



SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Prison Riot

October 11, 1954

On October 11, 1954, a riot took place at the South Dakota State Penitentiary (SDSP) in Sioux Falls, with approximately 250 inmates participating. The disturbance began in the chow hall, reportedly over the meal that was being served, with inmates smashing dishes.

Four correctional officers would be taken hostage from a cell hall during the ordeal, yet no staff injuries were reported. One of the officers was released the first night. He hadn't initially been taken hostage, but inmates found him hiding in East Hall. He was released almost immediately.

The Associated Press reported tear gas was used to get inmates to return to their cellblocks, where they continued to break windows.

Right: An unidentified person stands outside the South Dakota State Penitentiary during the October 1954 riot.





Above: A view of the damage caused in a cellblock by inmates during the 1954 riot.

It was reported that every window on the south side of East Hall was broken out. Inmates were throwing whatever they could find out these windows toward the law enforcement and media who had gathered. Governor Sigurd Anderson called in the National Guard to assist with the disturbance. Food, complaints of abuse by staff and inadequate toilet facilities were among the grievances cited by inmates. At the time, there was still no plumbing in Federal Hall. Soil buckets were still in use.

The unrest ended the next night, with the remaining hostages released. Six inmates were injured. One inmate died, presumably from drinking hair tonic or shaving lotion. Several other inmates who drank the hair tonic/shaving lotion got sick from doing so.

The next year, the current recreation yard at the Penitentiary was completed. In 1957, indoor plumbing was installed in East Hall.