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October 25-26, 1989

Riot at Camp Hill

CO 1 Ronald Klock

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On October 25 I was assigned as acting Sgt. on G and K blocks. The two officers working with me were officer [REDACTED] who worked downstairs switchbox, and [REDACTED] who worked upstairs switchbox. At approx. 1430 [REDACTED] received a call on the radio to lock the front door to G block and to secure all areas, this meant locking everyone up including tier runners, who did various jobs on the block, and not opening front door even to inmates who belonged in the block. The reason we were told to secure the block was due to a few fights breaking out when the yard was coming in.

I made a round on the downstairs floor and [REDACTED] made a round upstairs, making sure all inmates were locked in, and switchboxes were secure. All three officers waited approx. 10 minutes for radio transmissions and further orders when a knock and a bang came on the dayroom door between F and G block. All officers recognized the voice which was [REDACTED] shouting, "Let me in open the door." As we left [REDACTED] enter, he stated, "lock this door we have to go into switchbox and lock ourselves in because inmates are in E and F blocks yelling, smashing furniture, looting cells, and carrying sticks and pipes, whatever they can grab." We all did as [REDACTED] ordered. We could have all gone out the back door while we had enough of time before inmates entered G block but we did not because this would mean leaving our post and we did not know at the time that this was turning into a full scale riot.

We waited in switchbox for a few minutes, hearing radio messages that three officers were down, that inmates had taken a truck and rammed through commissary doors, then proceeded looting the commissary and rampaging blocks. [REDACTED] who was Sgt. on J and H blocks, went to E and F to see if he could assist officers and found out things were out of hand. A few minutes later inmates started coming from F to G block yelling, and smashed the door through. The block's T.V. was knocked over causing it to smash, they then took wooden benches ramming the switchbox using keys that they had obtained from other officers, opening all doors upstairs.

[REDACTED] took the key to the switchbox and placed it in the door turning it halfway so when inmates stuck key in from outside it would not turn. There was a small window in the steel door that inmates broke first, trying to push sticks, pipes, and what have you in at us. We had a small bench in the switchbox that we placed in front of the door and placed a filing cabinet that was quite high on top of the bench to cover the broken window hole. Inmates lit fires outside of the door using sheets and cardboard to try and smoke us out. All officers decided to flood the floor from the bathroom sink and to turn electrical power off in the switchbox, we also took off our belts and tied them to the door handle of the switchbox in order to try and secure it.

We were in the switchbox for approx. 3 hours, we kept calling officials trying to get help through the back door, we had phone contact for about two hours, not only did we try calling officials we also tried to contact other blocks to see if things were all right. All officers were told that help was on the way, and to hang on for a few minutes, but minutes turned into hours. Little did we know that they would not let state police through the main gate. Finally, inmates cut phone wires and battery in the radio went dead and we had no contact. While inside the switchbox inmates kept yelling we're going to get you, come out, give up, several time inmates yelled to [REDACTED] we are going to kill you. Inmates kept banging and battering walls at times, then would leave and go to other blocks and come back. On three occasions we heard whistles blowing, thinking officers were coming to help, but we did not open doors and we found it to be a decoy to get us out. At one point inmates broke walls into switchbox on F ward dayroom side, poking shovel handles, pipes, and even throwing flames at us with a torch or a welding cutter. We tore the bathroom partition apart to prop against the holes. We then took water from the toilet to outen flames that were coming at us, also using fire extinguishers to hit flames and inmates as they looked through holes to see where we were.

Finally on other side of switchbox they broke a hole into wall where they could just walk through.

As the hole opened I recognized a few inmates from G block, I talked, begged, whatever and asked them to help us. ~~They stated they would try to help but would not promise anything.~~ Inmates stated for three officers to come out and to let [REDACTED] in the switchbox. We then asked for a few minutes to talk with each other, three officers agreed to give in, [REDACTED] stated, "I am not letting go of this key, they are going to kill us." due to the threats shouted at him, we had to actually shake [REDACTED] several times and point to the opening where inmates could walk through, [REDACTED] not realizing it was there. Finally we all agreed, I stated to inmates we are all coming out or none of us. Inmates conceded and said throw cuffs, radios, and keys out of opening. When the door opened [REDACTED] and I placed [REDACTED] in the middle of us fearing for his life. As we came out of the switchbox inmates cuffed us and placed sheets over our heads, stripping us from all personal items such as wallets, rings, watches, glasses, flashlights, etc. Little did we know that [REDACTED] was not covered and beaten.

We were moved past cell blocks on the walkway. Under the sheets we could see along the ground way where we were going. Inmates stated they had to take us out to show state police that they had us as hostages. [REDACTED] was taken to B gate entrance and three other officers to the light pole by kitchen 2. As I was being moved I had two inmates stay by me, I recognized them by voice. As we stood by the light pole I heard [REDACTED] moaning and falling to my feet I edged my way to the ground and asked [REDACTED] if he was okay. [REDACTED] said he was all right but he thought he had some broken ribs because he was hit with something. Inmates took [REDACTED] clothing off and put browns on him. Inmates wanted to do the same to the rest of us. I then asked the two inmates who stayed by me to take us back to the block and stop hitting on [REDACTED]. A few minutes later they took us to the front door

on G block and sat us on a bench, then took the sheets off our heads and asked if we wanted a drink or food they took from the kitchen. In a bout a half an hour I noticed that [REDACTED] was getting pale and clammy and was in pain. I asked inmates to ~~take us into the dayroom and cover [REDACTED] with a sheet or blanket.~~ They did and [REDACTED] seemed to look a little better with color in the face.

While in the dayroom we looked through the windows and could see officers and state police around the perimeter fence. At the time all inmates in dayroom were from G block. We asked inmates if [REDACTED] could yell out the window and talk to officials and tell them who was there and that we were all okay, inmates said okay. We sat in the dayroom for about 1½ to 2 hours when we noticed two officers from F block brought over and sat with us.

We all sat for a few minutes no one being harmed when an inmate came in and said we were going to be released by the E gate entrance. All officers present thought they were going to take us into the yard and beat us. Inmates in the block stated they all were going to get around us, put us in the center and cover us so no one would hit us as we walked by the block areas. Inmates escorted us to E gate house where we were picked up by prison officials, marked off the hostage list, taken to the rear gate to the ambulance point, evaluated and taken to various hospitals. Those who were discharged had to go to SCIC Institution for debriefing and be seen by a psychologist. We were then released to go home not being told to stay at home or come back the following day.

October 26 1400-2200

I reported in for work October 23 for the 2-10 shift. I was placed as acting Sgt. on G and K blocks. As we entered the block, we saw that the tier floor was covered with smashed furniture, water, broken televisions, shanks, weapons, and whatever from the riot the previous night. Locking panels were

torn off the walls, levers in the switchbox were broken, no cells were secure except for about 25--35 cells on H block which were padlocked when they ran out of locks. Area Lt. and supervisors on 6-2 and 2-10 shifts were notified and in turn notified top officials but nothing was done about it.

Bag lunches were served for lunch and passed out to all cells, rounds were made. It came to supper time, one officer went to eat, while the other two stayed on the block. Quite a few officers on the blocks would not pass out bags, because there was only one or two tier lights that worked, it was dark and during the day you could hear doors click knowing that cells were not secure. I was the last officer on the block to eat, I had gone through the line sat down and we all heard on the radio the area Lt. on group 2 and 3 side, "Lock your doors on the block get over to control area. Inmates have broken out again." We all started to run back to group 2 and 3 sides to assist when Capt. yelled, "save your energy you may need it," and inmates, about 300 in number, came running toward us with sticks and pipes and weapons. We all had to run to get into control area for our lives. As officers went into control entrance, patoons were given out. Half of the officers were sent to dispensary area to stay with the nursing staff and the other half stayed at the control area.

Inmates got into the control area by taking the air conditioner out of the deputy's window, they started a fire in the control area and forced officers into the upstairs area. Inmates came through hallway smashing windows, going into kitchen 1 area taking food. Inmates got into blocks on group 1 side again smashing cells and locking systems. The officers in the infirmary area stayed until state police came past exit area, we then took nursing staff to main gate while shots were being fired. As we got to main gate officers stayed at main as inmates came crawling on hands and knees for safety from other rioting inmates. All inmates were cuffed with flex cuffs and made lie down on ground. A few had to be taken to hospitals because of injuries from rioting inmates. One

inmate stopped breathing and had to be put into an ambulance. I was ordered to go with the inmate until discharged.

As I returned into institution a ladder was placed above the control area by fire fighters where smoke was shooting out of windows. A flashlight flashing from upstairs control area was spotted by Main Gate Tower officer or officers would have died from smoke inhalation. Upon my return from the hospital, officers and myself helped riot squads and state police gather inmates and take them into yard area. We worked into early hours of the morning of the third day of rioting. Some officers worked from 24-36 hours. Eventually we were ordered to leave. Luckily I had a four day break, and took the last of my three days off. Several officers worked for days with little sleep.

I worked in SCIC until December 23, 1989. I stayed at SCIC hoping things would improve but they did not. The Commissioner put in paper that any hostages could transfer if the institution that they wanted to go to would except them. I wrote a transfer letter to both SCIF and SCIC, the Commissioner, and the Governor. I received a transfer within a week and a half. I started at SCIF on December 26, 1989.

Out of 2650 inmates about 1350 stayed at SCIC. I thought this made things very unsafe for officers involved. In later months inmates were identified as being involved and had to go to preliminary hearings and then bound over to criminal court hearings in which I was involved with inmates from G block.

Even though inmates helped you on the first night of rioting they may have been involved in the second night or involved with taking other officers in other blocks. This in itself tells you not to trust any inmate.

Ronald L. Klock, Corrections Officer I