

Inmates transferred out to quell jail protest

By KAREN SMITH

The Champion

A protest by 300 Maplehurst Correctional Centre inmates over the loss of their allowance is reportedly water under the bridge after 120 prisoners were transferred out of the jail Saturday.

A relieved Maplehurst acting superintendent Michael Stephenson said Tuesday that day-to-day operations were gradually returning to normal following the removal of inmates identified as ringleaders, and other militant protesters.

The 200 prisoners in the work unit, which helped staff perform kitchen and laundry duties, and about 85 prisoners enrolled in the jail's education program, staged the nine-day revolt against a new government policy that came into effect October 1.

The inmates refused to show up for work or attend school, leaving the classrooms empty and the kitchen and laundry duties in the hands of staff.

The policy removed the prisoners' \$5-a-week allowance for the jail's canteen, where they purchase items such as cigarettes and chocolate bars.

The Ministry of Correctional Services' original strategy to wait it out and hope the inmates would have a change of heart and return to their duties wasn't working, so measures were taken over the weekend to break up the protest, Mr. Stephenson said.

He said the 120 prisoners were reclassified and

transferred to 14 maximum security penitentiaries across Ontario. And the tension-filled atmosphere that was escalating to serious danger for staff and the public has calmed down.

"Most inmates were back to work Tuesday," he said.

Mr. Stephenson said the entire ordeal — from the inmates' massive revolt to the steps involved in dealing with the problem — was "extraordinary."

He said a number of specially-trained correctional officers were called in to help combat the difficult situation.

"It's never been done before," he said.

The amount of overtime hours and other costs involved in tackling the dispute were being calculated, he said. At press time, Mr. Stephenson said he could only comment that they were "substantial."

Prisoners at Guelph Correctional Centre and Rideau Correctional Centre near Ottawa staged similar protests October 1. The revolts lasted five days.

Concerned about the safety of staff, local 234 of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union called for the ministry to take a more aggressive approach to Maplehurst's dispute, arguing that protests left brewing could snowball into riots.

In one incident, a fire was reportedly set in the cell of an inmate who wasn't supporting the protest. The blaze was extinguished by staff and no one was hurt.

Blitz makes for lots of tickets

The OPP reports record-breaking results in the October 4 seat belt blitz.

In 24 hours, OPP officers across the province stopped 85,400 vehicles in the seventh annual Operation Impact — 4,000 more than last year.

As a result, police handed out more than 1,400 seat

belt tickets, charged 72 people with impaired driving and processed about 1,100 other criminal code and traffic offences.

"This year's results are some 30 per cent higher than last year's totals," said OPP spokesman Sgt. Terry Blace.

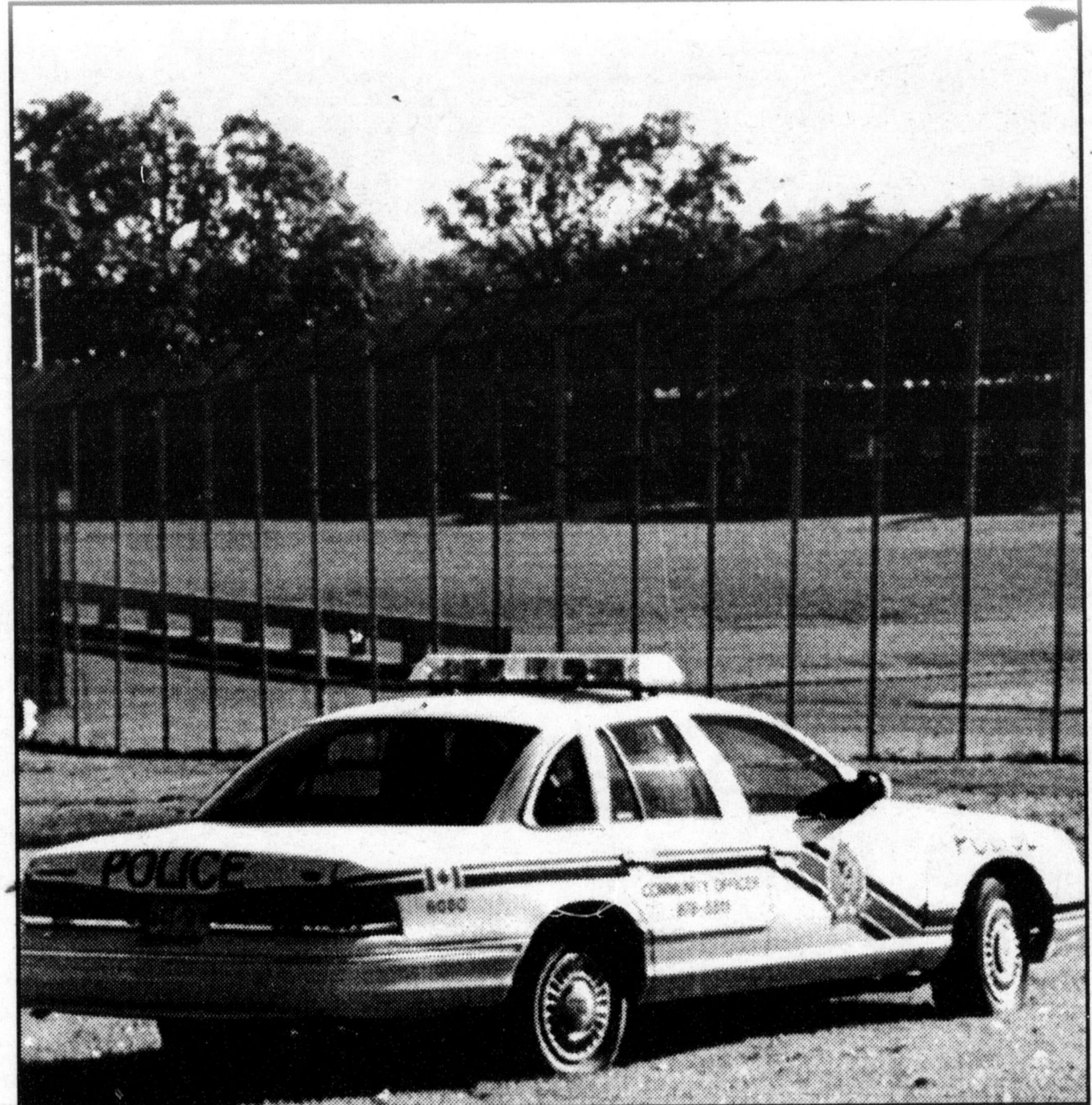


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

A Halton Regional Police officer in a cruiser watches the Maplehurst perimeter as troublesome inmates are transferred out of the institution.

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