

# Channings Wood to Nebraska

**Tom Taylor** is a Senior Officer at HMP Channings Wood and in this article he gives an account of his staff exchange with the Nebraska Department of Correction.

*This article is a follow-up to the one on the same theme by the then governor of Channings Wood - Roger Brandon in Issue 102 of the Journal.*

The opportunity for the exchange was the idea of Wessex Area Manager John May. More detail's of the mechanics of the exchange are the subject of another article due to be produced for American corrections magazines, so I won't try to reproduce them here.

Basically it is a self-funding exercise and as well as paying the airfare the exchanges are required to ensure that there is as little financial commitment as possible left for each other as regards utilities, ie, gas, electric, etc. We were both still paid by respective departments and I simply put all my outgoings onto direct debit. Our houses and cars were compatible and neither of us had children living at home so that made things easier.

Massachusetts and Nebraska were the only two states to actively show an interest in participating and I was given permission by John May to pursue an offer from Jack Currie a Case Manager in Lincoln, Nebraska. We were both keen to do the exchange and with the encouragement of our respective wives we corresponded to see if we considered ourselves compatible. That was in March 1993. We set a dateline of October 1993.

My wife and I went out to Nebraska in October 1993, Jack Currie and his wife met us and we spent a few days with them being shown the locale. I had a tour of the Lincoln Correctional Center (LCC) and my wife and I went to the Dept. HQ to meet the Director of Corrections Harold Clarke and Headquarters staff as well as me getting a new ID Card. After that few days Jack Currie and his wife left for the UK and we were left to cope with settling into a new situation. First thing for me was to get used to driving Jack's Chevrolet Automatic on the wrong side of the road.

## Staff training

The training academy is also in Lincoln and adjoins the Department HQ. I joined a group to

do the four weeks basic training which I was obliged to do as if I was a new employee. This was a condition laid down by the Nebraska Department of Corrections. Amongst my training group were potential guards, nurses, a pharmacist and a canteen operative. Of the group only the two potential guards and I had to complete the fourth week which included five man team cell removal and qualification with rifle and shotgun. The first two weeks were mainly theory on a wide range of subjects with a test on each subject which required a 70 per cent pass each time. The American Constitution plays a big role in prison life as well as elsewhere in the USA and cropped up in most subjects. Overall I would say that our UK training is as good as theirs but I could not have fitted into their system as Jack Currie did in ours with just an on the job induction period. The trainees before they start their course know which establishment they are joining and which shift they will be on. Their shift system is a straightforward three shifts therefore one of the two trainee guards knew he was going to the Penitentiary to work in a gun tower on the 2-10 pm shift. The other officer knew that she would be working on the night shift 10-6 in the Diagnostic and Evaluation (D & E) Centre which adjoins the LCC, it is linked by a tunnel (which also serves as a tornado shelter), so that inmates can be securely moved between the two facilities. Self-defence training includes pressure point control techniques (PPCT) which has a written and practical test which must be passed. The training also includes First Aid and CPR qualification. As I've said the training is comprehensive and each member of staff has a refresher course lasting for one week every year which includes First Aid, PPCT, shooting (for uniformed guards) and cell removal teams. If any part is failed it must be re-taken. Qualification is part of their conditions of service and this was the reason I had to complete and pass the training before I was allowed to work in their system. Training and re-training plays a big part in the Nebraska system and is encouraged and available.

I was encouraged to complete a mid-management training course three weeks before I came back because the training might be of value to me.

Having completed the training which had five days 'on the job training, fitted in between the training. I was now ready to start at the LCC.

### **Work, roles and responsibilities**

The prison is manned by unit staff who wear civilian clothing and uniformed officers who man the three gun towers as well as the yards. The uniformed staff do all internal escorts, visits and designated officers are the emergency response teams to answer alarms anywhere in the prison. They also make up part of the control unit staffing but not the segregation unit. They are ranked as in the forces, led by a Major, a Captain, Lieutenants, Sergeants, Corporals and Officers. The units are manned by a Unit Manager (PO) (0800-1630 Monday to Friday) a case manager (SO) on each shift 6-2 and 2-10 and four case workers on each shift.

Each unit can run with (and often does) two case workers. Each member of staff works a five day week with fixed rest days which are staggered so that the whole week is covered by the four case workers. With leave and sickness I quite often had to 'run the floor' with a case worker. The units are in two parts with a total of around 100 inmates in some single and some doubles. The doors could be opened by key or electronically from a central console outside the unit where the night officer did his shift with observation through an all glass frontage to the unit. There are no cell bells and at night the night patrol would only be alerted by inmates switching their light on and off. There were also no alarm bells on the units. Alarms were raised by means of a button on the radio worn by each of the case workers running the unit. The response is by the aforementioned emergency response teams of uniformed officers. However the number of alarm calls was small and never malicious, although occasionally accidental. All searchings (shakedowns) are done by individual case workers on the units. Each cell must be done twice a month and staff are held responsible to complete a fixed number each month. The staff member doing the search can have the inmate present or not while the search is done. At the end of the search the officer leaves the yellow part of a duplicate sheet in the cell with his/her findings including condition of cell. If any discrepancy is found however small a misconduct report will be written. If the cell is shared then both inmates would be held responsible and placed on report and the issue settled by a disciplinary committee.

The daily routine on the units is started with a tannoyed wake up call at 5.45 at which time the

first shift staff would be attending the guard mount where the duty lieutenant would be checking that he had his required staff numbers for the shift. At this time at least once a week the lieutenant would also give out equipment required to take random urinalysis samples as part of the anti-drug campaign. The same process is repeated at 1345 for 1400 and 2145 for 2200 the other shift changes. Breakfast would start at around 0610, the food being brought on to the units on heated trolleys. After I'd been there about six months a central dining hall was opened. All food handling was done very hygienically with two orderlies being the only ones touching the trolley or food. After breakfast inmates were locked down again until work call at 0730. Doors would be opened for about 10 minutes during which all movement would take place. Inmates could be in cell, certain areas of the unit or on the exercise yard if not working. No cell doors were left open, nor were inmates allowed to associate in other inmates cells. Once doors were closed they had to remain that way until the next 'door call' on the tannoy which would be one hour later when again inmates were allowed to leave or enter cells.

### **No smoking rules**

Inmates were permitted to smoke in their cells or on the exercise yard but nowhere else in the establishment. The same rules applied to staff except that they had no cells to smoke in. It was a ruling which I never saw broken. I often saw staff scurrying about trying to snatch some time on the yard. It is a big enclosed institution with a corridor which runs in circular fashion with the units leading off like spokes from a hub with the exercise yard in the middle. It was a lengthy walk from some of the units to the gate lodge so smokers could only use the yard, if they could get off their unit. Inmates were responsible for being at work, school, groups or medical appointments, etc, so the movement through the exercise yard was unescorted. The corridor was only used for the movement of inmates from the mental health unit or inmates from protective custody (PC), the segregation unit or the control unit. The latter two would be wearing orange boiler suits, plus handcuffs belted at the waist and leg irons. During these movements no other inmate movement would be allowed in the corridor. The corridor would be used for movement in foggy conditions. Inmates were only locked down completely once during the day at 1630 hours for a roll check, prior to tea being served, apart from the final lockdown at 2100 hours. Visits also went on during the day and evenings. Visits were subject to stringent conditions for inmates and visitors. Prior to anyone being allowed a visit the inmate had to

send out a proforma for each individual who wished to visit which included their social security number and was checked against FBI files before being passed back to the unit for final scrutiny. The whole process can take some time to complete. Visitors are not allowed to wear coats or jackets in visits or to take any bags in. They are also required to submit to a search. Any refusal to comply means they will not get in. Once in, visitor and inmate are allowed to embrace/kiss for 10 seconds at start and finish of the visit then they must have no physical contact. Like all the prison rules if they are applied consistently no-one can really complain. The visits room is also used for open parole hearings and anyone with a vested interest for or against a parole applicant may attend, and decisions are made on the day. Quite often a family would turn up to support a parolee and they would leave the prison on the same day together. However I believe that those who did not get a positive result still appreciated the opportunity to put their case directly to the board face to face.

### **Inmate misconduct**

Adjudications are dealt with differently as well. Misconduct reports are written on a basis of three stages of severity depending on the alleged disciplinary offence. Class 1, 2, 3, each class has about 12 paragraphs. Class 1 is the most severe and all of Class 1 and half of Class 2 are dealt with by a disciplinary committee with at least two members, one of whom would be an associate warden, a unit manager, Major, Captain or various other senior managers as chairperson plus a case manager or case worker or others of similar status to make up a committee. Lesser charges such as Class 2 second half and Class 3 could be dealt with by a unit disciplinary committee consisting of a case manager plus a case worker or mental health counsellor. The difference between the committees was that because of the more severe offences the institutional committee could award segregation, take good time (remission) and restitution above a certain sum of money. The inmate could defend himself to that committee by calling witnesses, disputing the evidence, etc. On the other hand the unit committee dealing with lesser charges could only award things like room restriction, lesser restitutions, extra hours of work, etc. If an inmate on a lesser charge opted for the unit committee he gave up the right to witnesses, to dispute the charge, in other words he threw himself on the mercy of the committee.

The misconduct is written by the reporting officer but the rule infraction is not decided by the officer who writes the report. This is the job of the Principal Hearing Officer (PHO) usually a

Sergeant who interviews the inmate and decides on the rule infractions. The inmate is given the opportunity to comment and is given a duplicate of the report and then has to wait to be called to whichever committee is deemed appropriate. In the US system there is not much use of staff discretion on misconduct reports and a lot of reports are written every day and a lot of them, to me, appeared trivial. However, the Warden, perhaps because he didn't have to deal with them, saw misconduct reports as a measure of how his staff were dealing with the many breakages of rules however trivial that occurs in any prison anywhere in the course of a day. It comes down to the need for consistency when following laid down rules which after all are for the benefit of staff and inmates.

There are many ways in which the Nebraska system differs from the UK and, I believe, in how each state differs from the others as well as the Federal system which is different again. A lot is to do with the location of the states, the diverse population, the funding, etc. Nebraska is a state in the Mid-West about the size of England and Wales together but with a population just over a million and locking up convicted inmates of just over 3,000 including about 100 female. Bearing in mind that the sheriffs department hold people before trial.

### **Death Row**

Another major difference is that of the death penalty. Nebraska has the death penalty carried out in the electric chair. Death Row is in the Penitentiary which is also in Lincoln and is about two miles from the LCC. I had the opportunity to talk to the staff at the Penitentiary about our system and was also given a tour of the prison. I visited Death Row and spoke to some of the inmates on there. Most of them had been there for a lot of years and there was not any apparent difference in their attitude to any other prisoners I had met. Having said that, there had not been an execution in Nebraska for 35 years but that was to change before I returned to the UK. Perhaps if I had been able to visit the Penitentiary again before I left there might have been a different attitude on Death Row. As well as Death Row I was also taken through the remainder of the procedure which ends at the chair. Nothing I saw or heard during the process of carrying out this execution including the feedback from staff inmates and the enormous media coverage has altered my opinion that it does not serve any useful purpose.

### **Centre routine**

Meanwhile back at the Lincoln Correctional

Centre life carried on as before. Work is as difficult to find out there as in our system. There are the normal institution tasks such as kitchen, laundry, works (maintenance), etc, and some VTC type courses such as panel beating. There was a lot of education, offending behaviour programmes and a law library manned by trained inmates where other inmates had access to legal books, etc.

The living units each of which could hold approximately 100 inmates in cells the same size but some of which were doubles, some singles. 'A' unit was for Protective Custody (R43) inmates, 'B', part of 'C' and 'E' were general population inmates. The remainder of 'C' unit was a segregation unit. 'D' unit where I worked held half sex offenders and, initially when I went there, drug offenders on treatment programmes. Latterly during my last three months the drug treatment programme was moved to a new location, also in Lincoln, an ex-services camp and given the title 'The Nebraska Chemical Treatment Centre' (NCTC). Their place in 'D' unit was taken by inmates who were mentally unstable and/or socially inadequate and who were controlled by a mixture of medication and psychological/psychiatric counselling.

Central dining, when it was introduced, was a well controlled exercise with the dining hall being manned by uniformed staff in the main at breakfast time with some help from case managers like myself who were on the early shift. I was generally to be found at the entrance checking that inmates were properly dressed in uniform with only the top button of the shirt allowed to be undone, belt buckle at the centre, etc. Meals were served on a tray by inmates behind a glass screen counter. The inmates were not allowed to take any food out of the dining hall and were subject to random pat searches (rub downs) as they left. The units were rotated on a weekly basis for meals and

breakfast started at about 6.10 and finished by about 7.15 ready for work call at 7.30. At lunch time the uniformed staff would be supplemented by case managers, unit managers, associate wardens and usually the Warden himself would be there. The meal would be one choice and the only diets I saw were some medical. The weekly menu was always posted a week in advance in the units so inmates always knew what was on. One choice of diet posted a week in advance helped inmates decide whether to eat or not. They knew nothing would change and generally at lunch time there was a full dining hall. Staff, if they wanted a meal, bought a ticket and joined the inmate queue for the same meal. The Warden usually had his lunch there and I never saw him 'jump the queue'. There was no staff canteen. Staff either brought their own food or ate with the inmates. It was accepted practice and I never saw it cause any problems. Inmates on protective custody segregation or in the control unit continued to be fed off a trolley taken to the units.

### **Acknowledgements**

I've tried to give a general picture of life in a maximum security US prison. There are lots of aspects I've touched on and lots I've missed but it would need a more comprehensive article than this to cover it all. In fact some aspects on their own would fill an article. Amongst other items are the variation in sentences, the parole system, the problems of gangs which carry on from outside life, visiting procedures, accreditations by the American Correctional Association which the institution needs to get Federal funding. This means a stringent inspection of every aspect of the institution every year, including volumetric control, property and inmates earnings. Mail is censored by civilian clerks and issued at 1600 ■

## **VERBALS**

"I fully accept that the Prison Service has to cancel courses. However it is apparent that cancellations are now very much the norm rather than the exception. Companies have given commitments at high level to ensure that suitable people can be made available to give awareness training to offenders. The goodwill embedded in that gesture will soon disappear if the Prison Service fails to demonstrate that a similar level of commitment exists in their organisation."

**[Baroness Seear commenting upon courses in securing employment on release in the Apex Trust Annual Report 1993/94]**