

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Employee Oral History Collection Project

Interviewee: Tabb Bickell
Topic: **The 1989 SCI Camp Hill Riots**
Interview Date: August 13, 2019
Interviewer: DOC Communications Director Susan McNaughton

Interview Transcript



McNaughton: Welcome to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' Oral History Project where we work to 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 13, 2019, is Tabb Bickell, who presently serves as the DOC's executive deputy secretary for institutional operations. Thank you for joining us, Tabb.

Bickell: You're welcome.

McNaughton: Before we begin, could you please provide us with a brief overview of your DOC career – at which facilities did you work and what titles have you held.

Bickell: Yes, I started out in Camp Hill in 1987. I went from correctional officer 1, sergeant and lieutenant at Camp Hill. In 1993, I transferred to the Academy as a lieutenant where I oversaw the CERT operation of the DOC. It was a little bit different back in those days. It wasn't as, uh, technology as we are now, which is good. It evolved very much. From there I got promoted to captain at SCI Coal Township, and that was 1996; and then I went to SCI Mahanoy where I was promoted to major and deputy superintendent for facilities management. Then in 2011, I went to SCI Huntingdon as the 19th superintendent in the oldest operating facility we have at that time. I came up here to central office as a regional deputy secretary in June 2014, and from there then, with this parole merger, I got fortunate and got – well in all of my positions I was fortunate – but I got promoted to this – was originally the chief deputy secretary and then it was ultimately made into the executive deputy secretary for institutional operations.

McNaughton: Great. Great career. Alright, so, to the Camp Hill riot. You said you started in 1987.

Bickell: Yes.

McNaughton: how old were you in 1989 when the riot happened?

Bickell: I was in my 20's (laughter).

McNaughton: Were you married?

Bickell: Yes.

McNaughton: Talk to us about how it started, where you were and your experiences.

Bickell: I remember it, as weird as that might seem or whatever, I remember it very vividly. I remember everything leading up to it. I was a young corrections officer. I remember there was a lot of incidents going on. And when I say incidents, I mean just a lot of inmates not moving off of the fields. Things of that nature, and there wasn't really a whole bunch being done about it, that I recall, you know, as a young CO1.

And it happened on a Wednesday, and I remember because I was off Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. What I remember about that is that I took Saturday off and I went up to a high school football game up in upstate New York. My Uncle Don's son, Craig, was playing football and my son was like one or two at that time – maybe a little older than... three. And I took him up to this football game, just me and him. So, we drove up to Port Jervis, New York, and then drove up to the football game and it was a beautiful Saturday, warm afternoon. And it was the time I remember, him and I stopped at McDonald's and I just remember that day so vividly – spending that time with my son.

So, when I came back – Sunday, Monday, Tuesday – it was Wednesday. Came back to work, and I'd say it was around – I was on F Block. F Block was one of the more – at that time Camp Hill F and J Block [Bickell's cell phone made a noise here] was where we kind of put our problematic inmates, as they say today – our level 4 inmates today, as we recognize them today. Those two blocks never went to chow together. One went first, one went last. They never were in the same yard together. We just kept those inmates segregated. So, I was running F Block.

It was probably about 10 to 3, 3 o'clock, and I heard the commotion. I was actually upstairs running the switch blocks. When you came back in those days – your first day back there was no sergeants that were assigned to the blocks at that time. There was a sergeant who oversaw everything, ok, like a line sergeant. So that wasn't available like they have now, where sergeants are assigned to blocks. It wasn't like that back then. So, it was probably about 10 of 3, as I was saying, and I remember I heard all of this loud noise and I could look out F Block and I could see that – in the main yard area – remember there was E, F, and G and H, J, K in the blocks – and I could see ... and then I saw an officer getting attacked by a bunch of inmates, and then the next thing you know it was just really chaotic like really quick.

So, what I remember about it at that point was – you realized what was happening very quickly. I don't know if you realized the magnitude of it, but you knew something wasn't right. Very quickly.

At that point I remember that the inmates -- and this is some of the good things that has happened since then – one key got you everywhere. One door key got you everywhere. So that once those inmates got the keys, they were coming through our side door – what we called the dayroom – they were coming from E Block, and I realized that we were in trouble. Remember,

this is probably five, six minutes into this incident. So, it was really – I could look out and see it was getting heavy.

The inmates actually came in. What I actually did, was, I jumped off the tier down onto the first tier, and the officer I was with... we got ourselves into the switchbox before we could get caught.

McNaughton: OK, can you explain to people what the switchbox is.

Bickell: Yes. The switchbox was a lower area where you actually ran the – it was like a control center almost – they were levers at that point, there were not push buttons like you have now. Everything was levers and cables, and that's how you would open a door – you would pull a lever down and it would open the doors. The doors were numbered and that's what we did.



This picture shows the control area above the cell doors. The switchbox, not shown, is what controlled these levers to open or close cell doors.

So, we locked ourselves into the switchbox area, and the one thing I remember – there was a sergeant who told me – I don't know why he ever told me this – but he probably told a group of us – that if you take your door key into the switchbox and you turn it half way, if anybody else has a key, they can't get in. So, I remembered that ... that this sergeant told me that ... and it worked. They could not get into our switchbox. Remember this was evolving now – now we are maybe a half our into this. OK? It's bad.

Radios back in them days were what they were. They didn't work – not like we have today. That's what I'm saying... this is where we evolved to --- so much better. So, I remember we were making phone calls into the control center telling them, you know, "We're under ... we're getting ready to be taken here," and there really wasn't much they could do ... control, so we just stopped making the phone calls.

McNaughton: I read some radio transmissions. Was that you on the radio asking control for help?

Bickell: Yes. I was probably on the radio a few times asking control for help. Asking anybody for help.

McNaughton: And there was a lot of swearing in the background. I guess these were the inmates threatening to come in and get you?

Bickell: Yeah, that was happening as we were doing that. Yes, there was a lot of conversations. It was a very hot day, by the way. It was almost like that Sunday, and the reason I brought that up about my son is that, as I get into this further, he's who I thought about when all this stuff was going down. He's actually what I thought about to put my head where it needed to be.

So, as this evolved, it was a warm day. The fans were still on the blocks. Remember there was no air conditioning in Camp Hill at that time. They were trying to break into the switchbox, and they couldn't get in. What they did then... oh, and then they actually broke our window a little bit and they were throwing fire bombs – again this is evolving. Where they were getting all of this stuff... later I find out, you know, there was everything back then... everything in the jail – people were bringing in their motorcycles there, and if you look at the tapes you can see a guy out there on a 4x4 just running around, you know, on somebody's personal... that stuff's all done now for obvious reasons.



They were trying to shoot fireballs into our switchbox. So, myself and the officer, we flooded the floor to try to help with that. Well, what they tried to do then was, they tried to cut [Bickell laughs], they tried to cut the fan, the wires what were on the fan to the cord, to try to electrocute us. Anyway, that's what I was thinking. I'm pretty sure that's what they were trying to do. Quite naturally it never worked.



Eventually, we knew this wasn't going to get good. They started breaking – they actually got hammers and whatever they had – sledgehammers – and they were actually breaking into the switchbox as this occurred. OK? Breaking into it, and then what happened was, after they broke into the first one, there was this beam – like this metal beam and I thought to myself, I told my partner, “They're not going to be able to get in here.” Because when they built this they put these beams so that if they would do something like this. But,

no, that wasn't the case. Eventually they just went a little bit higher. Eventually they actually broke in – put a hole into the wall and came to the switchbox, and that's when they got myself and my officer and actually took us hostage.

McNaughton: These were concrete like cinder-block types of walls with grouting in between, and that's how they were able to...

Bickell: Yes, Yes, they were. Very thin, Very thin blocks. It wasn't very sturdy and was very easy for them to get through once they realized there weren't any beams anywhere. So, it didn't take them long to penetrate into the switchbox area. But the key thing that the sergeant told me worked to the very end. They could never get in the front door.

McNaughton: But they did get in?

Bickell: Yes. They broke in that way, and then they took us out through the -- they opened up the thing and then they took us out.

McNaughton: And then what?

Bickell: At that point, there was a lot of threatening going on. A lot of punches. They handcuffed us. My partner had thick glasses – I remember they took his glasses and they crunched them, they just stepped on them, so he couldn't really see anything. But they wound up separating us. I was handcuffed – I was kind of like hog tied. I got handcuffed pretty much. Originally, I was handcuffed with my hands and my legs together almost – you know – not a good position to be in. So, they did that and there was a lot of threats being made.

McNaughton: Did they blindfold you?

Bickell: Yes. They covered me up then, and then a couple inmates that were on the block with us... they came up and asked if we were ok and I told them the handcuffs were tight. So, they got me from that real vulnerable position and then just put me in the regular handcuffs. Then they loosened them up. And then they just started walking us around. Again, I eventually met up with other hostages – I can't remember who they were – I remember, but I can't, if that makes sense.

McNaughton: Did they walk you through that common yard?

Bickell: Yes. Yes. I think if you look at the tapes you might see some things. I had hair back then.

McNaughton: But your head was covered so we wouldn't have been able to see you.

Bickell: Yes.

McNaughton: And that night went on until about 11:30. How did that end for you that night?

Bickell: Eventually – I'm not sure what happened – but they – again we were being led around in inmate clothes and the whole nine yards – and back into officer clothes. It was kind of very weird... just very weird as you go through this process. You weren't real sure what was going to happen to you. Again, there was a lot of threats. Physical, sexual -- that people were saying to you. What was going to happen, and that's when, I told you, I started thinking about my son. Because there were times that they just – remember this was a period of time where they just left you sit there. Then I was around some other hostages. You really couldn't see. You really

weren't saying a whole bunch, you know, you're just hoping that ... somebody would come get your ass and you'd be alright at the end of this.

Again, our CERT back in those days was nothing compared to what they are now. There were a bunch of brave guys and women who put on a helmet and had a baton and some sort of body armor and they were willing to go in to fight. Not as advanced as CERT is now. That was another good thing that came out of the riot. They were brave. Eventually how it ended for me on the first night was, ah, they came and got me.

McNaughton: Who's "they."

Bickell: The inmates – the leaders of the inmates. The leader of the inmate came and got me, and what I truly remember about it was they surrounded us. I remember when I was being walked out, I felt like the heavyweight champ of the world if you can picture like being led into the ring where the crowd is just around you and your entourage busts you through the group of inmates. They took me down to what they called E Gate, and at that point there was almost like a struggle. Like the officers – there were a couple of lieutenants there and they grabbed me, and then the inmates weren't sure they were going to let me go, so it was like a little tug of war.

McNaughton: Could you see at this point?

Bickell: Yes. I could see what was going on. I could see. I still had handcuffs on, and eventually I got pulled over to the, ah, onto the correctional officer side.

McNaughton: And then from there... medical triage or what?

Bickell: Yeah. Yeah, again. I don't want to put anyone down, but it was totally different back then than it is now. I did get interviewed, but it was nothing like you would now. Nobody really asked a lot of questions. I did get some medical... looked at.

McNaughton: Because there was a lot of first responders outside the main gate, which is where kind of triage took place...

Bickell: Correct.

McNaughton: ... so, did you get into an ambulance and they took you to a hospital?

Bickell: Yes. I think I eventually did somehow get into an ambulance. Yes, and I eventually went to a hospital and then I eventually came back to the institution. That's what I remember.

McNaughton: You came back to the institution when?

Bickell: That night.

McNaughton: That night?

Bickell: Yes. And that's when some people wanted to interview me.



McNaughton: Some people meaning PSP or who?

Bickell: No. I don't think I really talked to the PSP initially that night.

McNaughton: So, corrections people?

Bickell: Corrections people. Yes.

McNaughton: Then, how long did you work once you came back? When did you go home again?

Bickell: Well, believe it or not – again, I was in my 20s – I actually went home that night, and I was shook up like anybody would be. My ribs hurt. My nose hurt. My eyes were black and blue. I remember, I actually went back to the hospital that morning. I worried about my ribs, and they said, “Ah, we don't think they're broke but stay off work.”

Well, again, being young, I went back to work the very next night on October 26 on the 2 to 10 shift. And as people realize, when we got in there, you could see --- like I went right back to F Block, and again, today, that would never happen. Today they would never allow Tabb Bickell to get back into an institution after something like ... they just won't let you in there, OK? But they did, and I went back to F Block, and when you got up there you could just tell “we got problems.”

I could see inmates down the tier – you gotta remember, this place was destroyed – it was destroyed. You could just see inmates running back and forth from the tiers. Like coming out of their cells because they ripped ... again it was all a cable system and they could reach up ... they ripped all of the metal boxes off and they could legitimately reach out of a cell and click their cell door open. They could legitimately do that. That's why we were trying to get the chains in there, but I guess there wasn't enough changes. Again, so much better now. It would never happen that way now.

McNaughton: Right.

Bickell: So, you knew there were issues going on, and ah...

McNaughton: That must have been eerie, just seeing these inmates running back and forth...

Bickell: It's almost like a movie to me... that I watched this. The hours just went by and I will jump ahead. I just remember, like, uh, the captain yelled, “Abandon the post, everybody get out! We're losing the jail.” I remember that radio call coming over.

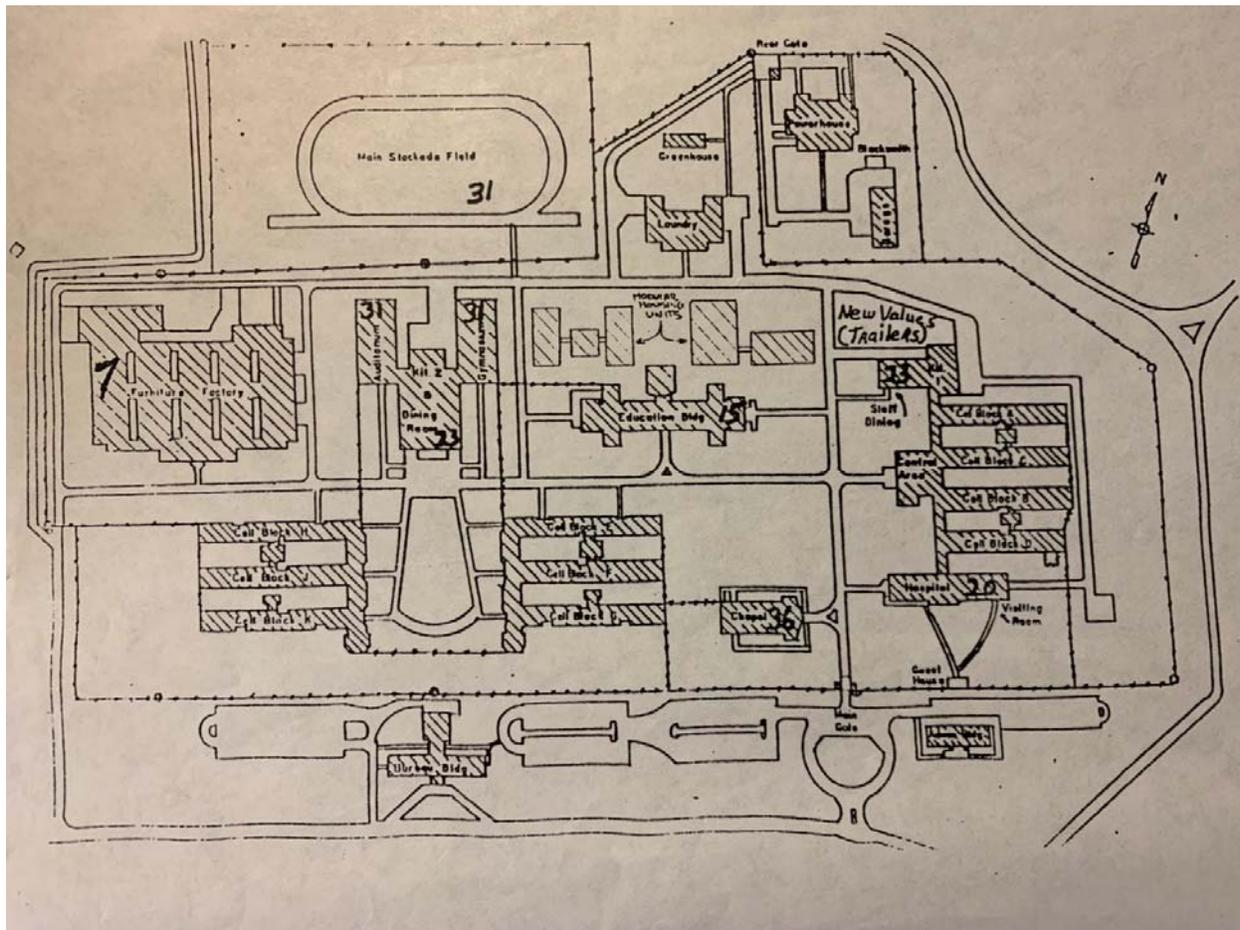
So, we all ran out of our blocks, or anyway I did, and everybody else did, except for a couple of people that got caught that second night up there. I went down to E Gate, and we actually ran across the whole compound – and remember Camp Hill was so dingily lit back in them days – again it would never be like that now – and we went into what at that point used to be the captain's office, the records office, the control center was all right there, and then we locked ourselves into that control center. This is the old control center back in Camp Hill. There was a bunch of us in there and we kind of got trapped.

By the way, when we started running – when we were told to abandon posts the inmates were breaking out. I could hear the cracking. I wasn't sure what was happening. But they were breaking out of their cells, and it just happened so fast. And they were actually chasing us pretty

much across the compound until we got into this control center. That walkway past the education building and...

McNaughton: So, they were through that gate?

Bickell: Yes, E Gate, oh, yeah, they got right through there and they were chasing us down into here right into the control center. Now Group 1, this is Group 1 at that point, probably still is Group 1, they never really ... I don't think a whole bunch of them ever got out. OK?



This is the diagram (map) of SCI Camp Hill as the facility was in 1989.

McNaughton: We're looking at the map right now of the institution as it was in 1989. So, ok, second night and there are several of you now are...

Bickell: ... a bunch of us. They actually had video of this too.

McNaughton: ... locked in there, including the prison spokesperson in there.

Bickell: There were so many people in there, I never... I remember there was a state policeman in there. There was actually somebody who was videotaping this, because I remember, I remember, after everything settled – and I'll tell you what happened to us that night – but after everything settled and they were looking at the tapes, I remember the lawyers telling me, "You're probably going to get sued." Because I was using mace to try to get them away. I was actually seen on tape going up and pushing...

McNaughton: And they said, “You’re probably going to get sued?”

Bickell: I think they were having a joke with me, you know how it works, you know what I mean. It was still weird to heard.



But anyway, long story short, again they were trying to fire bomb us. They were really truly trying to fire bomb us in there, and it was really getting smoky. And I just remember when I was up front and I turned around and there was really nobody there. I don’t know where everybody went, and it was real smoky. So, I went into where the old records area used to be – which is now I believe the deputies area – but I went back into there and I could just see everything blazing. It was just completely on fire.

So, when I came out, I couldn’t find anybody, and I ran into an old correctional officer -- older correctional officer -- at that time and him and I we found each other and we couldn’t find everybody else. So, what we eventually made our way into was into the staff bathroom, which by the way, was never unlocked. You had to get a key to it. I just said, “Please be unlocked.”

McNaughton: Wow.

Bickell: So, this staff bathroom was legitimately unlocked, and myself and this officer went into this bathroom and we just sat in there, and we were both like, “Man don’t get us.” You know. We were like, “Don’t let this happen again.”



So, you could hear, I mean legitimately – I could hear shotgun blasts. I could hear what I thought were shotgun blasts. I could hear like right next to us outside of this bathroom used to be the old security office. So, what they did – what the inmates did – they got over there quicker – they pushed the air conditioner in, because they wanted to get into the security office, they were probably looking for the drugs and stuff that were in the security office. What I assume.

So, we’re just sitting there hoping and praying that these inmates don’t come into this bathroom and find us. Which they never did. We waited for a period of time. You could kind of hear that the police and the correctional officers were now out there in the ... anyway what I thought was.

So, I told the partner I was with, I said, “Look I’m getting out of here. I’m gonna make a run for it.” He didn’t want to go, but I said, “I gotta get out of here.” OK, I knew where I was at, I knew the area. So, I

came out through the security office and, of course, this time I took my shirts and stuff off so, in my mind and I really mean this, I was thinking if an inmate saw me I could make a dash to the front gate and try to have them catch me. Ok, I was young then. I could go.

So, when I got out there, I actually ran into state police and correctional officers who identified me, because they were pointing weapons – they weren't sure who was who. I mean it was chaotic.

McNaughton: Right.

Bickell: So they identified me. They identified who I was. So, I told them I said, “The other officer is still in there.” We were yelling for him, but he wouldn't come out, I think he thought we were setting him up or that somebody..., so we actually crawled back in there and got him. And then we got out, and that's what happened to me on the second night. Probably more terrifying than the first night.

McNaughton: Really?

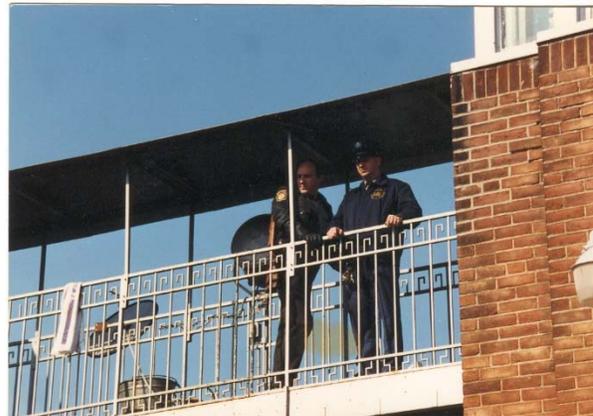
Bickell: Yeah, because you say to yourself, “What am I doing back in this institution? Why am I back in here? Why am I caught in this closet? Why am I doing this,” but ... yep...

McNaughton: So, then, when did you go back to work after that?

Bickell: The next day. The very next day. I was there when they were pulling them off the Group 1 fields and they were opening up, I believe it was Waymart, or was it Retreat?

McNaughton: Waymart. They opened Waymart early.

Bickell: I remember them coming off of the bus, and I remember I was out there and I was just looking around and I remember a lieutenant spotted me and he was the first guy who realized that some of these guys don't belong here. So, he pulled me out and put me at the front gate and gave direct orders that these guys... “I don't want them inside this institution until we get some clearances on everybody, what's going on.” And then it just went from there. I just kept coming back to work.



Eventually I did take some time off. I was kind of like directed to. It really came down, because I was there for a while, but the hearings started kind of fast. And that's when it really hit me. The worst was when I had to go testify.

McNaughton: OK

Bickell: Because then all of that stuff kept coming up and I seen a lot. I seen a lot, you know, being held like that the first night. Second night. So, I seen an awful lot.

McNaughton: Right.

Bickell: And I knew who the players were.

McNaughton: OK

Bickell: Anyway, those who were talking to me, I knew who they were.

McNaughton: Right. So, one of my questions is how do you get through the trauma of what you experienced? [There are fire engines driving past our building during the recording.]

Bickell: I don't know. I don't know how I did it. I got lucky. I mean, I think there was a time in my life... actually that Friday night I went to a high school football game. Lebanon was playing Wilson and that's when Kerry Collins left Lebanon to play for Wilson. We should have had him. Lebanon could have won the championship that night. I remember going to that game, but I remember the roar of the crowd truly upset me that night. I didn't show it, but I felt it. Because it was like I heard the roar of those inmates, so that that affected me.

McNaughton: So, that was another question I was going to ask you. Did you have nightmares or any kind of physical or emotional reactions. So, there, the roar of the crowd at the football game was one, but how about nightmares?

Bickell: No. I never had any nightmares. I never had... I mean I think I got angry. But I never, uh, I don't know why, I just never had anything that affected me that way.

McNaughton: And how did your family react to your involvement?

Bickell: Oh, I think they... I never really talked about it that much. I mean, my son was too little, and I just didn't really talk about it. So, I never really discussed it.

McNaughton: Were you ever debriefed? I remember at Central Office like Dr. Lance and John Ream were having debriefings in the basement.

Bickell: Yes, Yes, Yes. Somebody debriefed me, and I don't remember. I don't. I just remember I talked to somebody.

McNaughton: So, let's change gears a little bit and talk about how you've seen changes be implemented over the years as a result of the riot.

Bickell: Ah.

McNaughton: What can you mention?

Bickell: Everything. Staffing. Gear. I mean, the OC that we carry. The radios. The good radios we have. The PAR alarms, and what I mean by that is where the alarms that go off to announce the wave system and every institution has one now. So, if something happens and you hit that, they're going to know where you're at. Everybody carries a radio now, and a good radio for the most part. It's not like it was back then... with mics. The lighting in the institutions are better, the staffing is... is phenomenal compared back to then. We got unit managers now. Back in them days I didn't even know what a counselor was. You didn't see a counselor. They weren't on the cellblocks like they are now. You didn't have that interaction like you do now.

McNaughton: How about keys?

Bickell: Yes, you know everything got rekeyed.

McNaughton: So, again, I just want to make this clear – so every staff member/officer had one key and could get everywhere in the institution?

Bickell: Well, no, not everywhere. But door keys. If you were the main block officer you had a door key. If you had E Block's door key, you have F ... all the other blocks' door keys.

McNaughton: Ok.

Bickell: That's how it was back then. It was just one little key that you would utilize. Yes. There was no... even the dayroom keys were one key throughout the whole Group 2 and 3 side. So, yes everything got refigured that way. Departmentalized. Compartmentalized, however you want to say it.

McNaughton: Interior fences?

Bickell: Yes. Definitely interior fencing. There's just so much. Training is so much better.

McNaughton: Of the specialty teams?

Bickell: Yes. Specialty teams, and again the men and women who served on the specialty teams back then were brave and gave everything they had, but there just wasn't much force. You legitimately wore an old helmet, and they were brave to do it... put on some turtle suit that didn't do shit and gave you a baton and you went in there. That's how those people did it.

McNaughton: I do remember seeing several guys – I'm presuming they were guys – in black outfits carrying a gurney between the two fences of the perimeter to pick up a hostage.

Bickell: Yeah. That might have been right in front of the highway tower...

McNaughton: Where the tool shed... right behind Central Office.

Bickell: Yes. I actually remember who that officer was, and they actually let him out because he had diabetic problems, and actually I was, I believe I was on G Block and I actually saw a little bit of that happen. I believe he might have been part of my group and they pulled him out, because the inmates didn't want him to die, quite naturally. Those inmates didn't.

McNaughton: Changes to tools...

Bickell: Awe yeah, even when I talked about where they got this fuel to start these fires, they wouldn't have that anymore. They would allow you to bring in power... we actually had chainsaws in there.

McNaughton: Acetylene torches.

Bickell: Yes. Getting repaired, it was just...

McNaughton: And there were car like autobody shops too...

Bickell: Yes. Inside there, yes.

McNaughton: I do remember seeing a truck drive through an interior fence.

Bickell: Yes, it was just so different back then. All that stuff changed through the years. The training's better, staffing's better, equipment's better...

McNaughton: I talked to former Secretary Beard who said back then, like you said, the CERT team just wasn't very well trained and they weren't properly equipped.

Bickell: No.

McNaughton: He said helmets* were even hard to come by.

Bickell: Right. Correct.

McNaughton: Amazing. So that's totally changed. So, we have hostage rescue, hostage negotiation, CRST-Corrections Rifle Specialist Team...

Bickell: Right.

McNaughton: ...and CERT and they are all mandated to do training annually?

Bickell: Yes. They get a lot of hours. Which is well worth it. It's certainly sufficient, and the staff that do that ... I'm very grateful for them and I do believe this... I truly believe this... if I would have had those trained HRT guys and CERT guys, and the CRST guys up top, I really believe that – first of all I don't think we'd ever get to that level. I mean anything can happen in our business... we get that. I'm not naive enough to think that it can't happen here 'cause it can. I get it. That's what we deal with. But I think we have done so much in order for it to get to that that magnitude... I think it would be very hard to get there. I really believe that. As long as everybody's doing what they're supposed to be doing.

McNaughton: Right.

Bickell: And I really believe that if we do have a situation like that, our HRT, our CRST and our CERT and our HNT are highly trained skilled and dedicated people who would do what they needed to do to get these people out in those types of situations. I'm very confident that that would happen now.

McNaughton: Yep. Talk to me about trends or ways in which the DOC now watches to determine if something is "brewing," for the lack of a better word.

Bickell: Well, we definitely have... we got our intel units now. Which really help us.

McNaughton: Because there were signs leading up to the Camp Hill riots.

Bickell: Oh, sure. There was more than signs. There was big signs. There was movie theater signs telling you something was going to happen.

McNaughton: Like what?

Bickell: Just not coming off the yard.

McNaughton: Yeah.

Bickell: Not coming out of the chow hall. Things were just moving very, very slow...

McNaughton: Were they hoarding commissary, do you think?

Bickell: I don't think so. They didn't need to.

McNaughton: Ok, wow.

Bickell: These were a bunch of young dudes back then. No, I don't think they really needed to. I don't remember that. I just remember the disrespect and slow movement. People just coming off the field when they felt like it. Coming out of the chow hall when they felt like it.

McNaughton: Wow.

Bickell: Those are the things that I remembered. Now a days I believe that we would immediately be alerted to that and take the appropriate action to ensure it doesn't escalate into a bigger event.

McNaughton: But then you do have ways to track – things like if commissary sales just spike or grievances or misconducts.

Bickell: Absolutely. I agree with that. Weekly status reports – there's a lot of things that we're looking at. We run a leadership meeting every Tuesday morning with all of the superintendents and parole people; and we also run every six weeks now where we run a two-hour meeting to where we're all telling each other what we're doing and what we're doing good. We have so much intel – a weekly weapons find, a weekly drug find, what's happening throughout the entire commonwealth. There's a lot of information coming down that staff can take advantage of. You know, our security office has grown. Back then I believe it was a lieutenant. Now you have a captain, three lieutenants, you have an intel lieutenant. There's just a lot of stuff that we are doing. We have phone monitoring. I don't think we had it back then – I'm not saying we did or didn't... I don't remember it as we would now. We can really just pick things up. We have a lot of intel. I have to be careful here not to reveal too much.

McNaughton: Talk to me again about testifying against the inmates. How did that impact you in both preparing for it and then you know just the thought of having to relive all of that and recall everything that you went through again.

Bickell: Yeah, that was probably the hardest part for me. Just getting in front of... and then they consolidated them ... so you're up there and there are like six inmates that you're testifying in front of. Six different lawyers. It was quite the show and quite ... it definitely stressed me. It was one of the things that definitely stressed me and I remember it. Uh, yeah.

McNaughton: So how do you get through that stress again. You say you just don't know?

Bickell: I just dealt with it. You know I just dealt with it. Again, things were different back then. They didn't have the... I'm not even sure if they had the SEAP program back then. If they did I don't remember it. There wasn't really anything like that, in my opinion, like we would have now.

McNaughton: Right. OK. SEAP is the State Employee Assistance Program. So, there are several of these key inmates in the system...

Bickell: Uh huh.

McNaughton: ...and as your capacity as executive deputy secretary/EDS, do you ever run into them? Do they know who you are? How do you interact?

Bickell: Yes. I run into them. They know who I am, and I know who they are. And we interact well.

McNaughton: OK

Bickell: You know, again, were all in our 20s back then. Now we are all men, and I think things are looked at a little bit different.

McNaughton: Are they treated differently because of their involvement?

Bickell: I think, initially, they might have been. I think it's 30 years ago now and the department back then, I can't remember what it was... 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 what jails to compared to what we are now; from 10,000 inmates to whatever it is now 47,000. So, it's a whole different ball game now.

McNaughton: Have any of those inmates ever said, "Hey, man, I'm sorry."

Bickell: No. I never really got to that level with them. Most of them I see who were involved in the riots, only one or two that I remember were directly involved with me that are still in the system.

McNaughton: What should employees know about riot situations if one would happen today... what should they do?

Bickell: If you're taken hostage... I just thought positive things, like I said, about my son. I didn't really argue with them, with the inmates. Again, it was so chaotic. I mean I must have been around 100 inmates, different inmates that were leading me around. It wasn't just one inmate. And I'll say it just like this, you know, there were inmates who wanted to hurt me as much as there were inmates who wanted to help me – by loosening up those handcuffs, getting me out of that vulnerable position I was in. Stopping them from punching you with the cheap shots. You know, there were inmates that did that. So, you try to remember that too.

McNaughton: Is there any other kind of advice you'd like to share, or is there anything that we've missed that you'd like to touch on?

Bickell: No. I just think that things are so much better now. Again, I will never say that it can't happen, but I think with all of the things we have in place for something to get to that level, I would hope it never would. It was a terrible thing to go through. Here it is 30 years later, and we still talk about it. There's a lot of people who still like to talk about it or want to know about it. I used to go down to the Academy and talk to the hostage negotiation class. I stopped doing that because that wore me out. Then they had me in the basic training class a couple of times, and it just wears you out if you keep ... 'cause I like to move forward. I've been very... I've probably been one of the most lucky people in this department to get the positions I've been put in. I'm always grateful for that, and thankful, and I hope nobody ever gets in one of those positions. It's not a good feeling. It's horrible, you're very vulnerable and it's scary, and so I hope nobody ever has to go through that. Or even the assaults... that's one thing I can tell you, I take that very seriously. My philosophy in corrections is very simple and it has been and always will be: no inmate escapes, no staff assaults, physical plant. If you can do three things... and what I mean by physical plant, the PIDs, just the running of your institutions... if you can take care of all that, I think your jails will be somewhat fine. And it's a different inmate nowadays too. It's a much more complex inmate than it was back then. They were more simple then. Just like the world. The world's more complex now than it ever was, and the inmates and people are the same, just more complex in your dealings with them... more legally, more lawsuit savvy and things like that.

McNaughton: Ok

Bickell: That it?

McNaughton: That's it. Thank you for sharing your recollections with us.

Bickell: No problem.

END

**Correction. McNaughton meant to say vests instead of helmets.*