



Wayne L. Selle

Staff Position: Senior Officer

Location: USP Leavenworth

Last Watch: July 31, 1973

One week after a major disturbance at an Oklahoma state penitentiary virtually destroyed the site, 40 USP Leavenworth inmates associated or acting in concert with the Church of the New Song, a pseudo-religious organization, planned and executed an elaborate plan to disrupt operations at the USP. Institution officials had heard rumors that something might happen. As a precaution, morning watch staff had been held over and all off-duty staff had been called to report for duty. Officer Selle had been among those called in that day.

The disturbance started in the inmate dining room at about 11:30 a.m. Simultaneously, hostages were taken from near and inside the laundry area, and a riot broke out in A cell house, followed by a fire in the industries complex.

In A cell house, when a large group of predominantly black militant inmates refused to disperse, Officer Wayne L. Selle was instructed by the Number One officer to lock himself inside one of the utility corridors on 3 gallery; this was the last contact Selle had with staff. Officer Selle was later found dead from the stab wounds he received. Cell house A was secured just before noon, only 30 minutes after the disturbance began, but too late to save Officer Selle.

A staff member reported seeing a small black inmate chasing Officer Selle with a knife in his right hand, but the inmate was not immediately identifiable as he had his face covered with a t-shirt at the time. Inmate William Hearst was indicted for Selle's murder and committed suicide while awaiting trial. Four inmates were charged and indicted in Officer Selle's death; they were convicted of lesser offenses, including attempted riot, assault, and assault with intent to murder.

Four staff hostages (two from Custody and two Laundry Foremen) were held in the laundry for a number of hours, but were released unharmed around 10:30 p.m. following a meeting between prison officials, members of the media, and inmates involved in the disturbance. No inmates were injured in these incidents and no use of force by staff was necessary to restore normal operations in the institution. In all, 22 staff (including 8 non-Custody staff) suffered various injuries.

The subsequent investigation found three groups – black militant, white militant and Mexican-American inmates – responsible for disturbances in the different parts of institution. Specifically, black militants took part in A cell house actions, which resulted in Officer Selle's death; white militants were to act in B cell house, but no action materialized; white militants took part in the dining room and west yard actions, holding hostages; and Mexican-American inmates were responsible for the Industries area fire.

Officer Selle was a 20-year veteran of the U.S. Air Force, serving in Vietnam. He retired from the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth in 1972, where he had worked as a correctional counselor, then joined the Bureau.

Officer Selle was a very good friend of John W. Johnson, killed at USP Leavenworth in September 1974; another friend/co-worker witnessed both officers' murders.