

Crowley Prison Riot of 2004

It was my first conviction as an adult and my first trip to prison. A three year sentence to be served in the Colorado Department of Corrections, at a private prison ran by C.C.A., called Crowley Correctional Facility.

I was a younger inmate, scared, and wondering how my life choices got me in this predicament. Time went by with few problems, till that fateful night. I was taking a shower when I heard a loud, repetitious, banging noise, uncharacteristic of normal everyday prison raucous. I looked out of the side of the curtain, and saw all hell breaking loose. Inmates were breaking open a soda machine with a heavy weight bar. Other inmates were throwing their sleeping materials, sheet's and mattress's over the railings, into the pod. I grabbed my clothes and ran down the tier towards my cell. After getting dressed, I left my cell and went downstairs. The pod was quickly filling with smoke and water. I was confused, not seeing any fire at first. I was choking on smoke and decided I had to try and get outside, or I could die. I entered the vestibule and glanced into the pod next to me. I couldn't believe what I saw. A younger looking inmate was continuously getting stabbed by a group of other inmates. Where were the Correctional Officers? I realized there were none in sight, and I had to survive so I could get home to my newborn baby and Wife. As I came to the front door of the building, there, the first fire was.

It blocked most of the doorway. A nice machine and what appeared to be mattress's were on fire. The acrid smoke burned my throat, eye's and nose. The heat was extremely intense, but it was my only way outside.

I hugged the wall tightly, the brick's hot from the flame's. I felt the fire licking at the back of me, but I persevered, and quickly cleared the heat. I fell to my knees on the grass of the softball field and greedily gulped fresh air. It was cool and refreshing, and life saving. Compared to outside the unit, the inside was a quiet walk in the park. As I stood up, I noticed that to the right of me, there was the greenhouse, erupting in flame's. A large group of inmates not far away, were attempting to cut through the perimeter fence with tool's that came from that greenhouse. Inmate's were running in all directions. Fight's and assault's were breaking out everywhere. Flame's lit the sky a bright orange and red. I had no idea where to go or what to do, but my mind was made up quickly as I heard the first gunshot ring out. A guard on the roof was opening fire with his shotgun on the entire yard. I saw the bleachers by the softball field a viable cover, and ran as fast as I could, quickly ducking the barely missing rounds that were whistling past my head. A few other inmates joined me, and then a few more, till room for protection was running out. We made a collective decision to try to make it near the control center. We raised our hands up

and took a chance. We slowly walked towards the gate that separated the two yards. Nothing was happening on the other yard, all inmates were locked down and I felt I would be much safer on that side of the prison.

There was a guard on the roof, the one with the shotgun. We told him we wanted no part of the riot and would like to go to the other yard. He told us to stay on the basketball court when we get through the gate, and we complied with that order. Of course I thought I reached safety, only to find there is no safety in prison. All was as well as could be. The guard on the roof kept up his shooting and we stood there.

I was naturally curious on what was going on on the opposite yard, so I took a step forward to look. This move did not bode well with the guard on the roof, as he yelled for me to step back. At that exact time, a SWAT team came around the corner. The first officer cocked his weapon, turned towards us, aimed at me and shot me in the side of the head and face. I hit the ground on my back, a loud ringing in my ear and a quick loss of vision made me think I was shot by a live round. Thank God it was a non-lethal round. I gathered my senses quickly as a few of my fellow inmates dragged me into the center of the basketball court. The tension was extreme already, and was about to explode into pure chaos. I heard a guy next to me yell that they shot on the wrong yard, and now it

was on. The yard that was calm, quickly and violently erupted. I was dragged over to the door by medical, where I pulled out a small black ball from my right ear.

A leftover piece from the round I took. As I sat there, I watched for about four hours as the entire prison rioted. Inmates started fires in front of each Unit, assaults were occurring all over, and the only guards, on the roof and on the outside perimeter, were pretty much helpless to stop it. The helicopters started to show up, buzzing above the prison. Guards were brought in from all over the state to quench the uprising.

Thankfully nobody died, but I've suffered from P.T.S.D. for years. I was one of a few hundred moved out of that facility, never to return.

The End