

Tom Drake First Native to Head Major State Jail

FAIRBANKS—Tom Drake a 31 year old half-Eskimo from Nome was appointed last week as superintendent of the Northern Regional Correctional Institution—to become the first native in Alaska to head a major state jail.

Drake came to Fairbanks last month as assistant superintendent following the resignation of superintendent Morgan Grude.

As captain of the state jail, he heads an institution which draws its prisoners from many villages and towns in the northern part of Alaska. Over 50 per cent (as of the week he took over) of these prisoners are native, drawn from both Fairbanks and village Alaska.

In an interview with the new jail superintendent, in his airy, brightly lit office in the jail facility, TUNDRA TIMES asked Mr. Drake what, after several years as a correction officer, he thought were some of the major reasons natives and whites landed in jail.

“Alcoholism,” says Drake continues to be one of the major reasons men land in the state jail.

“Off the cuff, I would esti-

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mate up to 40 per cent of the prison population could be avoided by operating a detoxification center in downtown Fairbanks."

A center of this type, he explained, would be a place to "dry out" intoxicated individuals rather than charge them and send them to jail for 15 or 30 more days. "Sending these individuals to jail," he commented "serves little purpose other than to get them off the street or out of the village."

The new superintendent sees the work release program at the jail as one of two of the most hopeful recent innovations in rehabilitation. In Anchorage, he remarked, the program has been extremely successful.

At present, the state jail has 18 individuals in their work release program, Drake explained. Of the 18, two men do not return to the jail at night. One man is at the Seward Skill Center to learn a trade and another has been released to the Alcohol Rehabilitation Center in Fairbanks to enable him to attend college this fall.

"Right now, lack of space limits the work release program," Drake explained.

The solution, he thought, might be a Halfway House for prisoners, a project which requires money.

The program, he feels is especially important to men with short sentences (15 days, 30

days) it helps to retain their jobs while they serve their sentences. Many of these prisoners can only work during the summer and will be destitute all winter if they lose their job.

Mr. Drake grew up in Nome, went to high school there and in Anchorage and returned to Nome in 1961 where he joined the staff of the state jail there. Since Nome, he has worked for the State Chief of Correctional Institutions in Anchorage and later for the Regional Correctional Institutions in Anchorage and Juneau and the state Adult Conservation farm near Palmer.

By next week, he hopes to have his wife, Carole and their two children settled in Fairbanks where they will also act as boarding home parents for two high school boys.

While his appointment makes Drake the first native to head a major state jail in Alaska, he does not think this has anything to do with job discrimination against natives.

"The problem is we don't get enough native people who apply for jobs as correctional officers,"

At this point, he believes, he may be part of the last generation of correctional officers without college degrees.

"Right now, if I were to advise a young native or other young person about getting into corrections work, I would say that college is a necessary step."