



Former inmate: Chino prison officer plotted attacks

By Mason Stockstill Staff Writer,

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CHINO - An officer at the California Institution for Men solicited attacks against an inmate there for raising too many complaints about the facility's living conditions, the former prisoner said.

Matthew Cramer, 38, who was released on parole in March, said his complaints have spurred an Internal Affairs investigation.

Officials at the prison deny an investigation is under way and said Cramer's charges are bogus. But he's pushing the case forward.

"She went to many inmates and said, 'Cramer snitched, Cramer did this, Cramer did that,'" said the former prisoner, who now lives in Visalia. "She tried to entice them to assault me."

The officer's last name is Duncan, said Cramer, who said he does not know her first name. Many officers typically do not use their first names inside prison environments.

Cramer's story appears to be backed up by written statements from several prisoners who said Duncan called him a "snitch" and a "rat" in front of others -- descriptions that can have

serious consequences for an inmate.

"She did this to make trouble for him and to get him beat up," wrote inmate Brian Watson in a statement.

Lt. Tim Shirlock, a prison spokesman, declined to make the officer available for comment. But he said Cramer's allegations are unfounded.

"I can tell you this much: When Mr. Cramer has been here, he's made several allegations on different issues, none of which turned out to be true," Shirlock said.

Cramer has been in and out of prison since 1992, when he was convicted of grand theft and embezzlement. Since that time, he has returned nine times for parole violations and once for violating a restraining order his ex-wife had against him.

In 1997, he was one of 25 inmates who testified in a federal trial against former officers at Pelican Bay State Prison.

Officer Jose Garcia and Sgt. Michael Powers were convicted of conspiring to arrange assaults on inmates at the institution in Del Norte County between 1992 and 1996. Additionally, Officer David Lewis was sentenced to federal prison for shooting an inmate he believed to be a child molester, but his conviction was later overturned.

Cramer most recently returned to state custody last year when he missed a meeting with his parole agent in July.

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The violation landed him at North Kern State Prison in Delano, but after an altercation in September, he was sent to CIM. Within days, according to his medical records, prison officials sent Cramer to the emergency room at Riverside County Regional Medical Center in Moreno Valley.

After he returned, Cramer was placed in the Cypress Hall day room at CIM -- a unit that had been converted into living quarters and was mostly occupied by inmates who were HIV-positive or had AIDS.

Once there, he launched a one-man crusade to have the living conditions improved in the unit. Inmates lacked access to showers with hot water, Cramer said, and cockroaches scurried freely throughout the facility.

He filed dozens of inmate appeal forms and began refusing meals. At the time, officials said no one at CIM was on an officially recognized hunger strike. But according to his medical records, the 5-foot-6-inch Cramer's weight dipped from 127 pounds on Nov. 24 to 113 pounds on Dec. 5.

Eventually, he started eating again in anticipation of his impending release. That's when the troubles with Officer Duncan began, Cramer said.

"Every time I talked to her about the showers, stuff like that, she didn't care," Cramer said. "When Duncan worked, she would say (to other inmates), 'I can't give you extra meals because

Cramer snitched to the sergeant, so if you want to handle it, handle it.' "

Such comments were said loud enough for everyone in the cafeteria to hear, said six other inmates whose written statements were supplied to the Daily Bulletin by Cramer.

On one occasion, Duncan called Cramer a rat and another inmate a child molester, "therefore putting both of these inmates' lives in danger," wrote Leonard Slaughter, a prisoner at CIM, in March.

Shirlock, the prison spokesman, dismissed the charges, as well as Cramer's claim that the Office of Internal Affairs was looking into any misconduct at CIM.

"I'm not aware of any active investigation at this point," he said.

Martin Aroian, the president of the local chapter of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, said he also didn't place much faith in Cramer's charges and hadn't heard anything about his latest complaints.

"Any complaint made by an inmate alleging unnecessary or excessive use of force would be investigated. The department is actually very good about opening those investigations," Aroian said. "They're not necessarily very good about prosecuting those investigations in a fair fashion. They persecute better than they prosecute."

Special Agent Richard Cortez of the Office of

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Internal Affairs has communicated with Cramer about the allegations, but Cortez said he was barred by department policy from speaking to the media and could not confirm whether an investigation was ongoing.

Cramer admits to being a thorn in the side of prison officials. Upon receiving a notice in March warning him that he was abusing the inmate appeal process, he promptly filed another appeal. He has sent e-mails to officers at CIM, taunting them with threats of a federal lawsuit.

He also appears aware of the gravity of the charges he is making. But he said that after testifying against officers in a sensational federal trial, possible repercussions no longer bother him.

"I have been beat, stabbed, set up . . . I have lost it all and have the injuries to prove it, too," Cramer said. "They can't do nothing they have not tried."

In fact, he appears to enjoy the thought of challenging a system that has so far taken so much from him.

"The officers took me aside and said, 'Cramer, as soon as you get out, this is going to go away. You don't have the guts,' " he said. "And I said, 'You're wrong. I'm not going away.' " Mason Stockstill can be reached by phone at (909) 483-9354.

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