

[Undated, possibly 1968]

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON PRISON LIFE

1. HOW LONG DO YOU SERVE ? Sentences vary widely from one part of the country to another. The average sentence for draft offenses was 32 months in 1967. You will be eligible for parole after 1/3 of your sentence has been served; parole may or may not be given. If parole is not given and you work at your job and generally cooperate with prison routine you will be released on mandatory good time after less than 2/3 of your sentence has been served.

2. WILL I HAVE CONTACT WITH OTHER PRISONERS ? Yes. In most prisons, following a short period of orientation, prisoners are assigned to dormitory-type living quarters where they mix freely with the other prisoners. Sometimes you may find that you have fifty or a hundred room-mates, and that can be a drag. Of course, you'll be among other draft refusers and people whose motivations for crime are akin to your own. Almost all federal prisons have draft refusers, including a few maximum security penitentiaries, even though most resisters are sent to minimum security prison camps.

3. WHAT ABOUT VIOLENCE AND HOMOSEXUALITY ? Physical violence is not a serious problem in minimum security federal prisons, where draft offenders are usually sent. It may be a problem in local county jails, where you may be held briefly before being sent to a federal prison. There is a good deal of homosexuality, much of it a substitute for heterosexual activity that has been denied. But if you don't want to become part of it, you can usually stay out of it. Most draft resisters report that with common sense and good judgment, a prisoner can handle most situations that arise.

4. WHAT ABOUT THE GUARDS ? The guards vary from prison to prison. In the youth prisons (including the reformatories where you may be sent if you are under 23, even though they are officially for prisoners between the ages of 18 and 21) the guards are mainly young rookies. There are some who feel they have to prove their toughness to the prisoners and other guards. They are always on the backs of the prisoners, and the hostility they generate usually gets redirected toward other prisoners for fear of penalty. In other institutions, where older men are confined, the guards seem more professional, more sure of themselves. At the prison camps, which are minimum security, there are few guards and most of them simply want the institution to run smoothly with as little work as possible for themselves. Corporal punishment is rare but not unknown in federal prison; usually one has to earn it.

5. WHAT IS A TYPICAL DAY LIKE ? Similar to the day of a factory-worker in the larger society. Up at an ungodly hour (a loudspeaker wakes you, not an alarm clock), to work at the 8 o'clock whistle, an eight hour day of work (five days a week, with a few exceptions). After 4 o'clock, mail distribution, supper. In the evening, television, gymnasium, library, school, other activities if you want them. Or you can relax, write letters, read, chat. On weekends there is a lot more free time; a movie and religious services, both optional, break up the time. In most places, you can be outside for a good part of your time. Lights out by eleven (varying with amount of security); in some places, prisoners are allowed on Friday and Saturday nights to stay up in the TV room after lights out. One peculiar item: "count time" - a check of the population - which happens a few times during the day and also at night, usually in the dormitories.

WHAT SORT OF A JOB WILL I HAVE ? You have a chance to express your preference, but will be assigned a job according to prison needs (channeling). There is factory work for which you have to apply since it's very popular. You make furniture or something for the war industry and get paid low wages (e.g. \$30 a month). Industry jobs are most often given to prisoners with families. You may be on the

farm crews, the construction crews, fire department, work on the kitchen staff (not recommended), work in a laundry or clothing room, machine shop, etc. The larger institutions offer courses in vocational training, bricklaying, automechanics, welding, woodworking, etc. People in those courses work part of the time and undergo training sessions as part of the forty hours of the work schedule. There are also a limited number of clerical jobs - these often offer much free time to read and write; others are library assistants, chaplain's clerks, warden's houseboys. Don't expect that the work will be interesting.

7. WHAT ARE MAIL REGULATIONS ? When you first arrive, you are asked to make a list of people with whom you wish to correspond. Think about this before you go to prison and arrange to have people on your list who will write regularly and send money if you need it. Although the rule may say that you can have only seven or twelve correspondents, it may be possible to go beyond that number if you don't shout about it. One draft resister, Paul Salstrom, had thirty correspondents at one time. In some prisons, letters from people not on your approved list are allowed in - but you can't write back without special permission. If the letters are not delivered to you, they will be returned to the sender. Letters are subject to censorship both incoming and outgoing, but many slip through uncensored. All incoming mail is opened to check for money; unless it is in check form, it will be placed directly in your commissary account. Checks sometimes lie around for weeks before processing is completed.

8. WHAT ABOUT LIBRARIES AND BOOKS ? Minimum security prisons generally have decent libraries, often a few thousand books. Books may generally be sent to you with prior permission from the prison, if the books are sent directly by the publisher or the bookstore. Sometimes you can take books in with you. Often, though not always, you have to leave the books in the prison library when you leave the prison. Newspaper and magazine subscriptions may also be received with permission of the prison. Guitars and harmonicas usually can be sent to you with no trouble, and other instruments may be approved.

9. CAN YOU HAVE VISITORS ? Generally, approved correspondents are also allowed to visit. Hours vary widely from one prison to another: at Springfield, Missouri, 14 hours a month are permitted, while at Marion, Illinois, the figure is 84 hours a month (3 days a week); more than one person can visit you at a time. Usually, the visiting room is a large room where there are small tables around which you can sit (in plastic chairs) and chat; necking is not allowed (this rule is not always enforced) but you can embrace and kiss your visitor on meeting and departing. No items are supposed to be transferred between visitors and prisoners, and prisoners are shaken down when they leave the room.

10. WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS AFTER YOU GET OUT ? This will probably depend somewhat on the political climate in this country when you get out. You may lose some privileges in the Great Society - some jobs may be difficult to get, for example. And you'll be conscious, despite television and newspapers in prison, that you've been out of touch for a while. But perhaps the limitations on your choices will lead you to consider alternatives to the usual channels in our society. In the movement, your record will be an advantage; somehow, the people who have gone to prison develop a keen awareness of the prison structures in society at large that others may not notice. Psychologically, different individuals react very differently to the prison experience; the presence of other draft resisters with you will help. With regard to the draft: it is possible that you will be reclassified 1-A and again ordered to report for induction; in other wars, some men went to prison more than once. At this time, a few have refused induction a second time, but there have so far been no second indictments since the Korean War.

Questions and answers were based partly on material prepared by John Phillips, a draft resister who served time at Petersburg, Va. and at Allenwood, Pa., and partly on the experience of Chicago area draft resisters, some now in prison.

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