

# **SIGNIFICANT INCIDENT REVIEW**



**Mass Casualty and Fire Incidents During Inmate Riot**

**California Institute for Men**

**Chino, California**

**August 8 & 9, 2009**

**Chino Valley Independent Fire District**

**CA-CHO-0905199**

## **Overview of the Incident**

In the evening of August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the Chino Valley Independent Fire District (CVFD) responded to a major riot at the California Institute for Men (CIM) in the city of Chino California. The CVFD response began at approximately 2035 hrs with a dispatch to CIM for a “riot involving approximately 800 subjects”.

The first arriving CVFD engine company found a mass casualty incident (MCI) resulting from the riot and immediately requested additional resources. As the riot progressed, a fire was started by rioting inmates in one of the prison dormitories. Ultimately the incident was staffed with the following resources:

- Four CVFD engine companies
- One CVFD truck company
- 34 Ambulances and a supervisor
- One Cal Fire Engine
- A four engine Mutual Aid Task Force made up from the cities of Montclair, Ontario, Rancho Cucamonga and Upland Fire Departments
- Additional overhead including a Safety Officer, Branch Directors and the CVFD Fire Chief

**Total outside agency Fire & EMS personnel = 115**

During the 12 hour course of the incident 54 moderate to critical inmate patients were processed and transported to local hospitals and a large fire in a dorm building was extinguished.

Eventually it was determined that over 1300 inmates had been injured. No law enforcement officers or firefighters were injured. To date the true cost of this incident is still being calculated.

## **The California Institute for Men Facility**

When CIM was first opened in 1941 it was a minimum security facility in the remote dairy lands of San Bernardino County. As California’s correctional system grew with the growing state population, so did CIM. With the encroachment of residential and commercial development, and the needs of the prison system increasing, CIM became a more secure facility with an ever increasingly dangerous inmate population.

Today CIM is a large correctional facility that is the collection point for convicted felons or returning parolees entering the prison system from San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange and Los Angeles County jails. After being mentally and medically evaluated and classified, the inmates are typically transferred to permanently assigned institutions

elsewhere in California. An inmate's stay at CIM may range from a few months to a year before being transferred. Because CIM is a collection point of yet to be fully classified inmates, the inmate population ranges from relatively low level non-violent offenders to extremely dangerous third strike killers.

The physical structure of the institution is broken into four distinct facilities including the East and West Reception Centers, the Central Facility, and the Minimum Support Facility. There is also an infirmary which handles 100 chronically ill inmates as well as the basic health care needs for the inmates.

Originally designed for a maximum of 3160 minimum security inmates, CIM now has an inmate population of 5800. The staff of 2327 is comprised of custodial and non-custodial personnel. The facility is overcrowded, outdated and is a hotbed of racial tension. Unfortunately due to California's budget crisis there is little relief on the horizon for an overworked staff and facility. All of these factors increased the tensions that ultimately resulted in the riot.

### **Previous Riots**

Historically riots at CIM are of relatively short duration requiring a commitment of resources for just a few hours. In the past all injured inmates, even those with minor injuries, were moved to an outside triage area to be treated and either released back into the facility or transported to area hospitals. This arrangement was a burden to both the CIM staff which had to provide two corrections officers to escort each inmate to the hospital and to the fire and EMS system outside the facility. Previous incidents did not include a significant structure fire.

### **August 8<sup>th</sup>'s Riot**

CIM staff had been getting indications and intelligence that there was an incident brewing and had taken precautions by locking down the facility. This action restricted the movement of inmates within the facility and ceased outside visitation. Most inmates do not live in cells but in large dorms which limits how much physical control custody staff can exert over the inmates. At approximately 2000 hrs a major riot erupted involving several dorms in the West Reception Center.

### **The EMS Response**

The number and severity of injured inmates quickly overcame the staff's ability to treat the wounded so outside resources were requested. The CVFD established a triage area outside the facility in the visitor's parking lot (exhibits 1 & 2). Unlike past events, the infirmary staff only sent severely injured inmates to the triage area outside the facility.

This action reduced the number of patients that were transported to 54 and reduced the burden on custody staff trying to provide a two officer escort to all inmates being sent to area hospitals. The CIM infirmary treated nearly 1300 injured patients.

The triage operation was unique for several reasons including:

- Private ambulances had to move patients from the CIM infirmary to the outside triage area. Once outside the facility, the patients were triaged and prepared for transport
- All inmates had to be positively identified before being transported to the hospital. Due to the severity of injuries, CIM staff had difficulty identifying some of the inmates. Chino Police officers expedited identifying inmates by taking electronic fingerprints
- CIM policy requires that inmates being transported to the hospital are to be escorted by at least two corrections officers. Since most of the corrections officers assigned to CIM were engaged in suppressing the riot, transportation of injured inmates was delayed until corrections officers from other prisons could respond to CIM. Some of the corrections officers had travel times over two hours
- Since the riot was racially motivated, inmate patients were triaged not only by severity of injury but also had to be separated by race. There were in effect two triage lines

The EMS portion of the response went better than any previous incident. The cooperation between CVFD, the ambulance companies and the CIM infirmary was exceptional. Ground transportation was provided by AMR and was assisted by Cole Schaefer Ambulance. Cal Fire's Prado Fire Camp helicopter pad was used for three air ambulances that were utilized early in the incident. The air operation was coordinated by Mercy Air.

Patient identification and force protection was provided by the Chino Police Department and the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department.

### **Fire Suppression Operations**

The fire involved Joshua Hall which is a non-sprinkled, single story open dorm building built in the 1950s (exhibit 1). The fire involved ordinary combustibles and natural gas from a gas main broken by the inmates. The fire building's design and construction was unremarkable other than access to it presented a significant challenge for firefighters. The dorm buildings and yard area are accessed through a sally port and three layers of wire fencing (exhibit 1). The middle layer of the fencing is electrified. Response to the

fire was also delayed until the inmates in the yard could be controlled and force protection provided for the firefighters.

CIM has its own fire department consisting of a single engine company normally staffed with career captains and inmate firefighters but because of the riot, the inmate firefighters could not be utilized. CVFD Engine 3 made the initial fire attack and knocked down most of the fire. Eventually the CIM engine was staffed with career captains and the CIM fire chief and they were able to complete extinguishing the fire and performing overhaul. The fire resulted in the loss of all the dorm's contents and significant structural damage.

### **Incident Command**

This incident was managed as two distinct incidents. The riot was being managed by CIM staff in their DOC inside the institution while EMS, Fire, and Force Protection/Perimeter (Law Enforcement) control was being managed by a Unified Command (UC) structure outside the facility. The outside UC was comprised of the CVFD and Chino Police Department. CIM did provide an Agency Representative in the UC Incident Command Post.

The UC structure was comprised of the following:

- **Incident Commanders:** *Chino P.D. & CVFD*
- **Safety:** *Cal Fire, San Bernardino Unit Battalion 5*
- **EMS Branch:** *CVFD*
  - Triage, Treatment
  - Transportation
    - Medical Communications
    - Ambulance Coordinator
    - Air Operations
- **Fire Branch:** *CVFD Deputy Chief /CIM Fire Chief*
- **Law Branch:** *Chino P.D.*
  - Force Protection
  - Perimeter Security
- **Logistics:** *Cal Fire (Prado Fire Camp)*

The UC utilized the Chino Police Department's Command Unit which performed well. The UC structure remained in place until the CIM was declared secure and no more casualties were anticipated. The UC was demobilized at approximately 0820 on August 9<sup>th</sup>.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

### **What Went Well**

#### **Command**

- Initial arriving company recognized the scope of the incident, established command early and requested appropriate resources
- Transition to large incident organization was smooth and well organized. Unified command was established with Chino PD.
- Incident had three Branches: Fire Suppression, EMS, and Law.
- Key allied agency personnel used to fill command positions
  - Unified Command: Chino PD (Law)
  - Safety: Cal Fire
  - PIO: CIM
  - Ambulance Coordinator: AMR
  - Liaison: CIM
  - Helicopter Coordinator: Mercy Air
  - Logistics: Cal Fire

#### **Operations (EMS Branch)**

- The EMS/MVI organization worked very well especially considering the unique challenges of the incident such as:
  - The need to segregate patients by race in the triage area. The incident was a race riot and we did not wish to continue combat outside of the prison
  - Maintaining custody, security and positively identifying patients
  - Extended departure times due to lack of custody escorts which meant caring for patients longer than would be expected
- Mutual Aid worked very well and resources were adequate for the incident needs
  - Support from Cal Fire and neighboring fire departments
  - Ambulance mutual aid (coordinated by AMR)
  - Air Operations ( 3 helicopters coordinated by Mercy Air)
- Initial Triage by CIM staff inside the institution was excellent
  - Reduced number of patients leaving the institution
  - Reduced impact on local resources such as fire, ambulances, and hospitals
- Great support by CIM staff especially the CIM Medical Coordinator

## Operations (Fire Branch)

- Fire fighting in a prison is inherently difficult due to access, a less than accommodating resident population and the need for force protection. In this incident these obstacles were overcome with no loss of life or injuries to inmates or firefighters
- The fire building was a single story conventionally constructed open dorm with limited fire loading. The fire was controlled using hand lines and an interior attack.

## Logistics

- Typically riots at CIM have been relatively short events requiring little logistical support beyond what assigned companies bring to the incident. This incident lasted 12 hours so logistics was an issue
  - Adequate EMS supplies were provided by AMR
  - Meals for incident personnel were provided by Cal Fire Mobile Kitchen Unit (MKU) personnel from Prado Camp
  - CIM Provided a dumpster for medical waste
  - Gross boot and equipment decon station was established (due to blood)

## **Areas to Improve**

### Command

- The initial dispatch report was vague as to the scope of the incident and what resources were required (*this has been a chronic issue that can only be resolved at the Department of Corrections level*)
- Need to fully integrate CIM into a single command structure if possible. The riot portion of the incident was commanded completely separately from the fire and EMS portion of the incident (*Mitigations: Interdisciplinary planning and training may resolve this issue but, if parallel incident management is required, CIM must provide a Liaison that has full authority to speak on behalf of the institution, provide timely intelligence on the incident inside the institution, and be authorized to make financial commitments*)

### Operations (EMS Branch)

- There were long delays in getting patients off the scene due to a lack of Corrections Officer escorts (*Mitigation: Current Department of Corrections policy*)

*require an escort of two Corrections Officers per patient. Due to the extreme commitment of officers to quelling the riot, there were few escorts available until officers arrived from other institutions. In such incidents local law enforcement should be used to help in escort duty)*

### Operations (Fire Branch)

- Fire attack was delayed due to lack of force protection *(Mitigation: Preplan for this need with CIM)*
- Incompatible radio equipment with CIM Fire Department and outside agencies *(Mitigation: Radios for CIM Fire are on order)*
- Not all fire attack personnel were in full PPE *(Mitigation: Enforce compliance with SOPs)*
- “All Clear” for the fire building was not broadcast *(Mitigation: Reinforce compliance with SOP)*

### Logistics

- Multiple triage lines required additional tarps and equipment *(Mitigation: Purchasing of additional equipment In process)*
- Cal Fire did an outstanding job of providing fire line meals to the incident. Approval to purchase the meals was delayed by CIM *(Mitigation: CIM needs to provide a Unified IC or Liaison with spending authority. The support from Cal Fire worked so well that this will unlikely be an issue in the future but other purchasing needs may occur)*
- Recall of CVFD personnel to backfill committed companies worked poorly *(Mitigation: Work with the labor group to seek resolution)*

### Summary

This report reflects only the Fire Service and EMS perspective of the response to the CIM riot. Whatever conclusions have been made from the Law Enforcement perspective or from CIM itself have been limited. From the Fire Service view, the CIM personnel acted with great courage and professionalism. An ever improving professional relationship with CIM staff served us well during this critical incident. An excellent relationship with Chino Police Department proved invaluable in the Unified Command.

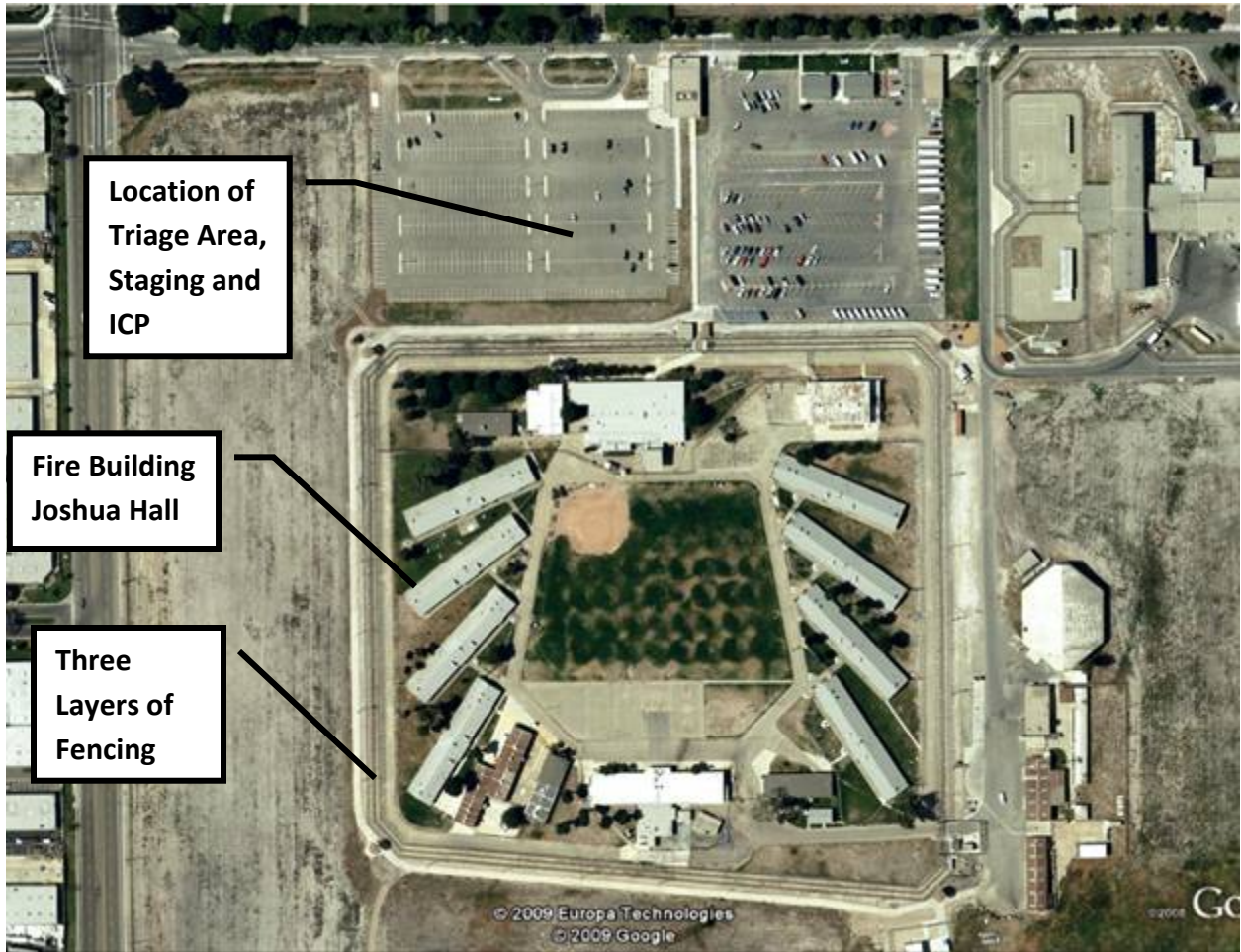
The Fire/EMS response functioned better than could have been expected. While there are certainly opportunities for improvement, the interaction between all the agencies and disciplines was excellent. The CVFD received great Mutual Aid support from the

surrounding city fire departments as well as from Cal Fire San Bernardino Unit. The support from AMR and the ambulance Mutual Aid from Cole-Schaefer was seamless.

In the final analysis 54 moderate to critical inmate patients were treated and transported to hospitals, a significant structure fire was extinguished, and there were NO injuries to emergency responders or CIM staff.

**Exhibit 1**

Below is the primary area involved in the riot. The parking lot just left of center was the area where the triage, staging and ICP were located. This area is outside of the secured perimeter of the prison



**Exhibit 2**

Below is a detail of the location of the triage area, staging areas, and ICP. Note the two triage lines required.

