

AS I SEE IT

By MONTE DEDMAN

It is not a pleasant task for the officers to take a man to prison. Especially so, when the man is being taken for the balance of his natural life.

To write the last chapter in the freedom of Charlie Stokes is not an easy task.

We sat in the County Jail at Columbus awaiting preparation of three prisoners to be taken to the State Prison: "Smokey" Joe Stallings for 42 years; Adolphus Littlejohn for 7 to 10 years, and Stokes for his life.

The minutes we waited seemed to mean little to us—but so great to the men. They reminded us of caged animals nervously awaiting the transposition to different cages.

The silence was almost unbearable, only the tinkling of the keys to the cells, and the audible sound of low voices of relatives who came to bid good bye, could be heard.

Sheriff W. D. Hines, Jailor John W. Conner, and Custodian Otis Dalton prepared the men for departure for Central Prison in Raleigh.

Sheriff Hines seated Stallings and Littlejohn in the front seat with him, and John Conner, on the right in the back seat; Charlie Stokes in the middle and placed us on the left of the "lifer".

Tenseness enveloped the whole procedure, and even those who were filling the orders of the State. Mr. Dalton, the custodian, who went to the car to see us off, showed an uneasiness of nervousness.

We left at 8:40 a. m. for the trip. During the journey, very little conversation was heard, especially from the prisoners. They never started a conversation, except for Stokes, who remarked after viewing a large field, "Corn down this way seems to be in good condition."

We talked to Stokes at every chance. We asked him if he had any word which he would like to send back by us; whether he had anything he wished to tell us "con-

fidentially. All his answers were "No".

We did learn some things, about Stokes, that the general public does not know.

He was tried for the double slaying of his wife, and brother-in-law on his birthday, Wednesday, August 31st—his 44th birthday. He was sentenced to "hard labor for the balance of his natural life" on September 1st. Also a birthday dinner was given him in jail by relatives, and attended by the jailor and others. Due to the fact that he was "celebrating" his birthday he was given two hours with his immediate relatives.

We also learned from Stokes that the only time he had spent in Raleigh was at the State Fair, when he and Clarence Cochran took some cattle there for exhibition. The man stated that he was right with God, and that his soul had been given to Him.

We arrived at the prison at 2:30. As we walked up the steps to the main entrance, we noted that Stokes was having difficulty in standing up after the long ride. Later we learned that he had been confined several years ago for 2 years with rheumatic fever.

Presenting the prisoners to the prison officials was a touching scene and our eyes swelled with unspilled tears, and we swallowed hard to clear the lump from our throat. We knew well and good that the proceedings would take all the privileges away from the men as "free citizens." We watched examination of the personal belongings of Stokes, which was 2 cartons of cigarettes, a tooth brush and paste, comb, brush, matches, and a Bible.

Central Prison at Raleigh, is by no means a delightful place, with its grey walls, and old brick structure. Some say it is over 200 years old. It stands like a silent sentinel watching over its captives.

We were shown around the building, with its many pried cells. Through death row, where 11 men were awaiting their orders from the Supreme Court to be put to death or given life imprisonment. The gas chamber is only three steps

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