

# GRIM PAST CLINGS TO DEVIL'S ISLAND

French Removing Last Prisoners From Infamous Colony  
But Visitor Views Relics of a Century's Horror.

(Second of a Series)

By JOHN A. THALE  
Times Foreign Correspondent

DEVIL'S ISLAND, French Guiana, April 2.—The prison the world has come shuddering to know as Devil's island is down to its last 15 prisoners.

When they are gone, the hellish place probably will become a coconut plantation.

After 22 years as a horror spot, Devil's island is being abolished. The present French government has ordered it abandoned, along with the other French Guiana penal institutions.

For one, find it hard to believe—after having been given full run of the place by the colonial authorities—that anything ever said of this infamous place could have been exaggerated.

What the world knows as Devil's island actually is three islands—Royale, St. Joseph's and Devil's.

They lie close together in the Atlantic about eight miles off the French Guiana coast, roughly 30 miles west of Cayenne.

All three comprise probably less than 10 acres.

Royale Colony's Center

Royale, center of the island penal colony, is a high-crowned island. A steep roadway—paved with smooth rounded stones, apparently taken from the seashore—leads to the top. The prisoners' barracks and cells, barracks for guards, hospital buildings, chapel, houses for doctor and superintendent, and other buildings are there.

Commandant Vincent, present head of the island penal colony, showed me the cells. We visited the barracks and workshops where thousands of deported French criminals paid for their crimes in blood and agony.

There were the isolation cells on Royale, stone caverns measuring some six by 10 feet. Men spent as much as three months there at a time in almost total darkness. Double doors of solid wood kept out virtually all sound. Most of the time the inmate was shackled to his bare board bunk.

No Rays of Sunlight

We stepped inside and Commandant Vincent closed the doors. A small porthole—high up in the wall—admitted so little light that the outlines of the bunk two feet away were barely visible. The porthole admitted no direct view of the sky, no rays of sunlight.

When a prisoner emerged from the isolation cell after three months, Commandant Vincent explained, he was given "two or three days to get used to the light again."

All of the island buildings have walls from a foot to two feet thick. Heavy, old-fashioned iron keys click open solidly-barred doors.

The rooms in the general barracks were designed to accommodate upward of 50 closely-packed prisoners.

Bare boards comprised the bunks. Each was equipped with iron bars at the foot so the prisoner could be shackled to it—by heavy ankle irons—at night.

The commandant explained that it wasn't as bad as it sounded, however. Prisoners frequently were able to obtain little pieces of soap, with which they were able to lather their ankles and surreptitiously slip off the shackles.

In a 40x100-foot courtyard between two of the long cell blocks, five worn stones were set in the rough cobbled paving. They formed the base for "the widow," or guillotine.

Here the engine of execution was set up, and the victim brought out to have his head chopped off, all within full sight and sound of the rest of the prisoners.

From a closet, Commandant Vincent produced an array of medieval-looking appliances used in quieting unruly prisoners.

He showed how a pair of manacles could be slipped on and screwed down until agony forced the victim to his knees.

There was a strait-jacket which Vincent explained, was slapped on the more unruly prisoners. Their legs there were drawn up tightly behind them and fastened to their trussed arms.

In the walls of most of the barracks were set iron rings to which the navy disclosed today.

## Subs Collide Under Sea—"It Couldn't Happen, but It Did"

PEARL HARBOR, April 2 (U. P.)—Navy officials disclosed today the "it-couldn't-happen" story of two submarines colliding in the Pacific during the war in a freak accident involving odds of 119,594,745,000 to one.

The collision occurred on Feb. 23, 1945, when the U. S. S. Flounder was rammed by the bow of the U. S. S. Hoe off French Indo-China in the South China sea. Both submarines were cruising at periscope depth.

Navy mathematicians, after extensive calculations, said it was "virtually impossible" for two submarines, each 300 by 27 feet, and each equipped with ultra-modern safety and detection devices, ramming in an ocean with 68,834,000 square miles of surface.

However, Cmdr. J. E. Stevens, Flushing, N. Y., and Lt. Cmdr. M. P. Refs, Belmont, Mass., commanding officers of the Flounder and Hoe, respectively, said it did happen whether it could or not.

In describing the accident, navy officials said:

### White Ship Shudders

The Flounder had just reported "all clear on sound." Suddenly, the white ship shuddered. About 30 seconds later, the ship trembled again and water began entering through an electrical cable. The soundman reported a tremendous noise and fuel lines were bent.

## COUNCIL MOVES TO AID CLEANUP

### Orders Investigation of Junk Yard 'Unsightliness'

The city council today took steps to abate juvenile delinquency, combat "unsightliness" in the city and approved City hospital request for federal aid.

In other action last night, the council also:

ONE: Approved a \$300,000 bond issue for new equipment for the city police and fire department requested by the safety board last Thursday.

TWO: Introduced and held for two taxicab ordinances, one calling for an increase of from 420 permits to 475 and the other for an increase of only 20 additional licenses.

THREE: Shelved approval of a parking meter purchase contract with the Magee-Hale Park-O-Meter Co. for 2000 meters pending further consideration.

Suspending council rules, the

R. C. (Bud) Dauss, Republican councilman, called for investigation of opening the city's public school yards as night playgrounds to alleviate the rising trend of juvenile delinquency.

"More than 72 per cent of the city's total crime is committed by children under 18 years of age," he asserted.

"We must do something to get these kids off the streets at night."

His safety committee accepted responsibility of contacting the proper authorities for opening the school yards.

Referring to The Times recent campaign to clean up the city and the approaching annual clean-up week April 15, Dr. Lucien B. Meriwether called for council action on the "unsightly" conditions that exist at many open junk yards throughout Indianapolis.

"Can't the council do something about fencing in the area in the 600-block on Senate ave?" he asked.

Aid for Hospital

Mr. Dauss also sought action on other similar junk lots. John A. Schumacher, council president, referred the matter to Dr. Meriwether, who promised immediate investigation.

Suspending council rules, the

city "fathers" last night urged the City hospital to make formal application to the Federal Works Agency for aid in the preparation of plans for construction work on new hospital additions.

"We shall ask the agency to advance \$8565 to aid in engineering plans for remodeling on the present auditorium and additional wings at the hospital," Dr. Charles W. Myers, hospital superintendent said.

He revealed that the construction of each unit would cost approximately \$200,000.

Post-War Vehicles

In announcing that council approved the safety board's \$300,000 bond issue would come at the April 15 meeting, Mr. Dauss, council safety chairman, stated that 66 post-war vehicles would be bought to replenish the two department's depleted fleets.

Purchase of two aerial trucks, seven pumper, three service trucks and accessories will cost the fire department \$184,000. The police department will receive \$116,000 for purchase of 45 passenger automobiles, five trucks, one emergency car, one station wagon and new radio equipment.

The parties will meet again today, however, to continue their attempts to settle the dispute over safety regulations and health benefits which sent 400,000 miners out of the

## 700,000 IDLE IN LABOR DISPUTES

### Coal Tieup Continues; Two Cities Lack Transit.

By UNITED PRESS

Almost 700,000 workers were idle in the country today because of strikes and shutdowns. Soft coal mines were closed because of a miners' strike and public transportation in both cities collapsed.

At Akron, 450 members of the C. I. O. transport workers union were on strike over a 32-cent hourly wage increase. The union had offered to accept 18 1/2 cents but reinstated its original demand last night after negotiations broke down.

Detroit transportation facilities were at a standstill because of a dispute between the city transit department and the Amalgamated Association of Street Electric Railway and Motor Coach Employees (A. F. of L.). The unions 5200 members have demanded an 18-cent hourly raise. The city has offered 15 cents.

Meanwhile, it was disclosed that Richard Sullivan, general manager of the department of street railways, had ordered all D. S. R. property locked and asked the police to keep employees off the property.

There was no sign of picketing as the strike wore through the second day, cutting off an estimated 1,800,000 daily fare in the nation's fourth largest city.

pit at midnight Sunday and halted output of fuel vital to the nation's industries and railroads.

Murray and Dwiln A. Price, president of Westinghouse Electric Corp., ended in a stalemate. The two officials failed to agree on a wage increase that would have ended the 78-day-old strike of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers.

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