Doll's pictures earn national showing

By Mary Kate Wells

Next month's National Geographic, renowned for its excellence in photojournalism, will feature the work of the Rev. Don Doll S.J., chairman of the Fine and Performing Arts department.

Doll said the culture of the Eskimo people was what he attempted to capture in his photographs. He made four trips to Toksook Bay, Ala. for the project.

It has been three years since the feature's completion and first layout in 1981. Doll said the feature has been revised and refined several times since then but this span of time is not unusual.

One different aspect of the feature is that it consists of black and white photographs, which is a first for National Geographic, Doll said. He said this media captured the "bleakness and harshness" of the Eskimos' lives.

Another unusual aspect of the assignment is how it was assigned. Then-associate editor and present editor of the National Geographic, Bill Garrett, asked Doll if he wanted a contract to do the feature. "They normally don't do that," Doll said.

Photographers dream of one day having their work published in a magazine that boasts a readership of 30 million. Doll said simply, "I'm glad they going to use it."

Virtually self-taught

Next month's publication is even more astounding when one considers that Doll is virtually self-taught. He took a beginning photojournalism class at Marquette University in 1964. Six years later he took his only other course in landscaping in Oregon.

Doll, 46, was born in Milwaukee, Wis. He entered the Jesuit novitiate in September in 1955. After two years he was sent to the St. Francis Mission, a Sioux Indian reservation in South Dakota. It was there that he first became interested in photography.

The equipment available to him was far from perfect. His first camera was plastic and didn't work, Doll said. One time he took five rolls of film, only to discover blank negatives after developing. He found out a year later that the film and chemicals he had been using were army surplus. However he did not get discouraged. Doll said he practiced photography during lunch, in the evenings and on the weekends.

Doll studied at St. Louis University and St. Mary's in Kansas before he was ordained in 1968. He became a instructor of photography in 1969. Five years later he was granted a one year leave from the university to photograph the Brule Sioux Indians in Spring Creek, S.D. and served as the parish priest.

Special recognition

These photographs were published in a book called "Crying for a Vision." In 1976 Doll received special recognition for these photographs in the World Understanding category in the Pictures of the Year Competition.

Exhibits of Doll's work are exhibited across the country, while he also does lectures and workshops on his craft.

Upcoming projects include another National Geographic feature on Sioux Indians, to be published next year, and a one week trip to the Holy Land this summer.