

PRISONER CRUELTY CHARGED

'Chained to Tractor Four Treated as Dogs' Says Fr. Jules Convert

Charges of cruel and inhumane punishment—the chaining of state prisoners like dogs—have been leveled at the State by a Catholic priest and an acting village chief.

"We cannot but be indignant that men have been treated like dogs by the law and it will be a long time most likely before they forget it," said Father Jules M. Convert, S.J. of the Lower Yukon Village of Kaltag.

Franklin Madros, Sr., of Kaltag, agreed.

Father Convert and Madros were referring to an incident that occurred in early November at Galena.

Father Convert put it this way:

"The other day a state trooper with four prisoners in his custody was on his way to the Fairbanks jail. As frequently happens, there was no connection in Galena and they had to spend the night waiting for the next day's plane.

"Public facilities were already taxed to their maximum and there is no local jail, so the men were taken to a garage nearby and chained to a heavy tractor, in plain view of the men working in the shop."

Father Convert continued:

"These men had been found guilty and condemned, but while we can understand the dilemma of the trooper and condone his action in view of the necessity of accomplishing his mission, we cannot but be indignant that men have been treated like dogs.

"Is this a way to insure respect?" the priest questions.

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"And what about their own dignity and self respect? What about their wives and children?"

Father Convert places the most of the blame for the cruel treatment of prisoners on the state for failing to provide holding facilities in villages and upon the failure of the state to make provisions for more expeditious use of the airplane by state troopers.

"Why is the state police forbidden to use their own planes in their job so they can accomplish it efficiently and inexpensively as possible? Is the policeman on his beat obliged to use a taxi or the common carrier bus?"

"Referring to the men chained to the heavy piece of equipment, Madros wrote: "I'm all in favor of these men going to jail but to treat them like dogs is the part I really don't like. You might pass this information to the Fairbanks Native Association."

Captain Donald McQueen, commander of the Northern Division of the State Troopers in Fairbanks, at first refused to discuss the incident at Galena telling this writer, "I do not have any responsibility at all to inform you of anything." But as the writer started to leave the State Trooper premises, Captain McQueen relented.

He said that at least one of the prisoners was violent and that "whenever a prisoner is violent we are going to use whatever means we can to restrain him from injuring either himself or others."

He said the prisoner was chained to a piece of heavy equipment in the state garage at Galena and that while the trooper went to get a guard that the prisoner broke his leg irons and escaped. He said he was later apprehended.

McQueen, upon further questioning, admitted that holding facilities were desperately needed in villages. "We have tried everyone from the Health and Welfare to the State Jail and we haven't been able to get them,"

McQueen said.

He suggested that the village of Galena provide its own holding facilities as Tanana had done. McQueen said he had even suggested to Ralph Perdue that he attempt to get the Tanana Chiefs to do something about the problem.

Other sources indicate that this is not the first incident of prisoners being chained. Perdue told Tundra Times that in July of 1968 it was reported to him that a juvenile male had been chained to a power pole all night in the rain at Galena. Perdue said he went to Juenau and talked to a high official of the State Troopers about that incident.

Other sources indicate that the chainings have been ordered by magistrates.

The four men involved in the recent incident are serving sentences now in the Fairbanks State jail: Dateen Andre, 58, Kaltag, serving 179 days, \$100 fine for assault and battery; Jimmy Malemute, 42, Galena, serving six months for petty larceny, escape, and malicious destruction of property; Raymond Nickili, 39, Kaltag, assault and battery, serving 179 days, \$100 fine, with 149 days suspended; and Matthew Captain, 31, of Galena, serving 179 days on each of two counts—assault and battery and drunk in public.

Andrew Demoski, of Galena, told Tundra Times in an interview that most of the people there felt very bad about the chaining incident. He said it was felt that the trooper could have deputized a person in Galena to watch the prisoners and could have found a room in which they could have been detained.

He said the shop where they were detained had a concrete floor and was quite cold.

Father Convert sums up the situation this way: "The deficiencies of our State penal facilities are known, but unless something is done immediately to improve them in our remote areas, men will continue to be exposed as its victims."