

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Employee Oral History Collection Project

Interviewee: Joe Miller
Topic: **The 1989 SCI Camp Hill Riots**
Interview Date: September 19, 2019
Interviewer: DOC Communications Director Susan McNaughton

Interview Transcript

McNaughton: Welcome to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' Oral History Project where we 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, September 19, 2019, is Joe Miller. Thanks for joining us, Joe.

Miller: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

McNaughton: Glad you're here. Can you provide us with a brief overview of your DOC career?

Miller: I started in corrections in November 1979, and I retired in 2007. During my career, I started as a corrections officer trainee at SCI Camp Hill. I worked there as a trainee, and at that time, they didn't have a training program, so you worked as a trainee until they felt you were strong enough to be able to handle everyday duties. From a trainee, I went to a CO1, a cell block officer, and then got promoted to a sergeant. I don't remember the years, if that's important...

McNaughton: That's OK.

Miller: As a sergeant... I was a sergeant at the time of the riots in 1989. Then after the riots in 1989, I started working with the CERT program, and helped train all of the institutions CERT programs and worked out of the security office at the department headquarters for a while. From there I went to SCI Frackville as major of the guard and retired from there.

McNaughton: Weren't you the chief of security at one point?

Miller: I was acting. Yeah, I was the assistant chief. I think I was acting twice.



McNaughton: OK. Well, sometimes... we act a lot of times. Let's get to the Camp Hill Riot... it's around 2:30/3 p.m. on Wednesday, October 25, 1989. Where are you and what's happening?

Miller: The first day, I was actually coaching football at a local high school. We had a game... I just got off a shift at 2 o'clock, and I got to the high school about a quarter to 3, so we had a game and I was on the sideline coaching. During the same, I saw... oh, the high school that I coached at was parallel to a major route going through Harrisburg, and I saw all these law enforcement vehicles flying up the highway. I wondered, "What the heck is going on." It just kept going. I'm noticing this during the game, and then all of a sudden, I see the Life Lion helicopter fly over. I see the state police helicopters flying over... and they're all going in that direction. I'm thinking, "Wow, there's something big going on somewhere." Then my wife pulls up in the parking lot and came down on the field and said to me, "Joe, something's going on at Camp Hill. You need to call." So, I quick ran off the field, went into the school and called the control center. They said, "Yeah, the place is burning down. You need to come in right away."

So, I got in my car, went home, quickly put my uniform on, and as I'm driving up the road... it's unbelievable all these police vehicles going in the same direction. As I got to the South Bridge, you could actually see smoke. You could actually see fire, and I'm thinking, "Yeah, this is something that I never thought would ever happen at Camp Hill, but it's happening right now."

I finally get there, and I remember I ran in the main gate, and they said, "You need to go to the armory to get a shotgun." I came back out... the armory was across from the main gate... I got a shotgun and went back in the institution. I remember walking into the institution just watching it burn and smoke everywhere and screaming and hollering.

I get inside the institution... I'm no sooner inside the institution, but ... I'm pretty sure this is the first day... and I hear a voice from the infirmary, which is as soon as you go through the main gate, there's a chapel on your left and the infirmary is on your right... I heard yelling, "Sarge, we're up here. Can you get us out?" I'm looking around and here there were officers... I guess they were trapped up on the second floor. I'm not quite sure who was with me, but we went into the infirmary and were able to get them out.

Then from there, I went down the walks, and there were inmates running everywhere, throwing rocks, bolts... all kinds of stuff at us. I got down to the control center, and that's where I saw some state police were there. Local police were there. People weren't even in uniforms. State police had t-shirts on. They just got deployed and just came right from where they were at.

At that point, what we were trying to do was just keep the inmates away from the control center. They were making runs from Group 2 and 3 just running across the walks and throwing stuff.

From there, we worked our way up toward E Gate. When we got to E Gate, they [the inmates] had it barricaded, and they had it covered, but you could still see in the Group 2 and 3 compound area.

The compound area was your worst nightmare, because you saw a whole bunch of officers sitting on the ground... handcuffed... blindfolded... and just... inmates walking around and punching them [the hostages] in the face, kicking them in the back of the head... just abusing them. And you're standing there and you can't do nothing because you can't get through.

I remember people saying, even asking me, "Can we shoot? Can we shoot? What can we do?" We have shotguns... they are a precision weapon. If you pull the trigger on a shotgun, you're going to take out anybody that's close. So, we weren't sure what to do, and there was no direction being given at that time about what to do. You were helpless. You're standing there watching this... you're yelling, "Get away from them!"

What sticks in my mind to this day... I still hear people on my radio yelling for help. They could see you, but you couldn't see them. [They were] Just yelling for help, "Come and get me. I'm over here. I'm in this cell block, can you come and get me?"

McNaughton: And you couldn't go anywhere...

Miller: ...and you couldn't go anywhere, because we were stuck right there at E Gate. We stayed there for a while.

Then there was word that... I heard over the radio that some officers were trapped up on top of the gym roof... so, my lieutenant told me to head over there. So, I go over there and there were two officers that were on the second floor that inmates were trying to get at them from below. So, they made their way up through the ceiling and onto the roof. We used a firetruck from Lower Allen Township, and I got on a ladder and they pushed the ladder up onto the roof, and we were able to help them get off the roof and down to safety. That was Gere... Gere Kostelac.

McNaughton: Ok.

McNaughton: This was still the first night, right?

Miller: This was still the first night. You'll have to excuse me, because sometimes they all run together because it was similar the second night, but worse. So, some of it I might have on the wrong day...

Somehow the inmates went away from the compound area, and we were able to get through the gate and start trying to find the hostages, as some point in there.

I'm just drawing a blank right now of how this happened, but... the first night the state police were there. There was a lot of stuff going on, but then... I'm just trying to figure out how it happened...

All of a sudden, the first night then... the inmates just disappeared and scattered back into the cell blocks and we were able to just go cell block to cell block and just start putting inmates in their cells.

McNaughton: And when you say ,“putting them in their cells,” it wasn’t putting Joe Miller in the cell he was in or even alone...

Miller: No. You would just... as you’re going down the tier... and this is a whole bunch of corrections officers and a whole bunch of state police... we just went cell block to cell block, and went in the block and just started shoving inmates in cells. Sometimes we put two and three and four in a cell, whether it was theirs or not. Then sometimes we would put inmates in a cell and go about five cells down and you’d turn around and they’re out already. They were just opening the doors. They had the run of the whole institution most of the day, so the cell locking mechanisms were tampered with. So, then we’d just pull them out of there and put them in another cell that worked. We did this in all six cell blocks, and it took a long time. It didn’t end until... I think in the morning. So, we put everybody in their cells and once we got everybody in their cells... I’m not going to say once we got everybody secure, because it wasn’t secure and people made no bones about it, we told them, “We can hear clicking as we’re walking out of the blocks.” You know... inmates changing cells. The cell locking mechanisms weren’t working right. So, after that I remember... I’m saying “after that,” but it took all night long. We did the same thing in every cell block. We went in as a group, put all the inmates in cells, and tried to secure them in as best we could.

Then it came time... it came over the radio that we had to feed the inmates. That didn’t really sit well with a lot of people, but that was the decision that was made by the administration... that they are going to send boxes of food over, and that we were going to have to go into the cell blocks cell-to-cell and hand out food.

We didn’t feel comfortable doing it, because you’re walking in a cell block that wasn’t secure. If you’re going in there by yourself, you can end up being a hostage again. We reluctantly... we did it, because we respected our captains and they asked us to do it. They said, “I don’t want to do it either, but this is what the administration wants. We gotta do it.” So, we did it. A whole group of us went down, and we fed the inmates.

After we finished with that, we did some searching and stuff to make sure we could leave, because... I remember us trying to count. It was almost impossible to count. I don’t know how we cleared count that night. That would be a good question to ask somebody.

McNaughton: I don’t think they did for several days.

Miller: I don’t see how they could have.

McNaughton: Right.

Miller: After that, it was just trying to get information about what was going on and what went on.

Then at some point... towards the morning, I think, we got word that we had to go pick up some inmates and take them over to the administration office... the deputy’s office inside the prison. I guess these were the inmates that were negotiating with whoever during the night. I don’t know how many inmates... I’d say maybe eight. We went around the cell blocks and rounded them up

and then we escorted them over to the deputy's conference room over behind the control center area. We get in there and they all sit down at the table, and the superintendent, deputy and major of the guard and other people are sitting there also... they just rehash the night. The inmates just sat there and were listening to what the superintendent was saying.

All the while, we're thinking, "After they're done with them, we're going to probably just take them right up the hallway to the restricted housing unit and they will be locked up until we find out what went on... until we get all of the information. Why let these guys go? They were ringleaders. If they're negotiating with you, that means they have a say in what's going on out there."

So, the meeting's over, and superintendent says [to the inmates], "Do we have your word that this won't happen again?" I remember looking at my partner like, "What?" The inmates said, "Oh, yeah. No. This won't happen again. Nope. You have our word." So, the superintendent looks at me and says, "Take them back to the cell block." I waited a minute, and I said, "Take them back to the cell block, or take them back to the RHU?" He [the superintendent] said, "Take them back to the cell block." So, reluctantly, we walked them back out of the control center and were heading across the walks to Groups 2 and 3. They're laughing and joking, just making light of the whole thing that just happened.

So, we get over by E Gate, which is right next to E Block... E Block borders the walkway by E Gate... and there's inmate cells on the side of E Block. So, these inmates... we got them that far, and they yell up into E Block saying, "Hey, pass the word. We didn't get sh*t. They didn't give us nothing. We're coming back out tonight." They're yelling that to everybody. Everybody they saw. So, we put them in cells. We report that back there, and nothing... nothing was ah... they didn't act on it.

The rest of the night... we did some searching, I remember, and some interviewing. Toward the morning, they said they were going to keep some officers over in the manor house just to make sure everything was ok. So, I remember I was at the manor house, and at some point during the day, after the first night, they told us we could go home and get some sleep for a couple of hours and come back in. So, I feel like I'm forgetting something...

I go home, and of course, the forgotten piece of the whole situation to being a corrections officer and law enforcement... your family is a mess. My wife was a mess. She was so happy to see me. I said, "Yeah, everything's good. I'm ok. Everything's good. I just want to get some sleep."

I remember going to sleep and then her [his wife] coming and waking me up saying, "Hey, it's Camp Hill, you've got to go back again." I was like, "Come on. This isn't even funny." She said, "No, you've got to go back again. They said on the phone that its worse than it was the night before."

I got out of bed, got my clothes back on... I can't remember what time it was... maybe 5/6 o'clock... again, we've got to get out on the highway, and it's packed with law enforcement the night before... this night it was JUST law enforcement on the highway. It was packed with vehicles all going the same direction.

We get there, and the fire's worse. The smoke is worse. You could see the fire from anywhere.

McNaughton: Now that it's October, it's dark now at night at 6:30...

Miller: Yeah, it's beautiful weather. For October, it was pretty nice out too. Which made it easier for the inmates to stay out and not have to worry about it.

You were afraid of what you were going to see.

I pulled into the parking lot and at that point I got out of the car and went into the main gate, and they just gave you a shotgun and they just sent you inside. They had them there for you.

Inmates were right at the door. As you walked in you had to push inmates away just to get in to the institution. There were inmates running everywhere. The whole jail is lit up with fire and smoke, and there are inmates running everywhere.

We start moving down, and we could see smoke coming out of the control center area. Again, we were told to head down to that area and make sure the inmates don't get in to control. Now droves of inmates were making runs from Group 2 and 3 coming across and just throwing stuff at us. Again, we had shotguns. Still not sure what to do with the shotgun... do I hit someone with it? What do I do with it?

From there... we were there for a while. I remember standing next to a Steelton/Highspire police officer... next to state police SERT team members who didn't even have a uniform on... and just a bunch of officers there... dogs from other agencies, and we're just trying to keep inmates away from the control center area.

All of a sudden, we start hearing banging... real loud bangs. I remember stepping away from the control center and looking up and I think it was C or B Block... and you could see inmates in their cells with sledge hammers banging out the windows. Then the window would fall out and they would pop out the window. Then you'd see torches... they were just torching lines of cells... taking the windows out, taking the doors down... I mean... just inmates were... you're standing in front of the control center and inmates were jumping on the ground next to you coming out of nowhere. It was a nightmare. It really was.

I would just like to put this in here too... Can you believe that all of these officers had shotguns and pockets full of ammunition, and we all had the restraint not to use it? I mean that's remarkable. I'll say it until I die... it's remarkable. They say we're undisciplined and all this kind of stuff... nah, there were some loose cannons that had shotguns in their hands, and handled themselves professionally.

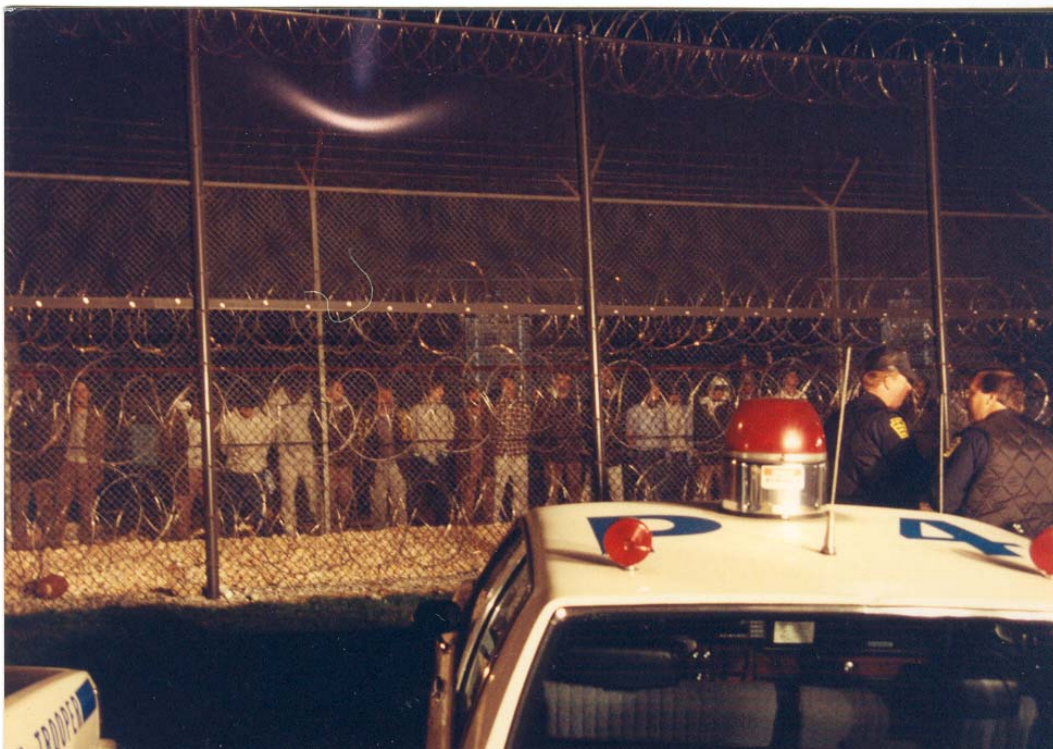
McNaughton: This was the night that about 20 to 30 institutional personnel were stuck inside control.

Miller: Actually, while we were there, one of our captains... he was the larger captain, fit through the key room bars. There's not much room to fit through there, but he had to get out of there. He actually wiggled his way out through the key room window, and to this day we still don't know how he did it, but he did it.

From there... I got a call on the radio saying that the state police... now the inmates are taking the bricks out of the kitchen tower that's on the yard ... in the main yard, and they're throwing smoke and lit fire up into the tower trying to smoke the tower officer out. My leader... Lt. Sunday said, "Can you take state police troopers the back way to the yard and clear inmates away from the tower, because the officer said he only has three rounds of ammunition left. There's a thousand inmates out there trying to get him out."

We went from there and I took them around the back of the Education Building... the back way to the yard. We got on the yard and sure enough they were... the tower was like... fire was coming out of the catwalk... so we quick made entry to the yard, and we moved all of the inmates away. We had shotguns. We chambered rounds, but didn't pull the trigger. Then we also had the Harrisburg International [Airport] firetruck with us, which is a HUGE vehicle made out of lead, I think. It's made to go into any situation. It came in with us into the yard and it used its canon in the front... water canon to clear inmates away from the tower. They also put the fire out on the tower. We were able to do that, and luckily that worked out well.

Then we just cleared all the inmates to the back of the yard. After we did that, we started bringing inmates out to clear the yard. We were bringing inmates out five or six at a time, putting them against the fence, searching them, putting flex cuffs on them and sending them on their way. Officers would escort them to areas where they could hold them... just to get them off the yard.



Inmates had been moved to the yard, where they were placed against the fence, searched and handcuffed.

Again, I probably shouldn't have been back there, but being that I had to guide the state troopers through the facility – because I knew the facility, they didn't – I ended up with them. We come out of the yard and we are at the gym road gate. I remember hearing shots fired in the kitchen, because there were inmates in there and the SERT team made entry into the kitchen...

McNaughton: That was the state police SERT team.

Miller: State police SERT team... and cleared the kitchen out. Then they came back out, and we're all at gym road gate... no, the yard gate... the next gate up is gym road gate. We're positioned there. Nobody is behind us. We cleared all that area out. Now all of these inmates are in front of us behind gym road gate, which was barricaded clear up to the top with all kinds of stuff... desks, metal...

We're standing there, and I hear a voice from ... remember the modular units that were burned to the ground?... all it was was a pile of rubble and just smoking, that's all it was. I hear somebody yelling my name, "Hey, Sarge! Sarge!" See the state police had helmets on. I didn't have a helmet on, so he recognized me. I go over to the pile of rubble. I remember stepping on the first piece, and the bottom of my shoe... the rubber just melted because it was so hot. But he was laying underneath all of these boards, and he said, "Hey, I just want to let you know, don't go through that gate. The inmates have a propane tank buried in the rubble at gym road gate, and as soon as you guys get there – they want you to go there – they're going to open the propane tank and throw a match, and you're all going to blow up." I'm like, "Are you serious?" He said, "Yes." I thanked him for the information. I said, "Do you want to come out of there." He said, "No. Not yet." I said, "Do you know where any of the hostages are." He said, "Yes, I know where just about all of them are." So, he gave me a lot of information about the propane tank and information about where the hostages were. I was relaying... that was another problem... it worked out pretty well though, that I had Capt. Ragan and Major Hazen with us, because all of the information I was getting, I didn't know what to do with it. So, I gave it to them, and then they relayed it wherever the command post was.



The modulares that had been burned to the ground.

Through the course of the night, I kept getting information from him. Finally, the command post wanted him over there to talk him. We pulled him out of the rubble and got him over there, but he told some good information about where the hostages were. He didn't know if they were all alive. Matter of fact, he said two of them were dead, which wasn't true.

From there, we were at the yard gate and inmates were throwing lit pieces of stuff at us. Throwing bolts at us, screws, nails. Every once in a while, they would pop out with a chainsaw... fire it up and point it at us and... I worked there for a while. A lot of them knew me. They were like, "Yeah, come on in Miller! You can't kill all of us." I just stood there. I didn't want to say anything, because it was the state police's ball game at that time. I was just with them because... helping them get to where they wanted to go.

I'm not quite sure what time in the morning... a lot went on up until then, but it was mainly us getting pelted with stuff and just getting information back and forth from this inmate.

Somewhere in there, the decision was made that we were going to storm the institution and we were going to go through gym road gate. Another group was going to go through E Gate.

McNaughton: So essentially from both sides.

Miller: Right. We're in position, and what happened was, I kept telling them, "There's a propane tank there. We don't want to go that way." They said, "No. Don't worry. The Harrisburg International [Airport] firetruck will take care of that propane tank."

Once the assault started, the Harrisburg International [Airport] firetruck went first and just opened up this canon, and it's probably about this big in the front [he's motioning that it's at least 12 inches across in diameter] of just water... thick water... and it just blew the whole gate down. There was a propane tank in there... it blew the propane tank out of the way. Inmates were just scattering... they were just running, because they didn't expect us to be able to get through the gate. They expected us to hit the gate on foot and then they were going to blow us all up. So, they're scattering. As soon as we got through the gates, that's when shots were fired at the inmates.

I probably went a head a little bit. I actually had a shotgun at the time. The shotgun was taken away from me.

McNaughton: Who took it from you?

Miller: I think Capt. Kerstetter, and the state police said it's not a good idea that one of your officers has a weapon and we're going in ready to shoot, because he has to work here for the rest of his life... the rest of his career, and he doesn't want to be the one that shot an inmate and then go in to work the next day. Which, when they explained it to me that way... I'll be honest with you, I wasn't crazy about given up the shotgun... but when they explained it to me that way, I was like, "You're right," and I handed over the shotgun.

McNaughton: But it wasn't just you... it was other...

Miller: Yeah, but I couldn't see. I couldn't tell who else was around. I don't know who else was there, to be honest with you. I don't. It was dark...

McNaughton: And it was smoky.

Miller: Smoky. Fire's still burning. So, we get through the gate, and shots start ringing out. It went from craziness to screaming and yelling and popping with fires and banging and chainsaws and torches... you could hear all that... helicopters flying over... and it went completely silent after all the shots were fired. All I remembered seeing was inmates scattered, laying on the ground moaning and groaning.

McNaughton: And this was about at dawn.

Miller: Right when the sun came up. We started securing the ones that were shot. We came through E Gate, and then we made our way to the front of the kitchen, and we formed a big line. From there, the decision was made to have the inmates come out of the cell blocks with their hands on top of their heads and then lay down in the compound area. That started to happen.

One... I think K Block... opened its doors first... or J... I'm not sure. It started to be a rush, and then they said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Just one at a time." The doors opened and inmates just started coming out... all these people in browns coming out with their hands up in the air.

I'm standing there not knowing what I should do... should I run out and handcuff them, what should I do? Then all of a sudden, I notice the one person in browns coming out of the cell block... it was Harold Mauer, one of the hostages who we thought was dead. It was him coming out, so I yelled... I'm not sure if it was to Capt. Kerstetter or Capt. Ragan, "That's an officer there! That's an officer there! Don't shoot!" He's not going to his knees, he was just roaming around. I ran out and grabbed him and pulled him back in. I remember when I grabbed him his face was swollen. His eyes were shut. At first, he was like, "Who are you?" I said, "It's Joe. Joe Miller." He recognized my voice and he said, "OK." I pulled him out of the line, and then I think Officer Campbell came out after that. Then all of the inmates just started piling out and laying on the ground. The officers that were there were grilling all of the inmates asking where the hostages were. We were able to get good information about where they were at and told state police, and they went in and got them.



Joe Miller kneels beside a hostage who was just released.

We just started flex cuffing the inmates that were laying out there until everyone was out of the cell blocks. Then we went through the cell blocks and cleared it out. I'm saying that like it took an hour, but can you imagine... it took several hours.

McNaughton: People said that they were also raiding and looting the commissary and then taking all that back to their cells. So, they were a complete mess.

Miller: Oh, it was unreal.

McNaughton: Rotting food and all kinds of stuff... and they [the cell blocks] were wet.

Miller: That's why there were a lot of rumors going around that some hostages were dead, because you can smell dead. That smell... like a dead animal. You can smell it, but here it was... they hit the kitchen and took all the hamburger out and they hid it in the plumbing chases in the block. All that heat with the... then it cooked, and then it rotted. We thought for sure we had a body in one of the crawls spaces. We opened it up and it was four pounds of hamburger sitting there.

McNaughton: Ew.

Miller: Yeah. All of the inmates came out and there was a lot of yacking back and forth. Inmates were yelling at each other... blaming them for this... blaming them for this... blaming each other. They were starting to get a little unruly with each other. We found out that there was some in-fighting between some of the groups that were in charge of the inmates in the riot, and that sort of worked to our advantage.

We got everybody handcuffed, and I think we took them down to the main yard and just put them out there.

I can remember this like it was yesterday... when the last inmate went through the gate. I can't remember if I was sitting with somebody or if I was by myself... I sat down on a five-gallon bucket and I looked around... I'll be honest with you, I started crying. I was like, "I have nowhere to work tomorrow. Where am I going to work? They just burned this institution down. I don't have a job anymore. Not only did they destroy some of my friends' lives who were officers there, but I have nowhere to work. I can't work here anymore. This place is a mess." It looked a lot worse then, but when you were looking at it, it was like, "There's no way this is going to be a jail again." It was just... holes in walls... things were still burning. Part of the fence in the yard was busted through. It just got to the point where you're like... I always thought that this would never happen at Camp Hill and it just happened. It's like something's impossible until it happens. That's so true about this situation that we were in.

McNaughton: When did you finally get to go home?

Miller: After we got the inmates out into the yard, then I guess it was decided that the state police would guard them out there... and local law enforcement... because they were getting relieved. We weren't getting relieved because there was no one to relieve us. I think there were 200 some officers injured in the riot. Some people didn't want to come back to work. Some people didn't want to come to work. I'm not going to judge them. I'm not saying that it was a

picnic. I was scared just like everybody else was, but we came to work. So, we couldn't leave until there was enough local law enforcement and state police there to watch them out in the yard. Once that happened, we were able to go home. We went home and they said to come in the next morning for your normal shift. So, I came back in the next morning and inmates were still out in the yard. We did a lot of searching... did a lot of moving inmates. Then after a while, they started identifying ringleaders... being that I was the acting lieutenant of Group 2 and 3, it was my job to go get these inmates that they are pulling out to interview and question or lock up or transfer... one or the other. We did that for the next few days. We were working 12-hour shifts, I remember.

McNaughton: Yeah.

Miller: Then that's basically what we did. We just moved inmates around the whole time.

McNaughton: And then Saturday, I believe... Friday night into Saturday, they were starting to plan to ship the inmates out.

Miller: Yeah. We got them ready. We got them all strip searched. We started loading up buses.

McNaughton: There was a time there when they weren't able to do count. They were missing an inmate... one inmate. It turns out that there must have been an inmate snitch that, in the middle of it, they just took him out to Cumberland County Prison. Jeff White was one of the transporting officers, and he never gave up that he did that until finally he was told, "If you want to keep your job, you better tell us about it." Sure enough, then after he gave that information and who it was – because they knew who they were looking for – then count cleared. It was several days later.

Miller: I never knew that. Isn't that something? The basic everyday stuff in the institution for three or four days, I was totally out of touch. Other than what you hear on the radio... and what I heard on the radio was mostly officers crying for help... which I still hear it to this day... you can hear their voices...

After that we start processing the inmates and they were being shipped out to other facilities throughout the country... California and all over the place... Kentucky... everywhere. Just coordinating and getting the buses in and getting the inmates on the buses with the proper paperwork... it was a job... very difficult.

McNaughton: It was difficult, because the records office was damaged, wasn't it?

Miller: Yep. Yep. A lot of these inmates have separations, and you can't... the records are a mess... you can't tell who's who. I remember the one time that the one bus driver was stopped coming in the gate because he was a relative of one of the inmates that he was transporting. A lot of this stuff was transpiring and but, in their defense... they didn't do this before. It was the first time they ever did this.

Another thing too, and whoever's listening to this... is the forgotten people are the hostages and their families. Somehow the department has to come up with something where, in any situation that causes a trauma to a staff member and their family, that the department does their part in following up with the families. It just takes its toll.

The people... we tried as officers and coworkers to take them out for dinner. The pain that it causes them... it's unbelievable.

I think I told you about the one hostage whose wife couldn't turn the lights off in her house all night long because her husband wouldn't let her... couldn't shut a door because he didn't want to be enclosed in an area because he was kept in an enclosed area and beaten for days... couldn't sit in a car, because as soon as the car doors closed he would run out... didn't want to be shut in. He had a five-speed truck and his wife didn't know how to drive it, and their family was out of state, so there was no one there to help them – other than their coworkers, which is the right thing to do.

We should do that – but there should be a mechanism in there somewhere where the department has something in place – like a procedure ... here's what we do, we follow up with the hostages and their families and make sure they have what they need to deal with what they're dealing with. Because they're dealing with a broken person. If they were a hostage for any length of time, they're not thinking right. It was an eye-opener for me. That's for sure.

McNaughton: Tell me about debriefings. What kind of debriefings did they have back then, immediately thereafter?

Miller: There were counselors on site. In fact, they wanted all of the officers who were there to visit a counselor.

McNaughton: An actual prison counselor?

Miller: I think they were from throughout [the DOC]... and there were people from the Inspector General's Office there too, so it was confusing, because the IG wanted to know what the administration did during the riot; and it turns out later on they wanted to know what you did during the riot. It was conflicting. It was confusing.

So, the counselors were there just for the staff, and you were asked to be interviewed. I personally refused to be interviewed, because I thought that I would have to answer a question honestly and then they would tell me I had to take six months off from work, and I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to do that to my fellow officers, because our force was depleted to begin with. There was no one relieving us... no one able to come into work. I refused to be interviewed. Some people followed my way and they didn't get interviewed either. Some people did, and went in there and were told to take four months off from work... you can't come back to the institution until you see me. It created some problems, because a lot of people took advantage of it, but after that then it was the part of... do we still have an institution left? Do we still have a job, and that's when Supt. Beard came... and Deputy Kyler. We were told that the current administration was relieved of their duties, and then Supt. Beard and Kyler came...

McNaughton: ...and McCullough.

Miller: and McCullough, and that is when the institution changed... when they got there. The reason I say that, is because, for the first time... we had administrative staff coming up to us saying, "What do you think about this? Should we do this? What kind of concerns do you have?" They were actually asking our opinion on things.

Then they put together a step-down committee that included corrections officers – not lieutenants and captains – corrections officers, sergeants, lieutenants, food service, maintenance, clerical... any department... and this was under Supt. Beard's direction... put this together, and that was the best thing that I've ever seen, because everybody had a say. You sat in this meeting, and you weren't afraid to talk. They asked you a question, and you gave them your opinion. You know, like, "We're thinking of giving them showers next week. What do you think about that? What kind of concerns do you have?" This is just an example.

Me being from security, I was able to say, "Here's the concerns I have. We don't have enough officers unless we move officers from one cell block to another." In other words, they gave you a mission and said, "How are you going to do it." Rather than just, "Do this," and worry about how you're going to do it later on.

State police and Supt. Beard and the staff... they saved us. They really did. State police saved us from the riot. Supt. Beard saved us to move forward and open up. He had a tough job. No one knew him. I didn't know him. No one knew if they could trust him. We all were questioning a lot of things. I'm not going to blame anything on anybody for the riot. It was a horrible situation.

We all have something that we probably could have done, but Supt. Beard and his staff really did a tremendous job in getting the place open up again. They opened it up slow and with the input of all the officers... all the staff... clerical, whoever... records... whoever was involved in running of the institution... you were a part of it.

McNaughton: Kind of helped to make you whole again.

Miller: Yeah. It did. It gave us hope, like, "Ok maybe we are going to have an institution. Maybe we are going to be able to open things up." He was reassuring, and he said, "We are going to have a jail here."

McNaughton: By giving you guys a voice, it gave you your power back and made you part of the team.

Miller: Yep, and it wasn't like... it was... they would ask your opinion, or they would say something, and they didn't expect you to just sit there and nod your head. It's like a basketball coach asking his assistant coach, "how are we doing?" ... "Oh, you're doing fine, Coach, but we're 0 and 20. We haven't won a game yet this year, but you're doing good. You're doing good."

They wanted you to open your mouth. They wanted you to tell the truth. They didn't always agree with what you had to say, but you had a say, and they listened to it. That was...

McNaughton: And you appreciated that.

Miller: I did. I can only speak for myself. I appreciated it. Then if things go wrong, then you're not pointing fingers, because you had a part of it. It was difficult, because... I'm speaking about me personally... as part of the step-down committee, I had to answer to the officers. They were like, "What do you mean we're going to give them showers? They don't deserve showers." I said, "You can't keep them locked up forever. We're going to eventually have to give them a shower, but we're going to do it our way. We're going to do two at a time with 10 officers. It's going to be very safe." That's what we did. It took us maybe days to shower a cell block, but we did it. The inmates knew that, "OK, they're showing us." They knew eventually we'd get to them. Then, slowly but surely, the institution started opening.

I remember yard when it opened up, we sectioned off all the yards and we let one cell block out at a time, and the inmates could bring absolutely nothing out to the yard with them.

It was nice because it was enforced too. We were able to enforce it. The opening up part... for me... at Supt. Beard's direction... it was the way to go. Yep.

McNaughton: Talk to me about now moving forward, when you're at the academy. Talk to me about how... what our CERT teams were like before and then what you helped turn it into.

Miller: Well, I was fortunate to be on Camp Hill's CERT team at the time of the riot, but at that time... I don't know how else to say it, but it was like a paper tiger. It was like a policy, but it had no teeth. We had names on a sheet of paper, but our training consisted of huddling up in an office and them showing us a three-foot wooden riot baton and then going through a couple motions with it, and then you were trained... you were ready to go.

There really wasn't much training, and in the leaders' defense, they didn't have much training either. They didn't know how to lead. We didn't know how to follow. We didn't have the equipment to be an effective riot squad, which is what they called it at the time. Some institutions were further ahead than others. There were. But Camp Hill wasn't at the time.

So, they decided that we needed to have standardized training for all the CERT teams throughout the state... every institution's going to have one, and they're all going to be trained the same way by the same persons. Randy Pollock and Ron Griffith developed the program, and I help them implement it. We ended up going around training all of the institutions. Got some pride back in the institutions.

McNaughton: Because that riot actually impacted everybody. It wasn't just something that was localized. Bring that pride back.

Miller: And it did. Later on in my career, I was fortunate enough to get the major's position at Frackville. When I went to Frackville and walked in the institution, I knew half of the officers... or maybe three quarters of them just from working with them for six months after the riot. Every institution was sending staff down for like six months after the riot to work with us, because without them, we couldn't do it. We couldn't run an institution. Until we got all of our staff back, got our staff up to complement as far as vacancies were concerned... there were a ton of

vacancies... plus all of the ones who were injured... all of the ones that were out on psychological leave... there were a lot of openings. All the officers from throughout the state sacrificed their time and their families and came and helped us out. We will be indebted to them forever. Them and the state police... yep.

A lot of good came out of it [the riot]. We realized that we have to do some things different... that security is important in the facilities. Not to say that treatment isn't, but it's hard to run a treatment program when you don't have security. One needs the other. That helped.

Communication with staff helped, for the most part. We learned from it. A lot of policies were changed. Emergency response changed. Now these institutions that we train their teams... now they had mandatory training, where they had so many hours... I forget now... but so many hours of training just to be a CERT officer.

McNaughton: Not just looking at a baton.

Miller: Right. Not just to show up and graduate class. You actually had to leave some sweat... and physical fitness standards, and you had firearms proficiency tests. You had to actually earn it.

McNaughton: And equipment...

Miller: And equipment... and the best equipment that we could find. We did. We had good equipment. It was a morale booster for the institutions, and then it progressed from there and went to sniper teams, to hostage recovery teams... I was happy that I was there to see all of that happen, and it was fun. We had K-9 teams. I remember... I said to someone, "What do you think about K-9s?" I was told, "Ah, we'll never have K-9s here. They're just show dogs. We don't need show dogs." "It's funny," I said, "because a lot of the larger departments have them and they're effective. They use them in their visiting rooms." I was told, "Ah, we'll never have it here."

McNaughton: Well, we started with four and I think we have 25 now.

Miller: Yeah. I think Commissioner Lehman... or Marty Horn got that started.

McNaughton: Marty did.

Miller: He was another one that was unbelievable. You could knock on his office door and go in and ask him a question, and he'd give you an answer. If you had something good to say, he would say, "OK, Let's do it." He was good.

We went from K-9s, we got trained sniper teams, trained hostage recovery teams, trained hostage negotiators... the whole program... the whole emergency response program came together. I've been retired for a while. I'm hoping that it still is, because it still has a special place in my heart. I still have my hat. I look at it all the time. I take a lot of pride in that. I really do.

McNaughton: Yeah, they are all still in existence.

Miller: I hope it continues on. Then eventually we actually did open the institution. But, again, it opened slow. I couldn't really tell you the date, because it was opening for a couple of years.

McNaughton: And even the staging down of the state police too. I remember when it was the time for all of them to be gone, and just kind of looking out the window thinking, "Oh boy." It was a big move.

Miller: Yep. It was. The big move was escorting an inmate without a state trooper with a shotgun with you. Any time an inmate came out of a cell block or was moved, there had to be a state police officer there with a shotgun.

McNaughton: Wow.

Miller: Yeah. Any time they moved. When we were walking them to showers... state police where there.

McNaughton: And some of those guys [inmates] were just sitting in the yard throughout the whole thing. They may not have been involved, correct?

Miller: Correct. The inmates learned from it. They were stuck in a cell with people they didn't know, and because we were starting to have inmate-on-inmate problems, we handcuffed the inmates in the cells and we leg ironed them to different things so they couldn't get at each other. Just keep everybody safe.

McNaughton: And then the conditions of confinement lawsuit that was brought.

Miller: Right. It was really to protect them... not for us. We had no enjoyment out of that. It's to protect them. The inmates didn't like it [the riot] either. I don't think they want to go through another one either right now. How soon people forget. That's the only thing that I worry about every day. As soon as you forget that then... it goes in cycles. So...

McNaughton: And another amazing thing is how vivid everything is 30 years later. Isn't it? It's just like you can see it...

Miller: It's our 9/11. I'm not diminishing 9/11 by saying that, but to me 10/26/89 sticks in my mind just as clear as 9/11 does. It really does.

McNaughton: Right. One of the biggest things you'd experienced.

Miller: Yep. I've got to be honest with you... this is the most I've ever talked about it since it happened. In training, I'd use bits and pieces to try to help reinforce what we were training them to do, but as far as ... a lot of people on the street, they want to ask you questions about it. I would just be real vague. It's not something you like to talk about. I don't think... I think everybody else... it's not something that was enjoyable. I don't like to talk about what I just talked about. I really don't, because it brings back bad memories. It was one of the worst days of my life.

McNaughton: Did you have nightmares afterward?

Miller: Absolutely.

McNaughton: I hope this doesn't bring nightmares back to you.

Miller: No, but yeah, you can't sleep. You just keep hearing the voices of people on the radio calling for help... and just seeing the families.... John's wife... just crushed... crushed. Seeing Tommy Campbell in the hospital with his legs three times the size and they had to cut them open... inmates just stood there beating him with a board. It just makes you angry. It really does. It just makes you angry.

McNaughton: And now you know why they took the shotgun away.

Miller: Yeah. Sitting there watching your fellow officers get beat and not being able to do anything about it... if that doesn't affect you, nothing will. I'll take that to my grave with me. It's something that I hated...

McNaughton: Do you have a military background?

Miller: No. I graduated from high school in 1973, and that's when the draft was over, if I remember. My brother tried to talk me into going because he was in the Air Force. I tried to go in the Air Force, but they wouldn't even take me. I couldn't even get in if I wanted to.

McNaughton: Is there anything else you wanted to...

Miller: I think are on the right track... we were on the right track in preparing institutions in handling situations like this, but the second part of it is... that if it does happen again... don't forget the hostages, and don't forget the families. It's not just, "When are they going to come back to work." They are going to have to work through things.

I remember some of the kids... some of their dads were like... [the kids were] scared to death seeing on TV what was going on and them knowing their dads were there. I talked to them. We all did. The group of us tried to make our rounds trying to talk to the hostages and their families and take them out to dinner... just trying to give them some kind of support. They are the forgotten ones, because after it happened, the administration in institutions are so busy trying to get things back up and running that you forget about them.

I appreciate this opportunity. Again, I was reluctant to do it, but you said maybe it will help other officers in the future do their job and understand what happened. So, if they understand what happened, to help them from preventing it from happening again, then I'm all for it. That's why I appreciate the opportunity.

McNaughton: Well, thank you.

Miller: I know you were here throughout the whole thing. I think it will be... if it's used the right way, I think people will learn from it.

McNaughton: Great. Thank you.

Miller: Thank you.

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