



—Associated Press

AUGUSTINIAN FRIAR William E. Atkinson is congratulated by John Cardinal Krol of Philadelphia after his ordination in Upper Darby, Pa. He is believed to be the first quadriplegic to be ordained a Roman Catholic priest. His brother, New York Jets middle linebacker Allan Atkinson, helps with the wheelchair.



—AP Wirephoto

The Rev. William Atkinson, 28, is the first quadriplegic in America to be ordained a Roman Catholic priest. John Cardinal Krol

congratulates him in Upper Darby, Pa. Brother Allan Atkinson, New York Jets linebacker, helps with wheelchair.

'THEY COUNTED ME OUT'

Sledding Victim Becomes First Quadriplegic Priest

UPPER DARBY, Pa. (UPI) — Almost nine years after a sledding accident which nearly claimed his life, William Atkinson yesterday became the first quadriplegic in America to be ordained a Roman Catholic priest.

Atkinson, 28, has been confined to a wheelchair since the Feb. 22, 1965, accident, but on special permission from Pope Paul VI, he was ordained into the Augustinian Order by the Philadelphia archbishop, John Cardinal Krol.

"They counted me out a couple of times," Atkinson recalled. One time, the doctor said That's it, and called the hospital morgue."

After a rehabilitation program, Atkinson, equipped with a motorized wheelchair, entered Villanova University to continue his seminary studies.

Atkinson's brother, Al, currently is the middle linebacker for the New York Jets of the National Football League.

"I had lots of time to reflect while I was lying on my

back," Atkinson said. "I saw all those people just responding to my needs. It was during that time that I put my life back together again. It was this response that encouraged me to keep going forward."

Atkinson said he wants to serve as a hospital chaplain.

"I'd like to go back and reassure these people that somebody loves them and that there is always hope," he said. "I could never have done it by myself, and so it goes. No one does it by themselves."