black community could clearly see a tenuous separation between those who were participating in planned assaults (the guerillas) and the BPP political workers. It was also clear that there was no reason to suspend armed action, and that it was probably too late to do so.

Beyond the disagreements and splits over the issue of arms in the struggle, numerous complaints arose about the new "opulent" lifestyle that some of the leaders of the BPP had adopted. After his release from

prison in 1970, Huey Newton hung out with Hollywood stars and rented expensive apartments. Despite disgust and anger over these situations, the real beef was over the poor strategy that continued to get members killed or sent to prison. Newton, still the top leader, advocated no guns in the program, and for those who wanted to fight or who were 12 underground, he sent an open communique to the North Vietnamese government that he would make 1000 BPP members available to fight in Vietnam against U.S. forces. This was odd to say the least. Of course the Panthers were highly supportive of the Viet Cong's fight, but very few could see any reason not to show their support by stepping up armed action within the United States rather than on foreign ground. The Vietnamese government was of a similar opinion. They openly declined the offer, suggesting that the BPP could better help by supporting them from within the U.S. At this point, other leaders started speaking against Newton more strongly. Cleaver (who had been feuding with Newton from Algeria) stated emphatically that it was time to stop bullshitting and that the armed struggle needed to be fully supported. He made arrangements with the Algerian government for Panthers and others to come to Algeria for military training. Similarly, Field Marshall George Jackson continued to advocate and write about the necessity for this type of change in the struggle, and how it needed to be carried out. He, unquestionably, would have been the most effective leader to implement this new phase strategy because of his superior theories, his desire to implement them, his desperation (at the time he was preparing to go to trial for the killing of a prison guard) and finally and importantly, because of the widespread respect and admiration he received from others. It would not have been difficult to "liberate" him from prison, had the BPP put their full resources behind the effort. There was no lack of BPP members, male and female, who would have volunteered for such an honored mission. Sadly, the West Coast leadership of Newton and Company, and the police and prison establishments, had cut him off from direct contact with those who were ready, willing, and able to carry out such a mission. Consequently he was set up by these establishments and was assassinated, although not before Jackson and his prison "Black Guerilla Family" killed five of the enemy. Magee, having recovered from his courthouse wounds, was in the battle as well (8). The date of Jackson's death—August 21, 1971—was a day of mourning. After a memorial for him, Attica exploded, with 43 guards and prisoners dead. Black guerillas walked into a California police station, killed a sergeant, and shot up the station. The George L. Jackson Assault Team of the BLA took credit for the act.

The question of the split on policy and strategy was solved when a force dispatched by Newton shot and killed a Panther after he had given unfavorable details about the inner workings of the West Coast

leadership clique. Robert Webb was a top Panther leader and bodyguard of Newton. It was his words at a New York meeting, attended by disgruntled Panthers from all over the country, that were the most damaging to the West Coast leadership. Allegations of opulence (penthouses, limousines, etc.), pimping BPP female members, and cocaine addiction were raised. Not long after that, the main West Coast representative, Central Committee member Samuel Napier, was found dead in a burnt-out office. He had been tied to a chair and riddled with bullets. Shortly thereafter, the West Coast delegation placed themselves under police protection until they could make arrangements to return to California! The word went out that the police were looking for a number of people in connection with the shooting and the previously held meeting, and this forced many people to go underground. Although a situation like this should have been prepared for, unfortunately this was not the case. Once again, the dictums of The Art of War were ignored. While some tried to adhere to them, too many others were still running their operations and actions in a haphazard and shortsighted manner.

This unfortunate situation did swell the ranks of the guerillas considerably, however. Intensive training was undertaken by these new guerillas, and they raided banks for funds and gun stores for arms and ammunition. Once again, this should have been a new beginning, but because the situation was forced upon them as a result of the actions of older BPP members, above-ground political work and activity was all but destroyed. The same mistake that the Civil Rights movement had made was visited upon the BPP. Each group put too much stock in one facet of the resistance. With the Civil Rights movement there was too much focus on political work and not nearly enough on military components, while with the guerilla groups it was just the opposite. It was not clear to either of these groups that professionals must lead revolutions if destruction is to be avoided. One may not be professional from the start but it's imperative that professionalism be acquired as soon as possible. The hallmarks of the professional are the ability to proceed from point A to point B without wasting energy, learning from the mistakes of others and one's own and not repeating them, and emulating the successes of others whenever possible.

This new phase was not solidly launched—rather it was launched in an unprofessional manner. Adequate time was not taken to evaluate where they had been, where they were at, and where they were going. After finally adopting the right style, they lost contact with the substance of the struggle: what it was all about: "war is an extension of politics;" it is "politics by different means." It follows that they had to take their cue from whatever was happening in the political arena as the Deacons had done, but it was not so. The BLA groups were busy acquiring and consolidating their logistical base (raiding banks, gun stores, acquiring

transportation, safe houses, etc.) and this was understandable and proper. Yet at the same time they were launching deadly attacks on the police and since these were planned assaults, they were much more successful than the old BPP shootouts. Usually these attacks were carried out so swiftly that when the smoke had cleared, the cops were either dead or wounded and the guerillas had disappeared. They had learned how to reverse the ratio of killed and wounded. Once again, they should have been operating this way from the beginning. They still suffered casualties from the rare operations that resulted from a running 14 gunfight, when they were subjected to car stops, and when they were forced into confrontations. The casualties in these situations were devastating because the BLA did not have an adequate political apparatus to replenish their forces, nor did they understand the necessity to integrate local street gangs into their activities.

The BLA became the top priority of the special FBI/local police task forces. To a great degree, BLA guerilla groups did not fall victim to being infiltrated by agents, and therefore if they were not caught off balance, they had to make some other mistake to give these task forces an advantage, such as surveillance. The BLA fielded the most effective black assault units since the Maroons! Their primary weakness, and the situation which caused them the most harm, was their failure to properly integrate themselves with the black masses and their inability to interact with an above-ground revolutionary political group. The BLA did attempt to re-integrate with political workers who had left or been expelled from the BPP. Since most of these workers were located on the East Coast, they were known as the East Coast Panthers. This group did not, however, have any of the vitality, stature, resources, or connections that they had previously enjoyed, although they did have the know-how to put together a new political organization that could eclipse even the BPP—by using above-ground cadres, recruiting from former Panthers and other political blacks. In order to do this, they would have to channel their energies and resources away from their armed activities while they rebuilt the political apparatus. Before the BLA guerillas would come to this conclusion, however, they were imprisoned, killed, or exiled.

The BLA continued their revolutionary commitment after being imprisoned, and several were able to escape or attempt escape:

*In 1976, BLA member John Andalewa Clark was killed at Trenton, NJ State Prison after BLA members fought a battle against armed guards. The prisoners were armed with home-made weapons and bombs. The State Police discovered a van parked a few blocks from the prison, loaded with weapons and camping supplies.

A BLA member was killed in a fall from a high-rise prison in New York, after another prisoner had descended on the same rope.

*BLA member Herman Bell was overpowered after holding a guard

hostage in order to escape from Rikers Island prison in New York. A rubber raft and other gear were discovered outside his building. 15

*In 1977, Russell Maroon Shoatz and three other BLA members escaped from the State Prison at Huntingdon, PA. Two of these brothers were recaptured and BLA member Wayne Musa Henderson was killed. Maroon was recaptured after a 27-day hunt.

In 1979, a BLA task force walked into the Clinton Prison in New Jersey and, after commandeering the visiting area, liberated BLA member Assata Shakur. She later resurfaced in Cuba.

BLA member Kweisi Balagoon escaped from a New Jersey state prison. He was part of the BLA task force that liberated Assata Shakur.

Also in 1979, Arthur Cetawayo Johnson and Robert Saeed Joyner, two BLA members, took over a cellblock at the State Prison at Pittsburgh, PA in an attempt to escape. They and a few of the brothers who had helped were overpowered.

In 1980, BLA members Russell Maroon Shoatz and Cliff Lumumba Futch escaped from a maximum-security state mental hospital in PA. They and Phyllis Oshun Hill, who had smuggled them the escape weapons, were captured three days later after a gun battle with the police and FBI.

In 1980-81 BLA member Sundiata Acoli and a number of other prisoners were almost killed when guards at the Federal prison at Marion Illinois opened fire when they learned that they were trying to cut through the security fence.

In 1981, BLA member Joseph Joe-Joe Bowen and three other brothers held guards at gunpoint for six days after a failed escape from the State Prison at Graterford, PA. Joe-Joe and the BLA member Fred Muhammad Kafi Burton had assassinated the warden and deputy warden at the Holmesburg, Philadelphia prison in 1973.

There were many more incidents, and the prison authorities dealt with them by keeping BLA members in the "hole" for 5, 10, even 25 years. BLA member Ruchell Cinque Magee (courthouse shootout and Sar Quentin rebellion when Jackson was killed) has spent most of his 30 plus years in the hole. The prison authorities had them cut out, just like they had done to Field Marshal George Jackson. Most of them have sentences that make it unlikely that they will be released back into society. A campaign for deportation to a foreign (African) country holds real possibilities that can serve as an organizing tool. There is much more to be said about the lessons that the black fighting formations learned on a tactical level. However, that is another paper.

—Russell "Maroon" Shoatz

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Russell Shoats
 AF - 3855
 175 Progress Dr.
 Waynesburg, PA 15370

RUSSELL "MAROON" SHOATS



**SOUTH CHICAGO ABC
 ZINE DISTRO**
 POB 721 HOMEWOOD IL 60430