



William A. Miller

Staff Position: Correctional Officer

Location: USP Alcatraz

Last Watch: May 3, 1946

Correctional Officer William A. Miller and Senior Officer Harold P. Stites were killed in the three-day riot and revolt by inmates at USP Alcatraz that occurred May 2-4, 1946. The major disturbance, referred to as "the Battle of Alcatraz" and popularly known as the "Alcatraz Blastout," started as an elaborate escape plot that ringleaders decided to turn into a fight to the death when the attempt failed.

On May 2, 1946, six inmates took nine officers hostage and broke into a gun gallery, where they secured weapons. When their initial plan to make their escape through the recreation yard failed, they took control of one of the cellblocks and settled in for a siege that lasted until the morning of May 4. While in control of the cell house, they severely beat the hostages and shot several of them point blank with one of the captured weapons. They also fired upon officers both inside and outside the cell house.

Officer William A. Miller was on duty in the cell house when "the Battle of Alcatraz" began. He had just finished letting several inmates out into the recreation yard and had not yet returned the yard door key to the gun gallery, where all weapons and keys were kept. Officer Miller was one of several officers and inmates taken hostage and placed in cells. He hid the recreation yard door key in the cell's toilet, and by the time the inmates found it, the escape attempt had been discovered. One of the inmates, Joseph Paul Cretzer, shot at the hostages confined in the cells, wounding several.

The U.S. Marines helped bring an end to the disturbance. Unfortunately, it took quite some time to rescue the officers and get them medical care. In all, 15 BOP officers were injured during the Blastout. Officer Miller did not appear to be as seriously injured as several other officers, but he died from shock and loss of blood.

However, apparently aware of his precarious and deteriorating condition, Officer Miller had the presence of mind to name his murderer before his death. His faint voice came was heard over the telephone from the section of Alcatraz Prison where he and two other correctional officers had been shot and tortured. His words were recorded in writing as witnesses listened. With the pain of speaking evident to his listening but unseen audience, Officer Miller stated: "On this date, May 2, 1946, at about 3 p.m., I, William A. Miller, being in a critical condition and believing I am now dying, make this my sworn statement: that I was shot with a .45 Colt revolver by convict Joseph Cretzer, who I positively identify."

Of the six inmates who instigated the disturbance, three were killed during the riot, two were tried and executed, and the sixth remained in BOP custody until the 1980s.