



Warden Heinze examines weapons used in riot.

SEVEN GRATING WORDS broke the reverent silence in the chapel of California's Folsom Prison near Sacramento:

"All right, you guys, get over there!"

We had just finished a hymn. There had been a moment of silence as our song leader, Joe Krake, thumbed through his book looking for the next hymn, "He Lives." Then those terrifying words! Three men leaped from their seats and ran down the aisle shouting, "Let's go!"

I thought: could this really be happening? Was it possible that a service to God was being used for a prison break and that we, who had come to comfort imprisoned men, were to be hostages of a few desperate convicts?

As minister of education in the Assemblies of God at Sacramento's Bethel Temple, I had gladly accepted an invitation to hold services at Folsom that eventful Sunday, Nov. 26. With me were 16 members of Bethel's Extension Department who visit people in institutions.

We all stood on the platform in shocked surprise, watching the three lawless prisoners advance. "Get over there," one shouted at us, indicating the left side of the stage. The blue-denimed prisoners in the congregation seemed like statues—except one.

"Come on, you guys. Help me stop them!" he shouted. Later I learned this was Conrad Becker, 41, serving a life sentence for armed robberies. Despite his record, he was known as a "religious" man, and evidently he was incensed by the blasphemy he was witnessing.

"Don't let them do this!" Becker yelled. He lunged at the men as they came up the platform steps. They grappled and fell in a tangle of bodies. A knife flashed, and Becker was stabbed in his side. The convicts started toward us again—~~but~~ Becker was determined.

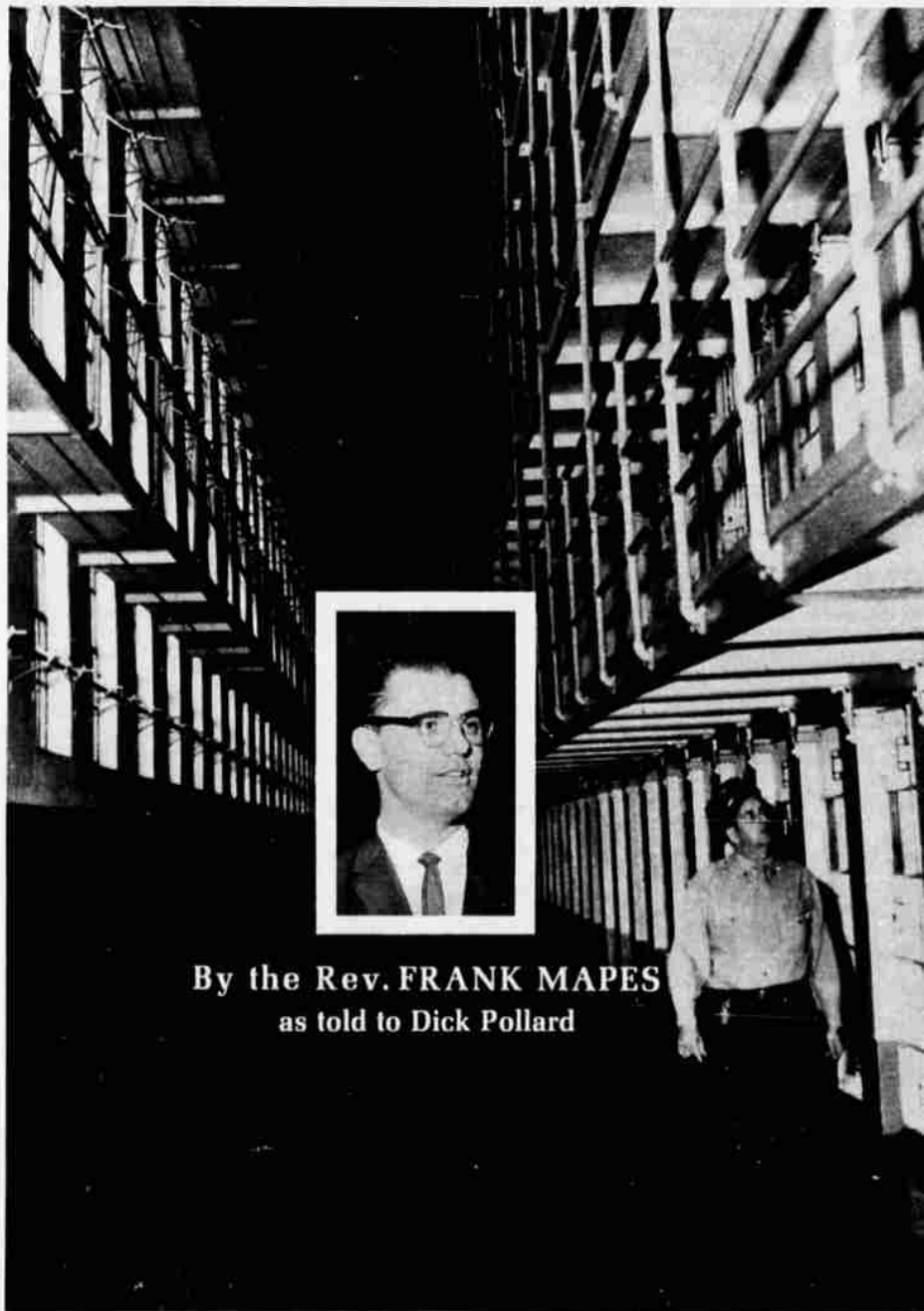
Painfully, he rose to his feet and attacked the rebels again. They fought amid grunts and cries, a swirling mass of deadly anger. The knife flashed again. Becker stumbled. How vividly I can see him! He had lost his shoe in the struggle and now, with life draining out of him, he groped for it dazedly, then staggered toward the chapel door and collapsed outside.

"Over here," one of the mutineers said. "Move fast!" He held a crude knife in his hand and was trying to isolate a few of us from the rest of the Bethel group. Most of the congregation was hurrying out the chapel's front door. I had an idea: I would pretend I hadn't heard him and try to join the others escaping.

"No!" one of the mutineers yelled at me. "We want you, too." He grabbed me and gave me a push toward the chaplain's office. The convicts broke a window to unlock the door and herded seven of us inside. I recognized my fellow hostages as the Rev. Heath Lowry, part-time chaplain at Folsom; Naaman Hall, Sunday-school superintendent; Howard Hooker, a teacher; and members Frank Dotson, Herschel Dean, and Joe Krake.

Our captors were Farrell (Red) Fenton, Edward William Maher, and Edward Vaughn, who were each serving life

A MINISTER'S STORY: I Was a Prison Hostage



By the Rev. FRANK MAPES
as told to Dick Pollard