



TWENTY-ONE INMATES OF THE ELLIS PRISON unit near Huntsville are enrolled in the heavy equipment school here at A&M. They are currently building a 13 mile levee on the unit under the direction of A&M and planning by the Army Corps of Engineers. Pictured are, Al Jones, chief instructor of the school, and (from left) James Koonce, Hickey McCook and Thomas Oliver, inmates.

## Heavy equipment school teaching convicts a trade

A select group of inmates at the Texas Department of Corrections' maximum security Ellis Unit are using heavy equipment to build a free world future.

Four days each week they leave the double fence prison complex, travel through sprawling farm-land and climb aboard powerful earth moving machines to attack nature.

The inmates, under TDC supervision, are constructing a 13-mile levee to protect thousands of acres of Ellis Unit farm land, threatened by flooding from the Trinity River when Lake Livingston fills.

Two crews are currently working the levee.

One has 21 men enrolled in a training program conducted by the Heavy Equipment Operators Training School at A&M through a Texas Criminal Justice Council grant made available to TDC.

The other crew has inmates who either came to the prison system with a heavy equipment skill or were trained during a similar school at A&M last year.

Al Jones, chief instructor for the A&M program, said the 19 inmates and two TDC guards in this school will complete 9,500 feet of levee by the time the program ends next Friday.

Jones estimated the men will move 90,000 yards of dirt. The average fill is 6 1/2 feet with three-one slopes.

The students also dug four culverts, assisted in the laying of culvert pipe and built the excavation ditch along side the levee. "We've done exceptional work," Jones declared.

He noted the inmates work four 10-hour days a week, from 7 a.m. until 5:30 p.m.

A&M instructors Bill Lofgren, George Berry, J. C. Humphries and Jesse Ladd travel to Huntsville every Monday and stay un-

till Thursday afternoon, giving the inmates on-the-job training.

Robert Gilliam, TDC director of vocational education, said the program is an attempt to train a prison market.

He said most of the inmates had no skills. All are trustees with a number of years to serve before being considered for parole.

The unexpected happened, however, when one class member was released last week.

Gilliam, at 29 one of the youngest corrections vocational directors in the nation, explained the inmates "are receiving an excellent opportunity to learn a trade."

Although two guards are included in the class, there is no armed supervision and the guards are often separated from the inmates during the work process.

Gilliam disclosed 356 inmates from throughout the system applied for the training and the 19 were selected after careful screening.

The students range in age from 25 to 55 years old. Gilliam said they draw trusty time, getting two days credit for each day as trustees.

"They receive no special privileges," he added.

When training is completed, most of the class will be assigned to heavy equipment jobs throughout the TDC system. Several will stay at the 1,500-man Ellis unit to work on the levee job, expected to take at least another year to complete.

Gilliam said he anticipates two more heavy equipment training programs for short-term inmates and conducted by A&M.

Last October 15 inmates and two guards completed the course at A&M and six of the class have been released.

"We have very high morale from the men who take this

vocational course," Gilliam observed. "It is one of the main conversation topics in the cell blocks."

Jones predicted future classes will follow the current training with A&M bringing the equipment school to the inmates.

He said the main advantage is the men see their work and take pride in building something constructive.

Six weeks of the 15-week program were spent at the Heavy Equipment Training School on the A&M campus.

The group moved to Ellis, 12 miles east of Huntsville on the Old Riverside Road, on July 17. A&M transported its equipment to the site, along with the five instructors.

Jones explained the river presents no danger except at flood level, when a major portion of the cultivated farm land is threatened.

The levee will protect the cotton, sugar cane, grain and garden crops, and cattle will be grazed outside under normal conditions.

Plans were drawn under U. S. Army Corps of Engineers supervision and initial construction began in January, 1970.

Inmates and TDC staff are the labor force, with inmates also involved in engineering and field survey.

TDC received federal grants for its equipment used on the levee project. A&M is paid through Texas Criminal Justice Council money received by the state from federal Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act funding.

The Criminal Justice Council funds are made available through the office of the governor.

### Oilers cut Naponic

HOUSTON (AP) — Rookie quarterback Bob Naponic of Illinois was among four men cut Tuesday as the Houston Oilers reduced their roster to 40 players.

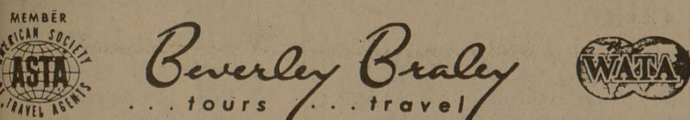
Also cut were defensive end Charles Blossom from Texas Southern and running back Bill Dusenbery from J. C. Smith College, both rookies, and second year wide receiver Paul Zaeske from North Park College.

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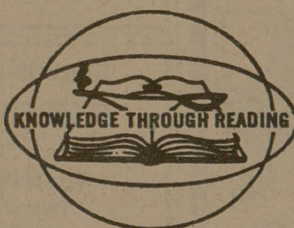
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