

# MADRAS RECORD OFFICE.

Government of Madras.

*Judicial* DEPARTMENT.

G.O. No.

1709

Press

M.H.

152-153

Dated

17.10.1862

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*Proceedings of the Madras Government, Judicial Department,*  
*17th October 1862.*

No. 152. Read the following letter from W. ROBINSON, Esq., Inspector General of M. Police; to T. PYCROFT, Esq., Chief Secretary to Government, Fort Saint George, dated 3rd October 1862, No. 2,279.

General Department.

I have the honor to submit a copy of the Report of the Deputy Inspector General of Central Range on the escape of Convicts which took place at Vellore from a working gang on the 20th ultimo.

2. The gang was 48 strong, guarded by eight\* Policemen; 37 made their escape, 17 have been re-captured (amongst them the ring-leader Cullen,) and one was shot, leaving 19 unaccounted for.

\* 1 Deputy Head Constable.  
7 Constables.

3. The escape took place from the gravel-pit at the foot of the hill. A most tempting place; where the ground was covered by boulders and great rocks. The spot is cut off from the suburb of the Town by a prickly-pear hedge.

4. The Convicts made for the hills at the foot of which they were working. Place and circumstances curiously favored their plans.

5. The gang suddenly overpowered the guard and possessed themselves of the arms (loaded but uncapped) of three of them. The other Constables failed to fire. And the pursuit, until taken up by the European Inspector and re-inforcement, was not what it should have been. The men were afraid. They have been brought to trial, convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

6. I attribute the out-break to the great and tempting facility afforded by locality at which the persons were at work. It was so successful through the want of pluck in the Police guard.

7. I have looked into this latter point. The men sent on this duty were not fit to hold their own against the band of ruffians. The order requiring that selected men in a state of discipline, shall be employed over Jails could not be enforced as explained by Captain Hearn. The Jail

duty at Vellore is so heavy that to afford even a little relief, the guarding of Jail and Convicts is taken by rotation with the Town guards. Instead, therefore, of a properly trained disciplined and experienced body being kept up for this duty, relieved from the Head Quarters Reserve, ordinary Policemen, quite fit for street duty but not for this, had been sent out with the Convicts. This will be placed on a proper footing for the future.

8. The Jail Guard at Vellore requires strengthening, as shewn by Captain Hearn, and I will address Mr. Rhode on this and the other subject contained in this Report.

From Captain CHARLES HEARN, Deputy Inspector General of Police; to the Inspector General of Madras Police, dated Vellore, 29th September 1862.

I have the honor to submit a detailed report of the circumstances connected with the escape of 37 Convicts from a working gang, which occurred, as you are aware, at this place on the afternoon of the 20th instant.

2. I was then at Chittoor. The first express containing news of the occurrence went through to the Superintendent of Police who was at Tripetty without being seen by me. I first received an authentic report of the event on Monday morning. I reached Vellore that evening, and having investigated the facts next day and received some information regarding the supposed route of the Convicts still uncaptured, I started off in pursuit from which I returned yesterday. This accounts for the unavoidable delay in forwarding this Report.

3. From the statements of the Police Guard, whom I took to the spot, but whose story is obviously unreliable in some points, added to the accounts given by spectators and by the captured prisoners, I believe that the circumstances were as follows:—

4. A gang of 48 prisoners had been working for some days at the foot of the hills at Vellore town, where they were employed in digging gravel. These hills branch out into different spurs which run away into the country for some miles. The escape occurred about

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\* 1 Deputy Constable.  
7 Constables.

3 P. M. The balance of evidence tends to show that the Police Guard\* were negligent and that a few of the prisoners had managed to stray beyond the cordon of Sentries amongst the boulders of rock, upon which they gave a signal to the remainder. This much is certain that 37 Convicts rushed off simultaneously, overpowered those Constables who were in their way, possessed themselves of 3 carbines, belonging to the Constables whom they overpowered, and made off in a body along a road which winds round the base of the hills and at the distance of half a mile crosses a dip between the ranges. The remaining 10 Convicts were working at a little distance with cart under charge of a prisoner maistry. This man behaved admirably and repressed the Convicts under his immediate charge from making any attempt at escape.

5. The conduct of the Police Guard at this crisis was, I regret to say, disgraceful. I can find no extenuating circumstances. They appear to have been quite paralysed by the unexpected event. The Convicts had 3 loaded carbines in their possession, but the Police knew well that they were uncapped. The Police on the other hand had 4 carbines, with a supply of caps and ammunition, yet no attempt was made to follow up the Convicts and bring them to bay by firing upon them; a single determined man could have done this, for Convicts loaded with irons cannot move fast. The Police Guard have been tried by the Joint Magistrate and sentenced one and all to 2 years' imprisonment with hard labour. Their misconduct was so astounding that I should have suspected connivance were it not that men will not face the certainty of such rigorous punishment. I find that previous to the entertainment of these men in the Police, one had been a Sepoy, another had been employed in a Cavalry Riding School, the rest were Shopkeepers.

6. There appears to have been unnecessary delay, which cannot be satisfactorily accounted for, in reporting the escape. Inspector Holloway heard of it at  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 4, and at once rode in pursuit. Such men as could hastily be collected from other duties (for there is no Reserve at Vellore) were already toiling up the hills, but the Convicts had long since disappeared over the crest of the range. Chase however was vigorously given, notwithstanding the difficulties of ravines and nullahs; villagers joined heartily in pursuit, and when Inspector Holloway reached the village of Vencatapooram after night closed in, 9 Convicts had been re-captured; of these one was taken by Inspector Holloway after a personal encounter in which he received a severe blow from an iron tipped stick, seized by the Convict from a shepherd whom he met in a field. Another, who also offered resistance, was shot by a villager with slugs and died shortly afterwards. Night prevented further chase. The search was resumed next morning but without success. The Convicts had disappeared and there were no fresh men to send in prolonged pursuit. Expresses were sent in all directions, and seven more Convicts were captured on Tuesday the 23rd in the neighbourhood of Timmery Station, by the Police and village authorities. Amongst the seven was one Koollen, a desperate character, who once before was detected in planning an escape and who is supposed to have been the leader in this instance. Two more Convicts were taken on the same day near Arnee, one by Inspector Ruthnum Moodelly, another by a Police Taliary, making in all 17 Convicts re-captured, 1 killed and 19 still at large. Two carbines have been recovered, one is still missing. I tracked 9 Convicts into the belt of jungle at the base of the Iavadie hills, 40 miles S. W. of Vellore, but they were at least a day ahead, and once there, pursuit was hopeless. They must, however, either cross the range by foot paths, or try the Singarpettah Ghat or make along the foot of the hills into S. Arcot. In any case the country has been raised ahead of and around them, and the Police in each District are on the alert. I have little doubt that some will yet be picked up; 12 of those still missing are, however, Lumbadies, Korchas and Hill men. If these met with any of their own tribe they will merge into the mass and recognition will become almost impossible.

7. It is obvious that this escape was only rendered possible by the negligence and cowardice of the individuals forming the Guard. There are certain points, however, connected with the occurrence which I wish to bring to your notice.

8. This is a Subsidiary Jail kept up to the strength of 180 prisoners only. The Guard allowed is therefore but small, viz., 30 Police of all ranks at the ratio of 1 to 6 prisoners. The number actually employed is 33.

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9. In the Central District Jails the number of prisoners being large, the Jail party is strong also, and performs the duty permanently. The numerical strength admits of the actual Guard over the Jail (furnishing sentries day and night,) being constantly relieved from the Police parties who go out with gangs. Thus the duty is not too heavy. The whole Jail party are drilled in a body every morning and constantly exercised in firing. They become disciplined and accustomed to act together. They are under special charge of a Reserve European Inspector who constantly visits the gangs at work. The supervision is very complete. Lastly, there is always a Reserve of men at hand to act in support.

10. At a Subsidiary Jail at an out-station the case is different. At Vellore the whole Jail party are at work all day either on guard or with gangs, and the strength of the night guard including Hospital is 17—or one more than half of the Jail party. The men, therefore, sleep at home every other night only, and for 36 hours out of every 48 they are on actual guard over prisoners. It thus becomes absolutely necessary to give them some relief by exchanging duties with the Town Police every month. The only European supervision is that of an Inspector who has also the executive Police charge of Vellore Town and part of the Taluq, and who cannot, therefore, be always present, while it is difficult to find much opportunity for drilling men who are so perpetually on duty.

11. Such being the disadvantages of a Subsidiary Jail, and the risk being certainly greater, one would suppose that short sentenced men would be drafted into these Jails, I mean men whose sentence is short, because their crime is of less daring character. I have been but a few days in Vellore, but I fully believed this rule was acted upon; I confess that it did not occur to me to inquire. But I was quite astounded on reading the list of escaped Convicts to find that so many of them were Gang and Highway robbers under sentence of 14 years' imprisonment.

119 men, sentenced to 14 years.

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12. I asked the Jailor how he came to put so many desperate criminals together in one gang. He has furnished me with a statement showing that out of 104 prisoners in Jail when the escape occurred, 119 were 14 years' men, while only 16 were under 7 years. I give details in the margin.

13. I submit that this should not be. It would almost appear that the drafting is left to the Jailors of Central Jails, in which case every Jailor would wisely get rid of his blackest sheep. Here we have 168 of the most ruffianly characters in the country congregated in one small Jail. It is true that many of these have but 5 or 6 years of sentence unexpired; but they are men of lawless mind, accustomed to face risk of punishment, and after 8 years' close confinement, the prospect of 6 more is sufficiently sickening to tempt escape if at all possible.

14. One of the re-captured Convicts had a chisel concealed within his leather leg-guard. He states that some of the other Convicts had chisels also, but of course will not say how they were procured. Either they were deposited near the grand pit by friends outside, or they were made by the convict blacksmith who works in the Jail. I incline to the latter supposition, because friends from outside would have furnished files instead of chisels, which are of little use in removing leg-irons. The blacksmith has no means of making a file. These leather leg-guards afford convenient receptacles for concealing small instruments, or other articles. They are not examined by the Jail Warders owing to the time and trouble expended in searching them. I have ordered the Police Guards not to take charge of a gang until the leg-guards have been examined. If the iron-rings chafe the prisoners, I should think a simpler and safer remedy might be found by covering them with list.

15. One of the prisoners stated that they had formed the intention to escape from the first day they went to work near the Jail. The Jailor, however, states that the gangs are broken up every 2nd or 3rd day, and that this gang was composed of prisoners from all the different wards. I have suggested that to break them up every second day would form a more exact rule. But where the number of prisoners is so limited and only 3 gangs of 48 each go out daily, the same prisoners must of necessity be constantly working together, another element of danger in a Branch Jail.

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16. In conclusion I venture to offer the following suggestions:—

I. That if it is thought absolutely necessary to keep up a Branch Jail at Vellore, the Jail authorities should be moved to discontinue the practice of concentrating the most daring criminals of the country in a place of confinement which is destitute of some of the safeguards existing at the Central District Jails.

II. That the Jail Department should be called upon to pay for a larger number of Police Constables than the usual complement of 1 to 6 prisoners. This suffices at large Central Jails, but does not suffice at Vellore for reasons already stated. At least 40 men are required at Vellore. This would give 16 for the actual Guard over the Jail and 24 to go out with the 3 gangs of 48 each—men returning tired from a hard day's work in the sun would not be called upon to perform sentry duty throughout the night, and *vice versa*. The Jail Guard of 16 would be relieved once a week from the 24 Gang Constables, and the work could thus be carried on permanently without undue demand on physical power. The Jail party of 40 men should be kept quite distinct from the Town and Taluq Police. It should be furnished and replenished from the thoroughly disciplined Reserve at Chittoor.

III. The Jail authorities might be moved to insist on a little more rigorous search of Convicts in Jail. I understand that a few months back the Convicts in Vellore Jail were found to have files in their possession, now they have chisels. The Police Guard must also be held responsible for this. But the out-door working system which takes Convicts amongst gravel pits, prickly-pear bushes and boulders of rock, affords great facilities for the deposit of articles by friends. These friends may not converse with prisoners but they can look on from a distance. The Natives are very expert at signs and desire of escape sharpens the faculties—next day a file is found in a certain bush and is slipped into the leather leg guard. This may escape the notice of a Constable, whose eyes are not perhaps quite so wide open as they should be, but thorough search by the Warders on re-entering the Jail must prove a thorough safeguard.

In offering these suggestions I do not seek to enable the blame which attaches to the Police Force for this most lamentable occurrence. Nothing can excuse the irresolution, if not cowardice, displayed. The gang of Convicts had probably gauged the calibre of their immediate keepers or they could not have dared the attempt. I do not think it could have occurred with the better disciplined men at District Head Quarters and most certainly with a Reserve at hand 19 out of 37 Convicts could not have escaped.

P. S.—I have written to Captain Cloete, Superintendent Police, Chingleput, to know if the same system of drafting the worst criminals is pursued in the Branch Jail at Guindy—a Jail of very weak construction.

(True Copy.)

(Signed) W. ROBINSON,  
Inspector General of M. Police.

No. 153.

ORDER THEREON, 17th October 1862, No. 1,709.

The Governor in Council has learnt with regret the escape of a large working party of Convicts belonging to the Vellore Jail, which is reported in the above letter. Of the 37 Convicts who escaped, 17 are stated to have been re-captured, and one shot, leaving 19 to be accounted for. It is understood, however, that three have since been apprehended at Madras.

2. The escape appears to be attributable to the gross misconduct of the Peons on guard; but it was favored by the nature of the ground to which the men were sent for work. Many of the Convicts were long sentenced prisoners, and it seems from Captain Hearn's letter that the majority of the Convicts in the Vellore Subsidiary Jail are of the same description.

3. The Peons on guard have been tried and duly punished by the Joint Magistrate. The Inspector General of Police is in correspondence with the Inspector General of Jails on the other points noted in the Report—and the Government will await the result. They would at the same time be glad to be informed by Mr. Rohde what notice it is proposed to take of the behaviour of the Convict Maistry whose conduct is so highly spoken of by the Deputy Inspector General, in para. 4 of his letter.

(Signed) T. PYCROFT,  
Chief Secretary.

Exd. F. Cartledge.

*Judicial Department.*

**PROCEEDINGS of the MADRAS GOVERNMENT.**

*Read the following  
letter from the Inspector  
General of Mofussil Police  
(Here enter 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1862. No. 2279)*

*Order thereon 17<sup>th</sup> October 1862 No. 1709.*

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J.P.

Ind. Gen. Secy  
Secy

Recd 18<sup>th</sup> Aug 18<sup>th</sup>

*Proc. of the*  
*1862. Department.*

No. 1109.

PROCEEDINGS OF GOVERNMENT.

*Dated 11/10/62*

*11/10/62*

*Regarding the check to  
inform them of the notice of  
proposed to take the behavior  
of the master to rightly  
the name of the Capt. Leavitt*