

## Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Employee Oral History Collection Project

Interviewee: **Jeffrey A. Beard, Ph.D.**  
Topic: **The 1989 SCI Camp Hill Riots**  
Interview Date: July 18, 2019  
Interviewer: DOC Communications Director Susan McNaughton

### Interviewee Background



Dr. Jeffrey A. Beard began his criminal justice career as a corrections counselor at the State Correctional Institution (SCI) at Rockview in June 1972. While at Rockview, he was promoted to classification and treatment supervisor, deputy superintendent, and finally, acting superintendent.

He was then named to the position of superintendent at SCI Cresson, where he was responsible for preparing the institution to receive its first inmates in February 1987, and for the overall operations of the facility for approximately three years.

In November 1989, he was appointed superintendent at SCI Camp Hill in an acting role following two major riots. The appointment to this more than 2,000-man close-custody facility came 10 days after two major riots destroyed or seriously damaged much of the facility. Once taking the helm, he oversaw reconstruction planning, improvements to the overall security of the facility, management of a continuing inmate population of 1,600 inmates, including more than 200 riot suspects, and a return to a more normal state of operation. Subsequently, he was named superintendent in June 1990. During his tenure, the facility grew to more than 3,000 inmates. He remained in that position until May 1994, when he accepted the position of acting deputy commissioner for the central regional at the Department of Corrections' headquarters in Camp Hill. He was permanently assigned to the position in June 1995.

Beard remained in the deputy commissioner role until Dec. 14, 1997, when he was promoted to the executive deputy secretary position. Beard became acting secretary of corrections on Dec. 30, 2000, and was appointed to the position on Feb. 15, 2001. He was nominated by Governor Rendell to serve in the same capacity and reappointed on Feb. 11, 2003, and again in April 2007. He retired from the Department of Corrections on August 20, 2010, after more than 38 years of service to the agency and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

As secretary of the Department of Corrections, Beard was responsible for the management and operations of the Corrections Department which housed more than 51,000 inmates, had approximately 16,000 employees, and a budget of more than \$1.8 billion.

During his tenure as secretary, Beard oversaw completion of a major security upgrade for all correctional facilities, worked to improve staff safety, and completed American Correctional Association accreditation for all facilities. He instituted a mandatory reentry program for boot camp inmates and worked on a number of collaborative reentry projects. He instituted a variety of assessment instruments to ensure the right inmates got in the right programs, changes to inmate programming to ensure that programs met the principles of effective intervention, and increased the mandatory education level from fifth grade to the GED level. He also supported an active research agenda and implemented the use of evaluation tools to measure program outcome and ensure that programs were functioning correctly.

He worked to diversify the workforce and see that visitors were treated with respect. He took steps to improve the department's image with the legislature, victims' community, prison advocacy groups, the press, and other interested groups by promoting a culture that was timely and responsive to inquiries. Dr. Beard was also instrumental in working with other organizations and the legislature to ensure passage of the State Intermediate Punishment (SIP) in 2005 and the Prison Reform Package in 2008.

Beard holds a B.S. in psychology, and an M.Ed. and Ph.D. in counseling, all from the Pennsylvania State University. Additionally, he is a licensed psychologist. During his tenure, he was a member of the Pennsylvania Prison Wardens Association (PPWA), American Corrections Association (ACA), North American Association of Wardens and Superintendents (NAAWS), Northeast Association of Correctional Administrators (NACA) Executive Committee, Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Advisory Committee (LECTAC) and the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA).

Beard was honored by his university in 2004 when he received the Alumni Fellow Award, the highest award given to an alumnus. In 2005 he received the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award from the Pennsylvania Prison Wardens Association (PPWA) and the Carl Robinson Award from Middle Atlantic States Correctional Association (MASCA) for his outstanding work in furthering excellence in corrections. In late 2005, Beard was selected by his peers at the Association of State Correctional Administrators to receive the National Michael Francke Award, the highest honor given by that organization.

### **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 am DOC Communications Director Susan McNaughton. Our guest today -- July 18, 2019 -- is Dr. Jeffrey Beard who served as the agency's secretary. Thank you for joining us, Secretary Beard.

**Beard:** Very happy to do so.

**McNaughton:** While you have an extensive career history with the Department of Corrections, which began at Rockview in the 1970s, I wanted to collect your oral history about the 1989 SCI Camp Hill Riots. Could you please tell us where you were working and how you first learned about the riots, and then lead us into the role you played from that point forward, specifically focusing on the recovery from the riots?



**Beard:** At the time of the riots, I was the superintendent at the State Correctional Institution at Cresson. I had been there for about three-and-a-half years or so. I was sitting in my office one day and I began hearing some radio transmissions -- we could sometimes pick up Camp Hill radio transmissions, and I heard the transmissions from Camp Hill -- indicating there was something going on at the institution. I wasn't sure if it was an actual event/problem or if it was some kind of a drill. So, I got on the phone and called somebody down there at Central Office. Actually, it was Ted Shumaker, who was the head of the DOC's Planning, Research & Statistics Office at the time. I asked Ted. I said, "Hey, I'm hearing these radio transmissions. Is there something going on or not." And he said, "There is something going on. We have a riot going on at the institution and it's not a drill." So, that's basically how I first found out about it.

As we went forward, it wasn't too many days later ... maybe a couple days later ... I got a call from the commissioner, David Owens. He asked me to report to Camp Hill and take over as the acting superintendent. At first, I was reluctant to do so. I was sitting in my nice, new institution on top of a mountain where nobody bothered me and now the commissioner wanted me at Camp Hill. So, I said I would come down and talk to him and deputy commissioner [Erskind] DeRamus about coming down. The next day I reported to Central Office, talked to them for a while and came to an agreement on certain things -- about staff that I might bring with me and things like that. A couple of days later I reported to the institution and took over as superintendent.



When I got there, the institution was in extremely bad shape. The inmates were housed four to a cell. They were shackled together. They were handcuffed. Each cell was secured by a set of two chains and a padlock, because the locking systems had been damaged during the riots. There were armed state police on the housing units, and the staff at the institution appeared almost shell shocked with what had happened.

As I toured the institution and looked around, I saw that all of the inmates' property had been thrown away. There was nothing in the cells at all. We basically had to start at the beginning to get things back into cells. Some of the inmates had partial clothing, so we had to get their clothing back and to get mattresses into the institution and blankets and things like that because the colder weather was coming. The riots happened in October. We were working on trying to get all of those things back and also worked on getting the shackles and handcuffs off of the inmates.



Staff, because they were still very upset about the riots and were very concerned about perhaps having another riot, were very reluctant to take off the shackles and the handcuffs; but we met with them and worked through it and got the shackles off, got the handcuffs off, got clothing, we got mattresses back in cells.

It was probably a matter of three or four months -- probably closer to four months -- before we were back to near-normal operation, where inmates had more than just a quick exercise period or a shower out of their cells. The inmates were kept locked down for quite a period of time. Part of that was because of the damage to the institution. A lot of the internal gates had been damaged, and so it wasn't practical to get the inmates out. There wasn't a place to put them and securely deal with them. Also, as I noted previously the locking systems were badly damaged. We had tried to transfer inmates out of the institution, and did successfully transfer 700 or 800 out of the institution, but we still had over 1,500 inmates at the facility. Of those 1,600 inmates, we had about 200 of them that were riot suspects and people that were actively involved in the riots, and we had to keep them at the prison for prosecution purposes, so we had to deal with that on an ongoing basis.

The other thing we had to deal with was feeding the 1,600 inmates by using only one kitchen, because the main kitchen had been put out of commission during the riots. Fortunately, Camp Hill had two kitchens, so we were able to prepare food out of the remaining kitchen.

All of this made for a very slow process of trying to get back to more-normal operation. We had to do it at the same time while making sure that the staff understood where we were going and felt as comfortable as we could make them feel about where we were going.

One of the things we did, for instance, was we put up new fences and new gates. We moved to electronically control the opening of those gates out of towers. Prior to the riots, pretty much everybody carried a key to those gates. That's one of the reasons why the riots did get so bad. When inmates got a hold of a staff member, they got their keyset, and then they were able to not only get through all of the gates; but they were able to access all of the housing units, because all of the keys of all of the housing units were keyed the same as well. So, it was those kinds of things which took a number of months to implement.

And while we were making such major changes, we couldn't let the inmates out of their cells. Again, initially we thought we would be able to transfer out more inmates by sending them throughout our system and to the federal prison system. I think the federal government took 800 inmates from our system, but our system had been very overcrowded and so there really wasn't spare room in the system. We were left with a rather large number of inmates and several major physical plant problems that we had to deal with; but we did all of this over a period of a number of months.

**McNaughton:** So, if I recall correctly too, after the riots, for quite a while there was a Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) presence at the institution, as well, for a very long time.

**Beard:** Yes, there was. They were on the housing units when I first got there, but we eventually moved them. I worked with State Police Major Jim Hazen, and we eventually moved them to a secure area so they would be inside the institution. They still had their weapons, but they were secure where they were located and they could respond if we had a problem anywhere inside the institution. PSP was there, if I remember, almost that four months that the inmates were locked down. They were there for that period of time, and that was another thing that we had to deal with as we started getting inmates out of the cells and moving around. We had to be very careful, because we still had armed state police inside our facility.



**PSP inside the prison following the end of the riots.**

**McNaughton:** Right, and then I also recall, as time went on, that the initial six housing units in the general population where most of the rioting took place, were all torn down. That was a huge construction project where they had to cut a new, temporary sally port through the fences to be able to start bringing in the modular cells that were going to be used to replace those six initial housing units.

**Beard:** Right. Camp Hill had 10 housing units and a bunch of trailer-type units, most of which were burned down in the riots. Six of the 10 housing units – those located on the far side of the institution -- were in very bad shape. Not only were the locking systems in bad shape and difficult to repair, but the water lines, sewer lines and everything had pretty much deteriorated. So, we decided to tear down those six units and build new, modular housing units in their place, and we were successful in doing so. That, again, was a process where we would move inmates, tear down housing units and rebuild housing units and move inmates to the new housing units. We continued this process throughout the rebuilding of the prison. It took a little bit of time and coordination, but we were able to do that and successfully move through that part of the process with remarkably few problems.



**One of the modular housing units which was damaged during the riots.**

Another major reconstruction project involved D Block, which was the restricted housing unit. This unit housed most of the riot suspects.

One night I received a call from the institution indicating that some inmates in that unit were destroying their cells and flooding the tiers with water. There was great concern that the inmates may be able to get out of their cells. The housing units at Camp Hill were constructed of hollow tile blocks, and with some effort one could get into the pipe chases, break through to an adjacent cell or even get out on the tier. Additionally, the toilet fixtures were all porcelain [and were] easy to break. Staff were directed to handcuff and secure all the inmates who were acting out to get the situation under control. The next day we made arrangements to transfer the inmates who were acting out, since that was the less restrictive action we could take.

Almost predictively, the next night, a new group of inmates engaged in the same activity. It was obvious that this would keep up until everyone was transferred, because the riot suspects all wanted out of Camp Hill. If we would have done this and scattered the inmates around the system, it would have interfered with the ongoing state police investigation. So, we did two things.

First, we told those inmates who had acted out that they would not be transferred and that we would remove their handcuffs if they promised not to act out again.

Second, we devised a plan to steel plate the inside of all the cells and to replace the porcelain fixtures with stainless steel. We moved inmates out of a group of cells and we began the project.

During the day there was a lot of activity and noise as maintenance staff moved to harden the cells. This likely kept the inmates awake all day and less likely to act out at night. We had no further problems, and over the course of several months, the project was completed.

During the reconstruction project we also made major changes to the remaining three original cell blocks (A, B and C) to improve security. This would require us to close down a block... move all the inmates... complete the upgrades and then move inmates in so another block could be completed.

At the same time, the two large inmate yards were partitioned into smaller yards for better control of the inmates.

There were a number of other major projects as well. So we had a lot going on over the three to four years that I was there.

**McNaughton:** Amazing. Camp Hill, really, the riots there changed a lot of policies and procedures not only there but throughout the system. I'm sure that once everybody realized that all of the gates and housing units were all keyed the same, that there must have been a message sent throughout the system telling every facility to change their locks and keys so that this didn't happen again. What other things were learned that were made systemically to improve the system?

**Beard:** I think there were a whole number of things. If you study the Camp Hill riots very closely, you find that it validates everything you might call “Corrections 101.” Things like key control. Control of flammable substances ... they had flammable substances inside the facility, and inmates used that to set fires. We established restricted tool lists after the riots because there were a lot of heavy, equipment and heavy pry bars and welding equipment that the inmates used to damage and break into things.

After the riots we set up this restricted tool list and directed all of the facilities to retain certain specific tools outside of the facility. They were only permitted to take them inside the facility when they were using them for specific purposes. This allowed for better control, and prevented inmates from having access to such things if you did have a problem in the future ... inmates wouldn't have access to those tools.



Another area that was impacted was inmate records. The records department was another area that was destroyed because it was located inside the facility. So, we move all records departments outside facility perimeters. Again, so that wouldn't happen and we wouldn't lose inmate records.

Another area of change involved internal fencing inside our facilities. When we built new facilities, we focused on using internal fencing so that you could properly section off the facility to contain an incident in a particular area rather than have it spread throughout the whole facility, as it did at Camp Hill.

There were many things that, in corrections, you would have thought we should have known about, but when things don't happen/when you don't have a bad thing happen for a long period of time, you sometimes become complacent. You become lax in what you are doing, and I think that is what happened at Camp Hill. They were complacent, they were lax, and maybe in other places in the system they were that way too. Fortunately, they didn't have a serious riot that Camp Hill had. Camp Hill actually had two riots in three days.

**McNaughton:** Another thing that came out of the Camp Hill riots, if I recall correctly, are our special teams. Hostage rescue, hostage negotiation and CERT. Tell me the story about special teams.

**Beard:** Prior to the riots, each institution had their own special team -- what they called Corrections Emergency Response Teams (CERT). At that time, team members were not very well trained, and they would get whatever training the local institution would give to them. Often, they didn't even have ongoing training. They also were very poorly equipped.

I remember when I opened Cresson, I had tried to get vests and helmets and things like that so that I could properly equip a CERT team. In fact, Ray Clymer, who was superintendent at



Frackville at the time, tried to get some additional equipment, but we were all limited in what we were able to get, because we hadn't had riots in the system so nobody was really all that concerned about it or paid particular attention to that area. In fact, Clymer got himself in a little bit of trouble because he bought extra vests for his staff. When it was learned that he had done that, he was instructed to give those vests to other institutions. I got some of those vests and others got some of his vests, but the teams back then just weren't well equipped.

After the riots we set up a Central Office training for CERT teams. Staff came from all of the institutions and received specific training, and they were mandated to have training on a monthly basis. We put properly-provided equipment throughout the system, so the CERT teams had the appropriate equipment and could respond to an emergency. And in addition, we also set up a bunch of specialized teams that came after the CERT teams – the hostage rescue teams, the hostage negotiation teams, the corrections rifle specialist teams. Really, all of the specialized teams were developed out of the Camp Hill riots and came on the heels of getting the CERT teams in place and properly equipped.

We also completely revised our emergency plans so that we were better prepared to respond to disturbances and riots in our system, and all upper level staff received very specific training on the new plans. Had this been in place at the time of the riots, the situation would have been contained a lot quicker, there would have been significantly less damage to the facility and there would have been less staff injuries.

**McNaughton:** Now, looking back, the system is very different. Camp Hill is nothing like it was back then and while you can never say a riot will never happen again, with all of the improvements and enhancements we've made over the years -- with the fencing, policies, response teams -- it's hopeful that we will be better able to respond. But you can never say never to a situation like that happening again, right?

**Beard:** Right. We can always have a situation, but I think some of the steps we have taken over the years have helped us prevent things from getting out of hand as we move forward. I'm sure you remember at Coal Township we had a situation in 1995, where they had a disturbance that was a near riot. They almost lost things there, but the Mahanoy CERT, which was close by, was training when that disturbance took off. They responded immediately to the Coal Township facility and controlled that situation very quickly. Yes, there were still staff that were hurt very badly, and it caused some damage to the facility, but it was nothing near what happened at Camp Hill because of better policies and procedures that had been put into place. We could better contain the situation and were able to respond with trained people who dealt with the situation.

As we look forward I know we had something at Houtzdale where fights broke out. Staff was able to respond to that and kept that from getting out of hand. One of the things that also helped us was that we put cameras everywhere. I think that was sort of an outgrowth of the riots as well. We put cameras inside and on the perimeters. One of the things you do, if you are having a problem at some location, is to look quickly at your cameras, assess that problem and use what you are seeing through the cameras to better respond to it. That's another thing that remained since the Camp Hill riots, and it's one of the things that helped at Houtzdale -- for them to be able to respond and keep that situation from getting out of hand. I think, maybe, we have

prevented riots. You can't forget that the inmates are very aware that we have our CERT teams, that these teams are trained. We are there, the inmates know that, and that helps as well.

**McNaughton:** It's no secret. The inmates know we have cameras all over our institutions, and if something kicks off we're going to start recording and we're going to hand over those videos to PSP or whomever and use those videos as evidence in any kind of trial. I would think that that could maybe play a deterrent role as well.

**Beard:** It certainly does. There was a situation somewhere in the 2000s at Smithfield, where an inmate got out of hand in the dining room. At the time, the dining room was packed with inmates. The inmate had a weapon, and staff were trying to control the weapon and control the inmate. What you saw when you watched the video was ... when it all took off and staff started to go after this one inmate to control the situation, some other inmates stood up like they were going to support the inmate. Then they looked up at the cameras and then they sat back down. You could actually see that occur. Then staff was able to control the situation. That situation could have turned really nasty had those inmates joined in. But they stopped because they realized that there were cameras watching what was going on.

**McNaughton:** Back to the Camp Hill riots again. There was always talk that there were signs that trouble was brewing. Can you talk about what some of those signs were and if it included a lack of communication up the ladder to people who potentially could have stepped in? Also, how did we improve upon that? Did we input processes that track these kinds of things that could be trends leading to trouble?

**Beard:** When we looked at everything after the riots, we learned that there were a number of things that led to it. Don't forget that there were a number of investigations – the department did their investigation, the house did their investigation, the senate did their investigation and then there was one the governor had ordered to be done. It was really studied very closely.

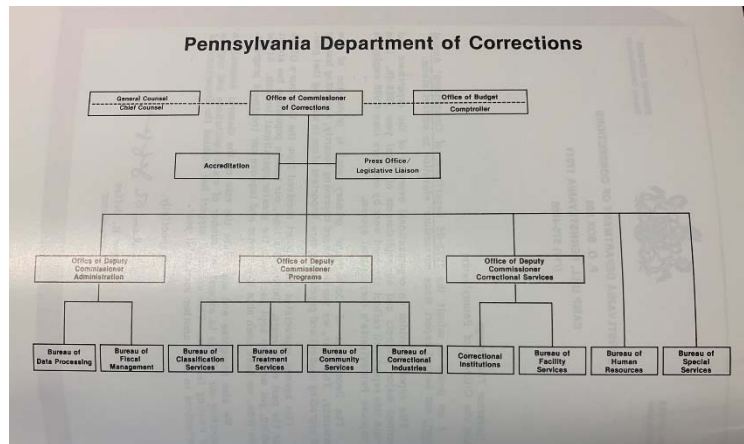
The one thing that our investigation showed was that there were some actual trends in inmate grievances – that there was an uptick in grievances that were coming in about how staff were treating inmates. There also were issues with misconducts where they seemed to go up and then drop off very quickly. There were some things telling you there – if anybody had been looking at that data – that there was something going wrong. And there were other things going on in the institution.

I believe that the administration at the time had some awareness that there was a problem, because we know that the one deputy superintendent, prior to the riots, had called in one of the inmates who ended up being one of the leaders in the riots. The deputy had tried to tell the inmate that the administration would put telephones out in the yards, and committed to doing all of these positive things for the inmates. The deputy wanted the inmate to go back and tell the other inmates, because he felt that that may calm things down. What it actually did was empowered that inmate and emboldened, I think, him and the other people and probably helped lead to the riots.

There also seemed to be some discord between the upper administrators. The superintendent apparently did not spend a lot of time inside the facility and sort of left things to the two deputies; and the two deputies, it seemed, didn't get along with each other. So, there was some discord there in the upper administration. That discord percolated down to the captains and lieutenants who didn't feel supported. It then percolated down to line staff who also didn't feel supported or that the administration was paying attention.

When I took over as superintendent at Camp Hill, I found that there was a tremendous amount of anger toward the administration that had been in place at the time of the riots occurred. Part of that was because the riots happened, and they needed someone to blame; but I think, part of it was, as I looked at things, how things built up to the riots. Staff were already feeling that they weren't supported before the riots occurred. So, as a result of all of this, we set up an early warning system, where we monitor numerous factors relating to what is going on in a facility. This information is reviewed at the institution level and is also reviewed in our headquarters.

When I was a regional deputy secretary, I would get information from and about my institutions and regularly reviewed that information to see if anything was getting out of whack at any of those institutions. We made a big effort to make changes there. Another thing that we did was to create regional deputies. Prior to the riots we had commissioner, a deputy commissioner, and then a deputy commissioner for programs, a deputy commissioner for treatment and a deputy commissioner for correctional services. That's all we really had, and I don't know that the deputies spent a lot of time visiting the institutions looking specifically at how they were operating or even looking at the management of the institutions.



After the riots we eventually reorganized and created regional deputy positions. Their job was to monitor and help to manage prisons in their respective regions. They also were tasked with visiting their prisons on a regular basis. I visited my institutions several times every year. Even when I became secretary, I would visit every facility at least once a year, and some two or three times a year.

**McNaughton:** Another thing I wanted to ask you, because this is the ongoing rumor – was anyone killed during the Camp Hill prison riots?

**Beard:** No. There was a newspaper from the Carlisle area that showed a map where bodies were buried, but part of what allowed that to get traction was that the original inmate counts were off immediately after the riots. But once everything was rectified – nobody was missing, nobody died – and even though some of the staff were very seriously injured and beaten by the inmates,

none of them died; and that for a riot as bad as Camp Hill was over three days and as much of lost control, it's really a miracle that that there were no deaths.

**McNaughton:** – I think I'm going to end this with something I know that you always said when you were secretary, and it was intended for all employees no matter what classification or level they are – “If they see something that isn't right or know something is happening that isn't right, tell your supervisor. If your supervisor isn't listening or acting, tell somebody. You have to share the information that you know, because your doing so could prevent something like this from happening in the future.”

**Beard:** Absolutely. There is absolutely no question, and if it happens on a regular basis – as I said, when bad things don't happen for a while everyone tends to become complacent. People tend to do things more for convenience than for doing the right thing, and that's what ends up getting us into trouble when that happens. I know that when I would meet with the superintendents, when I was secretary, at every meeting I talked about that. I talked about the need to stay on top of things and not to become complacent and to make sure your staff were doing the same thing.

**McNaughton:** – Thank you for sharing your recollections with us. This was a very important time in the DOC's history.

**Beard:** I appreciate the opportunity.

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