

THOMAS A. FULCOMER, SUPERINTENDENT
STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION AT HUNTINGDON

TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

REGARDING THE

OCTOBER 23, 1989 DISTURBANCE AT THE
STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION AT HUNTINGDON
HUNTINGDON, PA

BEFORE I PROCEED WITH THIS REPORT, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO COMMEND THE HUNTINGDON STAFF FOR THE EXCELLENT JOB THEY DID IN CONTROLLING AND RESOLVING THE DISTURBANCE. THEY WERE FACED WITH A DANGEROUS SITUATION, BUT ACTED COURAGEOUSLY IN DOING WHAT THEY HAD TO DO IN ORDER TO RETAKE THE CELL BLOCK. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK THE SMITHFIELD STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION, THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE, HUNTINGDON BOROUGH POLICE, AND THE HUNTINGDON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE. IN ADDITION, THE ASSISTANCE OF THE VARIOUS FIRE AND AMBULANCE SERVICES WAS INVALUABLE. IT WAS THROUGH THE COORDINATED EFFORTS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL STAFF AND THE COMMUNITY AGENCIES THAT THE SITUATION WAS RESOLVED SUCCESSFULLY. I AM PROUD OF THE HUNTINGDON STAFF AND THE WILLINGNESS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AGENCIES TO OFFER THEIR ASSISTANCE WITHOUT HESITATION.

ON OCTOBER 23RD, 1989, A DISTURBANCE OCCURRED AT THE STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION LOCATED AT HUNTINGDON. THE INCIDENT OCCURRED IN A-BLOCK, A GENERAL POPULATION HOUSING AREA, INSIDE THE INSTITUTION. BEFORE DISCUSSING THE DETAILS OF THE INCIDENT, I WOULD LIKE TO STATE THAT AT NO TIME WAS THE COMMUNITY IN DANGER. THE DISTURBANCE WAS CONFINED TO ONE CELL BLOCK AND THE PERIMETER OF THE INSTITUTION WAS SECURE.

ON OCTOBER 23, 1989, THE INSTITUTION WAS OPERATING UNDER EMERGENCY CONDITIONS AS A RESULT OF AN UNRELATED INCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON OCTOBER 20, 1989.

THE INMATES WERE BEING FED ONE CELL BLOCK AT A TIME. AT APPROXIMATELY 5:20 P.M., A-BLOCK INMATES WERE RELEASED FROM THEIR CELLS TO GO FOR SUPPER. AN INMATE STOPPED AT THE OFFICER'S DESK TO SIGN FOR HIS LEGAL MAIL. EARLIER, WHEN THE MAIL WAS BEING PASSED OUT ON A-BLOCK, THE INMATE HAD REFUSED TO SIGN FOR HIS LEGAL MAIL. THAT INMATE AND ANOTHER STOPPED AT THE OFFICER'S DESK. THE SERGEANT OBSERVED THE ONE INMATE LOITERING NEAR THE DESK. HE THEN ORDERED THE INMATE TO PROCEED TO THE DINING HALL. THE INMATE REFUSED TO OBEY THE ORDER AND THE SERGEANT THEN INSTRUCTED HIM TO GO TO THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTROL CENTER. THE INMATE STATED THAT HE WAS NOT GOING TO DO THAT, AND THREATENED THE OFFICER. THE SERGEANT ATTEMPTED TO DEFUSE THE SITUATION BY NOT ISSUING ANY FURTHER ORDERS, AND PERMITTED THOSE TWO INMATES TO GO TO THE DINING ROOM. THE SERGEANT THEN REPORTED THE INCIDENT TO THE CAPTAIN IN CHARGE. THE CAPTAIN INSTRUCTED THE OFFICER NOT TO CONFRONT THE INMATES WHEN THEY RETURNED FROM THE DINING HALL. IT WAS DECIDED TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM WITH THE INMATES ONCE A-BLOCK WAS SECURED.

AT APPROXIMATELY 5:45 P.M., THE INMATES STARTED TO RETURN TO A-BLOCK FROM THE DINING HALL. THE REGULAR OFFICER ASSIGNED TO A-BLOCK NOTICED A GROUP OF 25 TO 30 INMATES GATHERING ON THE FOURTH TIER NEAR THE BLOCK TV. THAT OFFICER WAS THEN ORDERED BY THE SERGEANT TO DOUBLE-LOCK ALL CELLS ON THE THIRD TIER.

FROM THE COMMAND CENTER, THE SHIFT COMMANDER OBSERVED THAT INMATES WERE GATHERING IN THE FRONT OF A-BLOCK AND THINGS WERE NOT NORMAL. THE CAPTAIN DISPATCHED SIX OFFICERS FROM ANOTHER BLOCK TO A-BLOCK, TO HELP SECURE A-BLOCK. ANOTHER CAPTAIN WAS DISPATCHED TO THE A-BLOCK AREA TO SUPERVISE AND OBSERVE. AT 5:59 P.M. THE CAPTAIN ASSIGNED TO THE BLOCK REPORTED THAT TWO GROUPS OF INMATES WERE NOT GOING TO THEIR CELLS. THE OFFICERS ON THE BLOCK WERE ABLE TO SECURE

THE TIERS. OCCUPIED CELLS ON TIERS 2, 3 AND 5 WERE DOUBLE-LOCKED. THE OFFICERS ON A-BLOCK REPORTED THE INMATES WERE BEGINNING TO ACT AGGRESSIVELY. SEVERAL OF THE OFFICERS WERE INFORMED BY INMATES THAT "THEY HAD BETTER GET OFF THE BLOCK - IT WAS GOING DOWN". THE CAPTAIN THEN ISSUED AN ORDER FOR THE OFFICERS TO EVACUATE THE BLOCK. JUST AS THE LAST OFFICER EXITED A-BLOCK, AN INMATE THREW A LARGE BENCH IN FRONT OF THE GRILLE, TWO OTHER INMATES SLID THE OFFICER'S DESK IN FRONT OF THE GRILLE, AND BEGAN TO BARRICADE THE ENTRANCE. THE CAPTAIN THEN ACTIVATED THE INSTITUTION'S EMERGENCY PLAN. OFF DUTY PERSONNEL WERE NOTIFIED TO REPORT TO WORK, UTILIZING THE INSTITUTION'S CALL-IN SYSTEM. THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE WERE NOTIFIED, AND ALL AVAILABLE PERSONNEL GATHERED IN THE CONTROL CENTER AREA. THERE WERE INMATES WHO HAD NOT RETURNED FROM SUPPER, AND WERE BEING CONTAINED IN THE LOWER CORRIDOR. THE INMATES IN A-BLOCK WERE RIOTING, DESTROYING FURNITURE, BREAKING WINDOWS, AND BARRICADING ALL OF THE ENTRANCES TO A-BLOCK. FIRE HOSES WERE LAID AND CHARGED AS THE INMATES ATTEMPTED TO SET FIRES IN A-BLOCK. THE OFFICERS MANNING THE FIRE HOSES WERE ASSAULTED BY THE REBELLIOUS INMATES. THE INMATES WERE THROWING LOCKS, SPEARS (MADE FROM MOP AND BROOM HANDLES), SCOURING POWDER, AND OTHER ITEMS AT THESE OFFICERS.

A COMMAND POST WAS ESTABLISHED IN THE SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE. COMMISSIONER OWENS WAS NOTIFIED, AND WE MAINTAINED CONSTANT CONTACT WITH HIM THROUGHOUT THE INCIDENT. INFORMATION INDICATED THAT INMATES WERE OBSERVED CARRYING HEAVY OBJECTS, INCLUDING RADIATORS, ONTO THE TIERS. IT WAS BELIEVED THE INMATES WOULD DROP THESE OBJECTS ONTO PERSONNEL ENTERING AT GROUND LEVEL. THE DECISION WAS MADE FOR THE INSTITUTIONAL EMERGENCY SQUAD TO ENTER A-BLOCK. A TACTICAL PLAN WAS DEVELOPED THROUGH THE COMMAND POST. I AM NOT AT LIBERTY TO DISCUSS THE DETAILS OF OUR TACTICAL EMERGENCY PLAN IN THIS REPORT; HOWEVER, IF COMMITTEE MEMBERS DESIRE THIS INFORMATION, I WOULD BE PLEASED TO DETAIL THE INCIDENT TO THEM PERSONALLY. TO DETAIL THE SPECIFICS OF THE PLAN IN THIS REPORT, WOULD VIOLATE SAFETY AND SECURITY PROCEDURES AT THE INSTITUTION.

AT 8:50 P.M., I ISSUED THE ORDER FOR THE EMERGENCY SQUAD TO RETAKE THE BLOCK. SEVERAL SQUADS OF OFFICERS WERE ORDERED TO ENTER THE BLOCK. THEY DEPLOYED DOWN TWO TIERS OF THE BLOCK, LOCKING CELLS AND HANDCUFFING INMATES FOUND IN UNLOCKED CELLS. THE SQUADS MET LITTLE RESISTANCE UNTIL THEY ARRIVED AT THE REAR OF THE CELL BLOCK. THERE THEY WERE MET BY A GROUP OF INMATES THROWING SPEARS, SCAFFOLD WHEELS, SWINGING CLUBS AND MAKING THREATENING GESTURES. THE INMATES RETREATED TO THE GROUND LEVEL WHERE THEY CONTINUED TO TAUNT, THREATEN AND THROW OBJECTS AT THE OFFICERS AS THEY CONTINUED TO MOVE FORWARD. HEAVY RESISTANCE WAS ENCOUNTERED AT THE REAR OF THE BLOCK. THE EMERGENCY SQUAD FOUGHT HAND-TO-HAND WITH A GROUP OF INMATES AS THEY PUSHED THE RIOTERS TOWARD THE FRONT OF THE BLOCK. THE INMATES WERE ARMED WITH CLUBS AND HOMEMADE KNIVES. THE EMERGENCY SQUAD WAS EQUIPPED WITH HELMETS, VESTS AND RIOT STICKS. THE INMATES WERE EVENTUALLY PHYSICALLY SUBDUED. AFTER THE INMATES WERE RESTRAINED, INSTITUTIONAL PERSONNEL REGAINED CONTROL OF A-BLOCK. EACH CELL WAS DOUBLE-LOCKED AND ADDITIONAL RIOTERS WERE IDENTIFIED. THE BLOCK WAS DECLARED AS SECURED AT 9:25 P.M. PHYSICIANS WERE ON DUTY AND THREE TRIAGE TEAMS WERE ESTABLISHED. FORTY-FOUR EMPLOYEES WERE TREATED AT THE ONE TRIAGE AREA, AND 22 INMATES WERE TREATED AT THE INSTITUTION INFIRMARY, OR AT ANOTHER TRIAGE AREA. A COUNT WAS CONDUCTED AND ALL INMATES WERE ACCOUNTED FOR BY 10:30 P.M. ALL LOCKS AND LOCKING MECHANISMS WERE CHECKED AND WERE FOUND TO BE IN PROPER WORKING ORDER. ONE DESTROYED PADLOCK WAS REPLACED. A VIDEO CAMERA WAS UTILIZED TO RECORD THE DAMAGES PRIOR TO CLEAN UP.

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT, A DEBRIEFING WAS HELD IN THE SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE. THE INSTITUTIONAL STAFF AND STATE POLICE WERE DEBRIEFED REGARDING THE TACTICAL ASSAULT BY A LEADER OF THE GROUP. NORMAL INSTITUTIONAL ACTIVITIES WERE THEN SUSPENDED BY ME. CONTINGENCY PLANS WERE DISCUSSED TO PROVIDE THE BASIC NECESSITIES TO THE INMATE POPULATION.

SUBSEQUENT TO THE INCIDENT, A GENERAL SEARCH OF THE ENTIRE INSTITUTION WAS CONDUCTED. THAT SEARCH LASTED FOR SEVERAL DAYS. IN ADDITION, THE INSTITUTION'S SECURITY OFFICE AND THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE BEGAN TO INVESTIGATE THE DISTURBANCE. AS A RESULT OF THE INVESTIGATION, 52 INMATES WERE IDENTIFIED AS PARTICIPATING IN THE DISTURBANCE, AND WERE ISSUED MISCONDUCT REPORTS. SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE HAS ALSO BEEN GATHERED TO FILE CRIMINAL CHARGES AGAINST 26 INMATES.

THROUGH THE INVESTIGATION, WE LEARNED THAT THE INITIAL GROUP OF INMATES (ESTIMATED TO BE 25 TO 30) WERE ABLE TO RELEASE OTHER INMATES WHOSE CELLS WERE NOT DOUBLE-LOCKED. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT AS MANY AS 100 INMATES PARTICIPATED IN THE RIOT TO SOME DEGREE. HOWEVER, IT IS BELIEVED THAT WHEN THE EMERGENCY SQUAD ENTERED THE BLOCK, MOST OF THE INMATES RETURNED TO THEIR CELLS.

THE DISTURBANCE CAUSED \$23,884.32 DAMAGE TO STATE PROPERTY IN A-BLOCK, AND THERE WAS \$49,420.12 WORTH OF DAMAGE TO A-SCHOOL. TOTAL DAMAGE AMOUNTED TO \$73,304.44.

IN CONCLUSION, THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT SEVERAL INMATES WERE ABLE TO INCITE OTHERS INTO PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISTURBANCE. TENSIONS WERE HIGH ON OCTOBER 23RD, DUE TO SEVERAL INCIDENTS THAT OCCURRED ON OCTOBER 19TH AND 20TH. HOWEVER, THERE WAS NO INDICATION THAT A MAJOR DISTURBANCE WOULD OCCUR. THEREFORE, NO WARNINGS BY INMATES WERE RECEIVED BY ANY STAFF OFFICE, INDICATING A PLANNED DISTURBANCE WAS BEING FORMULATED, AND NO STAFF INDICATED A CONCERN FOR SUCH A PLANNED DISTURBANCE AS WELL. THIS PARTICULAR INCIDENT DID NOT APPEAR TO BE PLANNED. IT WAS MORE A SPONTANEOUS ACTION RESULTING FROM ONE INMATE'S REFUSAL TO OBEY THE DIRECT ORDER OF AN OFFICER.

PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE IN CONTACTING ME IF THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
REQUIRES ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING THIS DISTURBANCE.