

# "I FLED THE CHAIN GANG"

Convict, Lashed with Cat-o-Nine-Tails by Guards and Superintendent, Unable to Walk for Six Weeks; Food Nauseating and Conditions Unhealthy; Guards Break Up Prison School.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This document setting forth conditions in a North Carolina prison, was submitted exclusively to the AFRO-AMERICAN Newspaper. Its author, of necessity, must remain anonymous.

I am a fugitive from a chain gang located in Salisbury, N.C., but being many miles from there, I feel most happy. At last I have a chance to tell about conditions in the prison camp I am known as No. 707 (authentic).

You can believe or disbelieve what I say here, or just let it go together. I will have had my say anyway, forgetting the fact that a convict's word is still not regarded as the truth.

In November, 1936, I was given fifteen months for a crime I did not commit. I cannot state the crime, for reasons, but I do say I was not guilty of it.

## Camp a Hell Hole

I was taken to the Salisbury prison camp, a shackled hell hole if there ever was one, where members of our race are treated like animals instead of human beings. The food was nauseating, the beds unclean and lousy, and the conditions most unhealthy.

Several times during our hard hours at labor I have seen the superintendent really whip the men with a cat-o-nine tails to speed their efforts. One can easily imagine the hated scowl on the super's face while doing this as well as hear the defenseless prisoner cry out in pain.

To be more straight to the point, real time was a gamble most of the time and a losing one for better food. Sleep at night was miserable, and work a hell which only the strongest men in the gang could stand.

## Months Like Centuries

For four months, which seemed like centuries, I stood the prison routine, sometimes hating myself for ever having been born. Then, the thought of escape constantly haunted my nights, often robbing me of what little sleep I could get with the ever-present lice.

I thought of famous escapes I had read of in books, concerning prisoners on Devils Island, famous prisons in America, and other chain gangs in the South. I had to get out or die trying.

Shortly before planning my escape, I was greatly shocked at the increasing number of the prisoners turning stir crazy from the disgusting treatment and the number shot in the past attempting to get out of the camp.

And I know it to be a fact that conditions at this particular camp still have not yet reached the attention of those residing outside its gates.

I saw that in the future my not-any-too-strong physical condition would make a maniac of me, under the treatment existing, after several months. I had to get out somehow, not only for my own good, but to run as far north as I could

and seek to expose Camp No. 707 in Salisbury, N.C.

I finally escaped in a manner which I cannot reveal, for I may have cause to use the same method again. I managed to cover a nice distance from the camp, but was captured by the cracker guards, assisted by (I hate to say it) colored trusties.

## Reprisals Terrible

What happened to me after they brought me back was terrible and certainly a stain on the State of North Carolina, which told the newspapers some time ago that such conditions of which I speak did not exist in their penal institutions.

**Strapped to a crudely erected whipping post, I was lashed by every guard in the camp as well as the superintendent. After that, it was six weeks before I could walk again.**

The prison doctor reported this occasion (only this particular incident, unfortunately) to Governor Clyde Hoey and an investigation was made. The result of it was nothing because the prisoners refused to talk and the trusties denied the happening altogether.

## Two Years for Escape Try

So when I was able to walk again I was taken to the prison and given two years (believe me) for trying to escape, and I really believe for bringing an investigation to the camp. I took it all on the chin as best I could despite the fact that I did not think I would be able to recover completely.

**One day I was returned to the prison camp from which I had escaped some time ago. I thought that after everything I had gone through they would be a little easy on me, but I was horribly wrong, for they do not want to ever give our race a chance to forget when you put something over on them.**

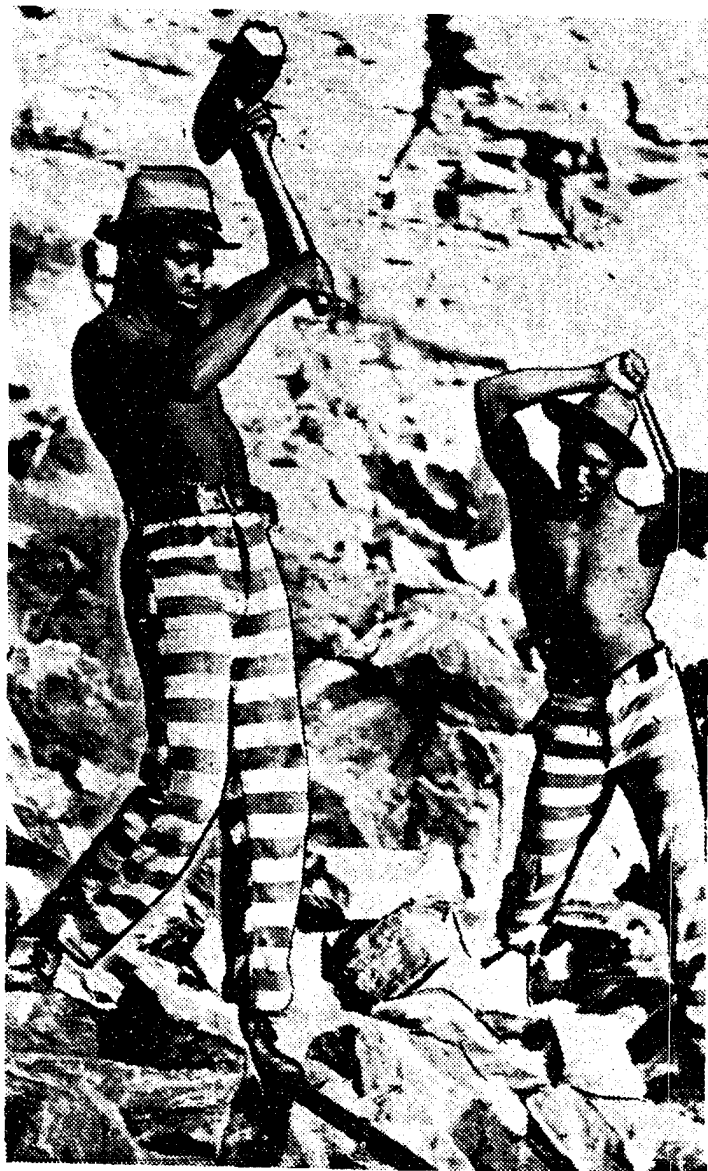
They made me wear chains (double-shackle type, they are called by convicts) with only twelve links or one foot. They kept demanding that I walk fast in them every day during the routine, and in time my silence broke and I screamed and pleaded that they remove them or add more links.

## Put in Solitary

Once my yelling excited the other prisoners and almost caused a riot, and so the superintendent had me put in the hole or solitary, claiming that I was trying to incite a general prison break.

**In the hole I was put for seventy-two hours, where one gets only a small portion of bread and water at no regular meal times. After they brought me out (I mean carried me out because of weakness), they actually made me work the morning of the same day, just as soon as I regained my feet.**

I complained only faintly this time to the superintendent. He is a Georgian and the boys must either make their sentences under the conditions or make a run and escape as I did. You probably will not believe it, but the guards hope and pray for such incidents.



Convicts on the rock pile.

They always say, when camp life is a little peaceful, that they wish one of us damn n—s would make a break and give them a little target practice. The word "colored" is not allowed in the conversation of the camp—not even by ourselves.

Not long ago we thought sure that camp life was going to become more bearable when the State of North Carolina gave the boys an opportunity to increase their knowledge, establishing a prison school, and some teachers from Livingstone College were engaged as instructors for the movement.

But the guards did not like the idea and said that on school nights if we did not miss classes we would not be permitted to see our folks or relatives on visiting days. If we did not attend classes, they knew we would be excluded from the school.

## Live for Visiting Days

We practically lived for the visiting days when we could see our folks and received gifts from them. So gradually the class at school decreased until there was not anybody to teach. The teachers did not understand, so the guards and the superintendent told them it was because we did not want to become educated, and they disbanded the school altogether.

**Back to the torturous prison routine we went, up to the time I again escaped and have managed to reach this far north. I hope to go farther, and even though I may be captured finally, I hope I can report the existing conditions**

**emphatically enough before then.**

It is my greatest hope that this shall be accepted as even half-way truthful and brought to the attention of North Carolinians or sympathizers of our group in all parts of the country.

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