

Sheriff's Office Takes Disciplinary Action in Jail Escape

July 23, 2013

On July 16, 2013 at approximately 12:40 PM, 46 year-old James Edward Cantrell escaped custody during transfer from the courthouse to a transport vehicle. Cantrell was among a group of inmates being escorted from the courthouse back to the Hall County Jail after court proceedings.

As a result of an internal investigation into the incident, Deputy Larry Henslee and Deputy Jack Dodd have been terminated. Both deputies were assigned to the transport detail.

The investigation revealed the following:

The two Deputies assigned to the transport detail did not have the inmates in an orderly fashion nor were they positioned to properly monitor the inmates. They failed to notice Cantrell as he slipped out of line and concealed himself in the alcove of an exterior doorway while they were loading other inmates onto the transport bus.

A head count was conducted prior to exiting the courthouse, but the transport Deputies failed to conduct a head count once the bus was loaded. After the bus departed, Cantrell located a nearby work truck with the keys left inside and fled the area.

In addition to allowing the inmate to escape initially, the transport Deputy's failed to perform an accurate head count once at the jail and failed to immediately investigate once a discrepancy was discovered. These actions resulted in approximately a one hour and thirty minute delay in discovering Cantrell's escape.

Also contributing to the escape was the decision by the transporting Deputies not to use adequate restraints. Cantrell had apparently complained of a knee injury, and therefore was not placed in leg irons nor handcuffed behind his back.

State and local area law enforcement were notified of the incident, and the victim in the Cantrell case was contacted as soon as possible. Security measures were put in place by both the Sheriff's Office and Gainesville Police Department to ensure the victim's safety.

Sheriff Couch stated, "The Sheriff's Office has long standing procedures in place to prevent such incidents. Events like this are inexcusable, and this is a prime example of why procedures must be followed. Unfortunately human error allowed this escape to occur and not be discovered in a timely fashion. The bottom line is there was a failure to perform basic, frontline duties resulting in a very serious situation, and I will not tolerate it." The Sheriff went on to say " We will be reviewing our policies and procedures as well as conducting further training to ensure no further incidents occur."

Cantrell was arrested without incident on July 22 by the US Marshall's task force at a motel in Tucker, Georgia. Cantrell had been the target of an intense manhunt since his escape last week. Sheriff Couch advised, "While our goal is to never have an escape occur, I am very proud of the teamwork and dedication that was involved in quickly tracking down Cantrell."