

For Immediate Release
May 26, 2011

**MESCALERO APACHE MAN SENTENCED TO 27-MONTHS' IMPRISONMENT
FOR ASSAULTING COMMON-LAW WIFE WITH DANGEROUS WEAPONS**

Defendant Used Steel-Toed Boots to Fracture Victim's Jaw

LAS CRUCES – Today in federal court in Las Cruces, **Dennett Jerome Chee**, 24, an enrolled member of the Mescalero Apache Nation, was sentenced to a 27-month term of imprisonment to be followed by three-years of supervised release for his assault with dangerous weapons conviction. Chee also was ordered to pay \$29,399.97 in restitution to the medical providers who provided medical care to the victim of his assault.

United States Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said that Chee was convicted of assaulting his common-law wife (Victim) by kicking her in the jaw with steel-toed forestry boots in the couple's home on the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation on March 6, 2010. Chee was charged by criminal complaint on June 9, 2010, and entered a guilty plea to an information charging him with assault with dangerous weapons with intent to cause bodily harm on January 4, 2011. Chee has been in federal custody since his arrest on September 15, 2010.

According to the criminal complaint, an officer of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) learned of the assault on March 6, 2010, when he was contacted by medical staff at the Lincoln County Medical Center (LCMC) in Ruidoso, New Mexico, where the Victim was treated for her injuries, which included a compound jaw fracture. The Victim initially claimed to be assaulted by another woman at a party. This claim not credited by medical personnel or the BIA officer who responded to the call (i) due to the force required to cause the compound jaw fracture, and (ii) because the officer was aware of a history of domestic violence within the Chee household.

After the BIA referred the matter to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for further

investigation, the Victim admitted that Chee kicked her in the face with his forestry boot during a physical altercation between the couple on the night of March 6, 2010. The Victim apparently lost consciousness after Chee kicked her and woke the next morning to find blood on her clothing and bed. The Victim did not realize her jaw was broken until she attempted to drink water and found that her mouth hurt and would not close properly. After she attempted to close her mouth and heard bones in her jaw “clicking” together, the Victim woke Chee and let him know that she required medical attention. Chee arranged for a neighbor to take the Victim to the LCMC where she was treated for compound jaw fracture and then was transferred to the University Medical Center in El Paso, Texas for a surgical repair of her jaw.

The complaint alleges that, before the neighbor took the Victim to the LCMC, Chee admonished the Victim to lie about the cause of her injuries by claiming that she got into a fight with another female at a party. The Victim agreed to do so because she was afraid of Chee. The Victim agreed to provide a truthful statement only after her family prevailed upon her to do so and despite repeated calls from Chee while she was hospitalized during which he threatened to harm her and her family if she revealed that he caused her injuries. The Victim’s statements regarding Chee’s culpability were supported by witnesses, including a witness who heard Chee say, “I think I broke my chick’s jaw.”

According to the complaint, Chee fled the area after assaulting the Victim and was arrested by the BIA on tribal charges on May 18, 2010. During his period of flight, Chee periodically visited his home and had contact with the Victim, who did not notify the authorities of his visits.

In his plea agreement, Chee admitted assaulting the Victim with dangerous weapons, which he identified as his steel-toed forestry boot. Chee also admitted that the Victim sustained

serious bodily injury as a result of the assault.

The case was investigated by the FBI and BIA, Office of Justice Services, Mescalero Agency, and was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Mick I.R. Gutierrez.

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