

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Employee Oral History Collection Project

Interviewee: Gregory White  
Topic: **The 1989 SCI Camp Hill Riots**  
Interview Date: August 30, 2019  
Interviewer: DOC Communications Director Susan McNaughton

**Interview Transcript**

**McNaughton:** Welcome to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' Oral History Project where record the oral histories of current and former DOC employees. I'm DOC Communications Director Susan McNaughton. This oral history focuses on memories from the October 1989 riot at the State Correctional Institution at Camp Hill. Our guest today, August 30, 2019, is Gregory White. Thanks for joining us, Greg.

**White:** Thank you, Sue.

**McNaughton:** Before we begin, Greg, could you please provide us with a brief overview of your DOC career?

**White:** I started back in 1976 at SCI Rockview. I worked there for 10 years as a corrections officer, sergeant and lieutenant, and left in October 1986 to take the position of chief of security/fire and safety at the central office of the department. I worked there a little more than three years, and was then reassigned as deputy of operations at SCI Waymart, which was still, at that time, Farview State Hospital. Then I worked there until 1993, at which time I was promoted and moved to SCI Pittsburgh as superintendent. I worked there for three years as superintendent. I then moved to SCI Greene as the deputy of facility management. After two years there, I went to SCI Greensburg as deputy of facility management, and ended my career opening SCI Pine Grove as deputy of facility management. I retired in 2001.

**McNaughton:** Let's talk about the Camp Hill prison riot. Tell us what you remember about the riot. Where were you on Wednesday, October 25, 1989?

**White:** I was at Waymart. We were planning to get it opened, working with the Department of Public Welfare. Myself, Conner Blaine and Chuck Zimmerman were on the phone with Bob Lorenz in Central Office, and Bob said, "Gee, I can't really talk right now. Camp Hill is exploding. There's a right going on." Of course, his office looked out onto the compound of



**Greg White**

Camp Hill. He said, "It's really... they're out of control." We told him, "Bob, what we are going to do is call all the other institutions so they know what's going on," and that what we did. We called everybody, told them what was going on, and then Chuck and I talked a minute and he said, "Hey, I'm a senior superintendent and you're still the chief of security, we're not doing anything gup here that's important, let's drive to Camp Hill." So, we drove down to Camp Hill and went into the Central Office building and met with Deputy DeRamus and Commissioner Owens. And we helped as we could around the office there.

**McNaughton:** So, you were up at Waymart, and obviously you were talking to Central Office initially. The riot started around 3 p.m. Then you headed down. How long does that ride take, and what time do you think you got to Central Office that evening?

**White:** Between 3 and 3:30 and we got some stuff together and just got in the car and left. It's about a 2½- to 3-hour ride depending on traffic, so it would have been 7 o'clock probably when we got there.

**McNaughton:** So, things were pretty well underway by the time you got here.

**White:** Absolutely. It was really fully engulfed at that time.

**McNaughton:** From a chief of security and safety standpoint, what exactly were you doing for that first night when you were here at Central Office watching the riot take place out the window?

**White:** One of the people came out and told us... they were a food service instructor... and they told us about hiding knives down in the storage area of the culinary area. And Keith Graham who was the department's chief of food service and myself and some other staff went down there to try and find those knives. We were able to get into that building even though there was a lot of activity all around us... things were still under control at that time. We went looking for those knives to make sure that we could find them and get them someplace where they wouldn't be found by inmates.

**McNaughton:** Inside the prison?

**White:** Yes.

**McNaughton:** Ok. Wow. Because that really was right in the area where everything was happening.

**White:** Yeah. We were able to get in a basement door and we felt pretty secure in there, but there was a lot of activity all around, that's for sure.

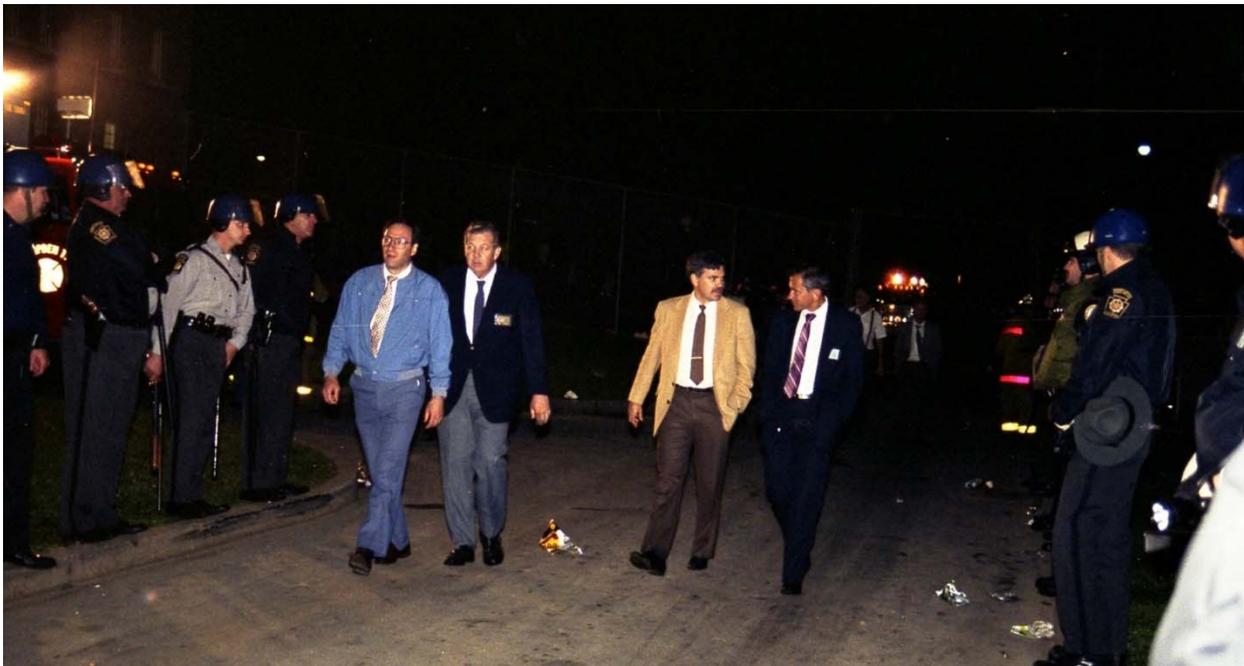
**McNaughton:** So, you secured those knives, and then what?

**White:** Then I went back to the POC command post in the Commissioner's office and was there for a while. Then I went back to my office down the hall and did a few things and then Superintendent Freeman came over to the office. There were some other people with him, and they had a discussion with Commissioner Owens and Deputy DeRamus. Freeman wanted to go back inside, but by this time things were getting under control, it was getting later at night ...

maybe 11 o'clock or 10:30 p.m. They said, "Yeah, go ahead, Superintendent." And I said, "Superintendent, it would be inappropriate for you to go in there by yourself. I'll go with you." So, the two of us walked through the institution as much as we could at that time. There was still some stuff going on and a lot of state police and CO's ... and a lot of activity, and we were around to try to assess some of the damage from the outside. Ken Chubb met with us and we came back out around midnight.

**McNaughton:** What happened after midnight?

**White:** After midnight things were sort of semi-under control and they felt that they had things contained. When we were walking up – that's one of the pictures I saw was us walking up that one main road – it was just surrounded... state police and corrections officers and some other local police and the fire fighters just lining that road... it was surreal.



From left to right, walking inside the prison after the first night's rioting ended: Greg White, Ken Chubb, Superintendent Robert Freeman and an unidentified man.

**McNaughton:** Tell me about the status of the facility. Did they have the inmates locked in cells, and obviously, the cells were kind of damaged so they were just stuffing inmates where they could, and then they fed them. Was there ever a search of the facility then at that point?

**White:** We were getting just bits and pieces of information and trying to determine – housing unit by housing unit – what the status was. At this time the modular units didn't seem to be affected, but it was just... trying to piece together what the status of everything was... I know they never got a clear count. They were trying to determine who was where, and as you said... several inmates in the same cell just to get them secured and that kind of stuff. It was very difficult to get verifiable information as to exactly what the status was.

**McNaughton:** A lot of people that I've talked to seem to use the same word to describe the situation and it was "chaos." Would you agree with that?

**White:** Yeah, but at this time it was almost more organized chaos. It seemed like the inmates themselves were under control at this time. It was just a matter of trying to figure out where the damage was in the institution and what tomorrow was going to bring.

**McNaughton:** So, you went home then?

**White:** Yeah, I got home about 2 o'clock in the morning. I got up the next morning and came into Central Office and went to my office... the chief of security office. I was trying to... I didn't get much clear direction as to what we should be doing at that time. They were leaving most of that up to the institution itself. I really never did get much direction that day as to what the status was or what I should be doing, frankly. So, about 5:30 p.m. I left the office and went to Guillifty's [a local restaurant] and met my wife and two daughters. We had some pizza, and the next thing you know... we're coming out about 7 o'clock and a fire truck goes by and I said, "If that fire truck takes the next left, that's bad." And, of course, it did. So, we followed it and got toward the institution to where I could pull in... near the abattoir or somewhere like that and turn around. I told them [his family] to go home, and I had ran up the road to go back to my office to start calling people, because it was burning. It was bad. It was a real chaotic scene then. I know I'm running up the road, and this police car comes flying up and stops and looks at me and asks, "What should I be doing? What should I be doing?" I said, "Uh, how about controlling traffic on the road?" He said, "That's a great idea!" From there it went downhill.

**McNaughton:** And they did actually end up putting roadblocks at the end of Lisburn Road and then at Lisburn and Slate Hill [Road] to control traffic. You had to use your ID to get through.

**White:** Yes. So, I'm running up the road. Of course, I had my ID on me, and it goes flipping out into the middle of the road, and traffic's coming and I made a run, scoop and picked it up... otherwise I would have had to go by facial recognition which wasn't very much with the police in the area there.

Then I was running up the road, going back to my office. At that point I heard a lot of gunfire. I'm running by Camp Hill's front gate, and I mean I heard a lot of gunfire and I thought, "Oh my goodness. This is beyond my wildest beliefs."

I went back to my office and started calling people in. I can remember calling people, and they would not believe me. They said, "It's not possible that Camp Hill's on fire again." I called in some of the people from Central Office, and I heard some people in the hall way come out... Commissioner Owens and Deputy DeRamus again... they were surprised to see me. I told them what I had already done, and Commissioner Owens said, "Go to Camp Hill's command post and be our eyes and ears there and keep us informed."

So, I went to the Camp Hill administration building and met up with the people at the command post and spent the rest of the night there. It didn't take long for it to just get totally out of control.

It was... between the state police and the local police and the fire departments and everything, it was pretty... amazing scene... just something you'll never see again. Hopefully.

**McNaughton:** Right. From the command post, which you said was in the superintendent's office in the administration building for the prison, the way the prison front gate was at the time, you had a pretty good view into the institution and could see what was going on. Especially in the Group 1 area where the modulares were.

**White:** Yes, and there was a lot of fire there. It was a very... a scene that ... you wouldn't think that a modular had that much stuff to burn, but they certainly did. And then as we started calling in people from other institutions... the emergency teams as they called them then, I would meet with them at the front gate... talk to them... tell them where we thought they should go... we just didn't have much information as to what was going on inside there... except we knew there were a lot of inmates on the one field that didn't want to be involved, but they sort of needed to be protected and also guarded at the same time. So, we sent a lot of folks in that direction.

Sometime during the night, we started talking about equipment. It was clear that we did not have the hardware... handcuffs, leg irons... those kind of things to control this situation with what Camp Hill had on site. So, we made the decision to call the other institutions that had the RERP equipment... the Radiologic Emergency Response equipment for the Berwick [I think he meant to say Limerick Power Plant ][nuclear] Power Plant which is close to Graterford. If they had to evacuate Graterford, they'd use that equipment. Camp Hill, fortunately, had some of that equipment. We got Rockview's and Dallas', although Huntingdon had some of that, we decided not to take it from Huntingdon because they had had problems earlier in the week and it was better off for them to keep it.

**McNaughton:** Can you describe for me, when you say equipment, what type of equipment are you talking about?

**White:** Mostly handcuffs and leg irons... hardware.

**McNaughton:** So that would be equipment they would have used to evacuate in the event of a nuclear meltdown or something...

**White:** Yeah, and for the receiving institutions to have on hand for accepting inmates.

**McNaughton:** A lot of people were talking about that there were communications issues, and back then we didn't have the Incident Command System like we have now. You had the DOC staff. You had PSP. You had local police, local fire... how on earth was everyone communicating with each other or was it, like you said, more so of an organized chaos situation?

**White:** Oh, yeah. It was just... the communication was real difficult. We were even having trouble communicating with the rear gate... the sally port.

**McNaughton:** Why?

**White:** They would call in with a message and sometimes it would get passed on. Sometimes it wouldn't. Sometimes they were waiting for a response, and it wasn't clear that they were waiting

for a response. It just... systems breakdown when they are under stress, and that was certainly a classic case of that, especially when you're not training for it and you just don't... we just didn't have the expertise then that we do now, hopefully.

**McNaughton:** Talk to me about the intensity of the second night. Obviously, it was worse than the first night, and talk about how it was able to spread throughout the entire institution. Also, I know that the control center was inside. Talk about the intensity, how it was able to spread and how the control center was at risk.

**White:** From what I understand, there were a few inmates that were never really accounted for, and one of them was able to release other inmates because of the damage to the locking mechanisms of the other cells... the cables that controlled the locks... and was able to start getting inmates out. Once they got some out, they got a bunch out, and staff had to leave areas that they wished they didn't have too, but they had to get out of there just as soon as they could. It quickly ... when I was headed to my office at central office, there was a lot of hostages in the administration building... in the inside building. They had gotten through air conditioning units that were not secured, and they got into that building and were starting to ruin that building. Setting everything on fire, and it spread quicker than anyone could ever have forecast. Then areas that had been protected the night before... the modular areas, for instance... they got into those and they just torched them. Some of the inmates there, they grabbed their own property and headed to the yard as much as they could just trying to save it, and of course the property ended up getting trashed anyway. Inmates... a lot of the inmates didn't want to be involved, but they had almost no recourse but to try to protect themselves, number one, and try to find someplace safe. We had inmates in the middle of the night come out to us and try to give us some intelligence as to what was going on. It's just really chaotic to get verifiable information. One of the things we were doing too... they were bringing some of the hostages... some of the people that were able to get out right away... even though the place was on fire... they came out... their faces were covered with soot. You could see where the soot was running down their face... white marks and that, and you're trying to ask them to give you information before they take them away in an ambulance... who else was where, that kind of stuff. It was... it was... just try to get any piece of information you can and see how it fits together.

**McNaughton:** And staff in the control center were trapped in very smoky conditions and eventually made it up to the roof. There were some high-ranking prison officials that were trapped above control, is that true?

**White:** Yeah. I'm not sure who all was up there and exactly when, and we were devising a plan of attack to try to get those people out of there, and while we were getting that approved, they were able to get out of harm's way. Exactly how all of that happened, I don't know. Yes, you're right a lot of people were in harm's way for quite a while.

**McNaughton:** Right. The people who were needed to make some of the decisions and even some that were doing some of the negotiations with some of the inmates, from what I read. A lot of people that I talked to... a common theme or thing that they mentioned is the "ninjas," who

weren't ours, they were the PSP's specialty team. Do you have any recollections or memories of the ninjas?

**White:** Only that they were able to get in and get a lot of information. They were able to get a couple of hostages out. They were actually... they helped us by getting some of the cooperating inmates that had some intelligence out to us to give us some information. I don't have much firsthand knowledge of exactly what all they did.

**McNaughton:** I had somebody mention to me that they saw a situation where an employee was being held hostage and was having some medical issues... maybe even a heart attack. He was released by the inmates to the ninja team on a stretcher, and as soon as the ninjas got him, they went a couple of feet... put the stretcher down, and the hostage got up and ran. This was a recollection of the cameraman who was on top of the Central Office roof taking videos. He said he saw that. Do you know about that situation? Was that individual actually having a heart attack or was that just a plan to get the individual out... do you know?

**White:** No. I don't know that. Ok. I wanted to see if I could cooperate that. The cameraman was like, "Wow, they faked that to get that guy out." And I don't know that that's really the case. It could have been a case of adrenaline and the guy was out and he just got up and started running.

**McNaughton:** Tell me about the rest of the day and how it came to an end for the prison and for you. What happened then?

**White:** As time went on... in the middle of the night, I was out on the perimeter just hearing the damage they were doing inside the cellblocks. I came back to the command post and there was a state representative there. He came into the downstairs of the administration building demanding to see somebody. Well... everybody looked at me. I went downstairs and I said, "Yes, Sir. How can I help you?" He said, "Well, who are you?" I identified myself. He said, "You have a lot of our local officers on duty here. You're leaving my district at risk." And about this time, I was getting a little bit short on patience, and I said, "Well, if you have a bigger law enforcement emergency than *this*, I'll absolutely release your officers." He looked at me and said, "No. That's not what I want. You know I don't want that." I said, "Well, what do you want?" He said he just wanted assurance that as soon as possible you'll get them back to our jurisdiction. I said, "Oh, absolutely. That's easy to promise and that's exactly what we'd like too." He thanked me and left. I couldn't believe it.

**McNaughton:** Explain how they were being used. Were they, like the state police and DOC staff, just surrounding the perimeter just trying to support the perimeter.

**White:** Yeah. The one report I had ... we had about 400 people on the perimeter. I don't know if it was that many or not, because I didn't see the back side [of the prison]... the front side, they were certainly clustered close enough that that would be an accurate figure. Funny things happened... we kept getting all of these pizzas and they would want to take them out to the people on the perimeter, and they'd all start going the same direction. So, the people in front have too much pizza, and the people in the back had nothing. Just those kinds of things that you don't have plans for how it should work... it just starts not working the way you'd want it to.

The state police, along with some corrections and local police, were pretty much on the perimeter. There were some state policemen inside, and a lot of DOC people inside... again, they inmates who didn't want to be involved had to be guarded. Some inmates... we got some inmates out in the middle of the night... a couple of them that were injured and they had to go to the hospital... I understand that one inmate called and said, "Hey, I don't know what to do. I'm here at the hospital and there's no officer." So, we told him, first go to security at the hospital and identify yourself and tell them that there's no security from the institution there; and we're going to get somebody over there as soon as we can.

**McNaughton:** Oh, my goodness. What a good guy.

**White:** I'm sure it was... he was scared to death too.

**McNaughton:** Right. He was probably hoping he could stay there and not come back.

**White:** Yeah. One thing, too, that I thought was interesting, but was really important for him... the district attorney for the county stayed all night in the command post to observe and take notes so when cases started getting prosecuted he had more firsthand knowledge.

**McNaughton:** Wow. I do have pictures of him sitting in the command post. I will definitely insert that into your transcripts. When it finally was over... did you just go home?



**Cumberland County's district attorney in the command center.**

**White:** Well, no. We decided around 6:30 or something like that in the morning, to pinch the perimeter a little bit and then once they did that and the inmates started giving up, we started having them come out of the cell blocks and lay on the ground. We started running out of room in some areas. They really started giving up enmasse, and I got called to go to see the commissioner, and Chuck Zimmerman was there, and he [the commissioner] said, "Greg, Chuck, go to Waymart and get ready to take inmates tonight." So, Chuck said, "Here, take the car. Go to your house and get some more clothes and stuff and then we'll go to Waymart." And that's just what we did. We drove back up I-81 and only had one flat tire on the way. We got to Waymart and got ready for inmates.

**McNaughton:** We are going to talk to Chuck in a little bit, so let me back up to the riots and kind of wrap that up. Looking back now, as the chief of security, do you remember seeing any trends; or did anybody have any information to know that this was coming?

**White:** Well, a couple of things. We knew we were having issues. We were overcrowded with not much relief in sight, and then an interinstitutional track meet scheduled, and it was going to be a Camp Hill... this was about a month and a half before the riot. And we had some information there was going to be some problems there, so we decided to cancel it. But at the same time the weather turned really rainy, so it gave us a very good reason to cancel that track meet. We started getting indications that we had issues. There wasn't like demands from inmates or a slew of grievances ... Camp Hill had just gone through accreditation. There just wasn't anything that would say Camp Hill was going to be *the* place that going to have issues. Of course, earlier in the week Huntingdon had a significant problem. Rockview ... earlier in the spring had had a pretty good size problem coming out of the dining hall. So, there were things, but from time to time you expect to have a few issues like that. It wasn't anything that wouldn't really indicate [his coo-coo clock went off here] a riot was eminent and that you had to take additional security precautions.

**McNaughton:** A lot of people had told me that morale was an issue... very, very bad morale among the staff. Do you have any information about that... like why?

**White:** We had gotten... actually more after the fact than before... there had been a lot of changes in direction... a lot of, "ok, are we security? What are supposed to do here? How are we supposed to do this?" The big thing about the staff was that they were overtasked. Once we started doing double-celling [inmates] we got real good at it. Once we started finding basements to put inmates, we got too good at it. Staff was a little bit... ah... concerned about that and also a little bit burned out because you're taking the same amount of treatment staff and trying to do more. Trying to get custody staff... get newer staff, and trying to get them to perform at a high level in a changing environment... that's difficult to do. And it was pretty clear that we weren't going to get a lot of help from the state legislature in the form of a lot of money or new prisons or that kind of stuff right at that time. We all... the staff at central office was ready. We had been out to the Boulder for training, and we know how to design, build and staff prisons. We just didn't have anything on the drawing board.

**McNaughton:** Tell me, from a security standpoint and operational standpoint, how did the riots change not only SCI Camp Hill, but the department?

**White:** At Camp Hill, of course, the physical plant had to be all redone, and it took a lot of time and money to get that done. The other... beyond that, a couple of things... they decided, number one – we have to go to unit management to have a whole different system to manage our prisons and our housing units.

**McNaughton:** Can you explain to me how it was at the time of the riot and what unit management is and why that was a good decision to go that way?

**White:** Prior to the riot, a lot of the housing unit decisions fell on sergeants and lieutenants... mostly sergeants... security things, with very little input from treatment staff and treatment staff were in offices that were remote from the housing unit. With unit management, they have a manager in charge of the unit – both security and counseling staff – and the counseling staff right

on the unit trying to keep problems at the lower level and get them resolved there, giving the unit manager the ability to make decisions.

**McNaughton:** How was unit management accepted?

**White:** It was a difficult sell. It probably wasn't the ideal conditions to implement it, but it certainly... over time it was... we did it at Waymart, and it was accepted really well there. Number one, the staff that we got from Farview was used to that kind of a system. Number two, it's brand new, so you could... you had some opportunities there that places that had been in existence a long time didn't have. Even though our physical plant was a bit goofy [at Waymart], it still enabled us to do it pretty easily. One of the units was a drug and alcohol treatment unit, and it just lended itself very easily for that unit management system.

**McNaughton:** And, of course, we still use the unit management concept today.

**White:** Yes.

**McNaughton:** What other changes or improvements came out of the riot... unit management was the first thing you wanted to mention. What were the other things?

**White:** The prototypical institution design-build... the way they financed them, the way they had them built, and the way they designed the ... how that all happened a lot faster than the traditional process would have. That gave us physical plants that we just didn't have that we needed very badly. Then the response to emergencies... the training... the dedicated staff... the integration much closer with the community resources... and then really training our own staff so that we didn't have to rely on state police if we had an emergency... for hostage negotiations and rescue and CERT and the training levels and equipment levels, just a big step beyond wherever we were before.

**McNaughton:** Talk about some of the other changes such as interior fencing, tool control...

**White:** A lot of security barriers to institutions could be sectioned off were put in place. Tool control... although we were following ACA guidelines for tool control, we just were able to improve on that... shadow boarding... and taking it from the maintenance department where it always seemed to be down to a housing unit itself... mops and buckets and those kinds of things. Making sure they were all accountable... that you didn't have a surplus of those and that kind of stuff.

**McNaughton:** Certain tools actually had to be outside the perimeter from that point on. When people talk about tools, inside Camp Hill at the time, they're talking about acetanyl torches and chainsaws and sledge hammers.

**White:** yes, they changed out tools were classified, and so some "red tag tools" or whatever you want to call them were then ... had to be secured outside the perimeter. It just was a much more organized system.

One of the other things that happened in more recent years was all of the cameras... all of the video cameras and the ability to see who's at a gate to remotely control that gate and those kinds of things. It really improved security also.

**McNaughton:** Do you think, because Secretary Beard and I were talking about cameras and how they were just put up everywhere, how are cameras a deterrent to inmates acting out? Do you think they know, "Hey, there's a camera here so I better not do this... in some cases?"

**White:** In a lot of cases. Yeah, they do. They are aware of them, because they have to come up to the same doors also. They know there are a lot of eyes on them that wouldn't have been there before. And they've also... many of them, word gets around quickly – so and so did this in the visiting room and they caught it on camera and he's in the hole. if

**McNaughton:** Right, or we'll use the footage from the video camera, it's a criminal activity, and we'll send that to the prosecutors and they can use that against them.

**White:** Yes. Sometimes they are probably more aware of it than the staff is. We get used to them. The inmates study their surroundings probably more than we ever give them credit for. Yeah, they know the cameras are there and that they are an important part of the security of the institution.

**McNaughton:** Another thing, back to the riot, was, after the first night, Superintendent Freeman went out to assure the media that everything was settled down. Was there supposed to be... the next day... was he supposed to meet with inmates, do you recall? Did that happen, and was there something that Freeman said the afternoon of the 26<sup>th</sup> that made them mad and that started the whole thing again? Do you recall?

**White:** The way I recall is that there were a lot of delays and demands on time that he hadn't expected and because of that, that did alter what he had intended to do. I've heard that, but I'm not sure... I can't verify that.

**McNaughton:** OK, and I know from a media relations standpoint, when we're in the middle of something, we're always very cognizant of the information that we provide, knowing that the inmates in an institution... even though the institution might be under severe rioting... they [the inmates] still have access to TVs and radios, and they can hear what is going on. I believe during a couple of the media broadcasts that they were showing... on the news... diagrams of the institution and even maybe pinpointing how they heard that the state police were coming into the institution. Can you talk a little bit about that... why it's important that you can't always reveal your information?

**White:** Yeah. That was one of the things that I don't know that we were prepared for the CNN-type of coverage that this brought... the satellites and all that kind of stuff... and the media reports a lot of stuff. Not all of it is factual. They had... one time... there was a person that was tired, and there was a cot there by an ambulance and they just laid down in it to rest. The news media right away said, "Oh, here's a body. It's covered over. Somebody died in there." But the guy was just taking a break.

**McNaughton:** Right. I did hear somebody else mention that. So, nobody died?

**White:** To my knowledge no. I understand one inmate was shot, but my information was that it wasn't a fatality. Rumors tell you there was a body count, but I never heard anyone actually died from Camp Hill.

**McNaughton:** I'm going to jump back to the different changes that have been made since the riot. Do you have any information on personal alarms? Afterward did staff get better radios and better ways to communicate, but also, did they get better ways to inform staff that they are in trouble?

**White:** Yes. The personal body alarms grew from that. That was technology that we had already been looking at, and frankly it just didn't work really too well. Now it's state-of-the-art stuff ... it's really what you expect. The price has come down a lot, number one. Number two, the way its transmitted... you don't have dead spots that you did before. Even the telephone systems, as to how they are able to report problems... all of that has taken a giant leap forward.

**McNaughton:** What was Camp Hill like with its keys... officer keys... at the time of the riot and then how was that improved.

**White:** I don't know a tremendous amount about it. There were lots of big heavy keys that you had to carry around and keys to areas that you would not want inmates to get to... you had the keys for.

**McNaughton:** And if they got your keys they could get into the same areas throughout the institution.

**White:** Yes.

**McNaughton:** That's how they were able to get into the cell blocks and let out the inmates.

**White:** Yes. Zone keys... they zoned the institution and only use keys for the area that you're in. When you look at it, it was almost common sense, but we couldn't see that beforehand for some reason. We did do it as we brought on new spaces, but we sure didn't do it at Camp Hill. Camp Hill wasn't alone. All of the old institutions sort of had issues too,

**McNaughton:** Knowing that then, as a result of the riot and immediately thereafter, was there notification from central office to – especially those older facilities – directing them to change their keys?

**White:** Yes. Especially the master keys ... everything got to be restricted very quickly. A lot of times too staff would draw keys for areas they just didn't need – like a maintenance person – they'd draw keys in the morning that would get them just about anywhere in the institution. That ended up getting changed. So, there were a lot of key changes like that. A lot of really good, smart people worked on and made big improvements.

**McNaughton:** Tell me about how the stress of the situation impacted you. Now, I know your story continues into Waymart, but how on earth did you deal with the stress, and how did your

family deal with the stress. I mean, they dropped you off and went home. How did the stress impact you and your family?

**White:** I always knew that we were moving to Waymart and so that was sort of... we were looking forward to that, and probably we were looking at waiting until the first of the year to get moved. Well, everything got compressed. They were up by Thanksgiving, which was three weeks after the riot or so. But the stress... I think what happens is you... when we went to Waymart, we had missions that we had to get accomplished. A lot of them had to do with sorting out personnel and figuring out everything... how we were going to interact with the inmates and keep them separate from the Farview patients and then start absorbing functions that Farview did that we were going to do. The whole transition, it all got compressed. I didn't have much chance to think about it and think about what we were going through, going forward for a couple of months.

**McNaughton:** It sounds like you were running on adrenalin.

**White:** Right. Exactly right. I'd been up since 6 o'clock that morning of the second day. 6 o'clock the next morning – 24 hours later – we were told to go to Waymart, and Chuck and I drove to Waymart, we started getting staff in and it was clear we weren't going to get inmates that night. So, I was up already over 36 hours, and then into the next day getting ready for these inmates. Chuck and I looked at each other and said, "One of us better go get some sleep so that once the inmates get here somebody's able to be fresh enough to run this institution." Chuck said, "Ok, go get some sleep." I went and found a bed in a deserted area in Farview and slept there that night.

**McNaughton:** Oh my. Tell me about debriefing and what it was like then? Were you ever debriefed and what it's like in more current times?

**White:** I was never debriefed. I very much would have been better off if I talked to John Ream or Dr. Belford [DOC psychology staff] or somebody for a while I think, but I never really was debriefed. Then things, as time went on, you're trying to focus on what you're doing at Waymart but then also what's happening at Camp Hill... staff getting replaced and all... it just continues to keep a mind at what's really going on and how... frankly we weren't sure we were done having riots. That was maybe was the biggest fear.

**McNaughton:** Why do you say that?

**White:** We weren't sure if that was the last one.

**McNaughton:** Because the possibility that these things are contagious and based upon the fact that you knew that Rockview and Huntingdon had some issues as well? Is that why you thought that?

**White:** Yeah, and Dallas is a big institution and it had... and then what do you do with the 2,500 inmates. Even where we were at Waymart, we got a couple hundred inmates and were trying to determine whether or not they were part of the problem at Camp Hill.

**McNaughton:** Because accountability of the inmates was different then, right? Nobody was really sure who was who at some point.

**White:** Oh, yeah. We got records for these guys and they were still smoking, and we were trying to figure out ... make sure this guy is really who he is and is his time correct. How are we going to do this and just make sure we knew who was who and do we have the records for them all? Physical plant wise we had one area that was secured – a pretty good cell block area – and about three other rooms that we could lock people up. Other than that, we were out of luck. Those inmates did not get to the gym or to the yard until March [1990].

**McNaughton:** Which inmates, where?

**White:** The ones that we got at Waymart from Camp Hill. They did not get out to the dining hall and back and a little bit of recreation, but they really didn't get outside until March. And the only reason they got out then was ... we had a... one of our perimeter patrol guys ran over a propane tank exhaust valve and we had to evacuate because of an emergency.

**McNaughton:** Wow. I have a couple of questions based on what you just said. The first one was about the records at Camp Hill... you said it was smoking? Literally?

**White:** Well, you could see where they had been burned and they had that smell of burnt paper.

**McNaughton:** And another one of the major changes was moving records offices at facilities outside of the perimeter because apparently that would help you keep better account of your inmates if they are burning the inside of the facility.

**White:** Yes.

**McNaughton:** Another question I had was from a systemic standpoint, when the riot was happening did Central Office send out notification to and direction to the other institutions telling them to lock down? Did we have a lockdown, or was it just kind of “watch your inmates’ type of thing?”

**White:** The way I recall, it was more of just “watch your inmates” especially at first... the first day sort of took everybody by surprise. The second day, I don't even know that there was direction more than just “watch your inmates and keep us informed.” We did start asking for a report every day as to what's going on with your institution.

**McNaughton:** Didn't the other institutions... state prisons at the time also send staff to Camp Hill.

**White:** Yes, first their emergency teams came down from most places, and then we sort of rotated some other staff around. I think this went on for a solid week.

**McNaughton:** So, the whole system was definitely feeling it and was definitely impacted because if they were sending their CERT teams down, they weren't necessarily at full staff either.

**White:** And then... at Waymart, we got staff from basically Dallas and Retreat mostly. So, yeah, there's no doubt about it... the whole department .... And frankly the whole state police were heavily impacted by Camp Hill.

**McNaughton:** And in the end, almost the entire prison was destroyed.

**White:** Yeah. The rebuild was pretty amazing to watch. I wasn't involved with it, but they did a lot of modular construction and there were very few housing units that were useable. The main dining room I believe was in pretty good shape, but the modular units were just a mess. A lot of the maintenance shops were a mess. Number one you have to get DGS involved and get a lot of planning done. The initial cost was about a \$50 million bill. I don't know what it ended up being totally, but it was a big dollar amount.

**McNaughton:** That prison now is nothing at all like what it was like back then.

**White:** It sure isn't. It's a modern facility now.

**McNaughton:** Back to how it affected you... Did you ever have... I know you were busy and didn't have much sleep, but when you did sleep, did you have nightmares?

**White:** Not really. Not at the time. Every now and then I'll get a flashback of standing out on the walkway and looking in at it burning, and one of the HR people from Central Office told me, "I haven't seen anything like this since Viet Nam." And the other thing that haunts me a little bit is when I was running up the road, hearing the cries.

**McNaughton:** Hearing the cries of who?

**White:** Superintendent freeman's family.

**McNaughton:** Oh, because his house was situated right there?

**White:** Right there, yeah.

**McNaughton:** What advice would you give to current-day corrections staff in the event that they are involved in some sort of incident, whether it be an isolated incident... I know they hate that term, but a contained incident to a full on, all-out riot? What advice would you give to employees?

**White:** The first thing is... know your training, take it seriously and follow your plan. They've been well thought out. They've had the test of time now. Follow that plan. So, if doors close when they're supposed to... you get to the area you're supposed to. [We began to have a bad connection again.]

**McNaughton:** Follow policy, know your evacuation routes. If you can get out, get out.

**White:** Yes.

**McNaughton:** What happens if you can't get out?

**White:** Know where you are supposed to shelter. Make sure they know who you are and where you're at. Those kind of things... when you get a chance to get out, take it.

**McNaughton:** Also, everything, right? Because when they get you out, and when you get out, DOC/PSP they're going to be coming at you wanting as much information from you as possible to help resolve the situation. Correct?

**White:** Yes. Resolve the situation and then respond to everything that happens thereafter.

**McNaughton:** And then they will get you to your medical treatment, unless it's really life-threatening... they'll probably take care of that first, obviously. Wow. What a situation. Since the riot, and while you were still with the DOC, have you experienced anything --- certainly not at the same level, but any other major situations that you were able to better handle because of the riots?

**White:** The rest of my career with the department... yeah, that was good training to go to Pittsburgh, that's for sure. There were lots of emergencies there that we were able to handle and handle better because of... not just my experience at Camp Hill, but the others... other staff also. And Greene... when you walked around SCI Greene, you absolutely felt secure. Here's a new facility. It's built the way a maximum, L4 institution should be. It just had the physical plant to handle issues much more so than any other place I worked.

**McNaughton:** I think that was probably the problem with Camp Hill... it was built in the 1940s for really juvenile offenders.

**White:** Yeah.

**McNaughton:** And the construction was different. The lines of sight were different. Obviously, those things improved over the decades as well. The inmates in Camp Hill, like you said, the locking mechanism just was flawed and they knew how to get out. But also, the cinder blocks that were used, they were...

**White:** Yeah, they busted right from one cell to another and ... yeah...

**McNaughton:** ... and just kept going until they were able to free themselves.

**White:** Yeah.

**McNaughton:** We definitely learned a lot. I did watch the new housing units be built at Camp Hill and they are very impressive individual modular cells that are pure concrete and are not cinder blocks anymore. Definitely very different and much improved.

I think we'll wrap this up... When you think about the riot, are there any special stories or recollections... beside everything that you just talked about that you remember most? Any odd stories or interesting things that happened that you think, "wow."

**White:** I guess I go back to that first night and we're inside there walking around and just turning that one corner and walking up that one main roadway, and it's just lined with DOC and

state police and fire... it was surreal. At that point... all these people responding to this emergency [you knew] it's going to be ok.

END