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NEGROES
WITH
GUNS

by

ROBERT F. WILLIAMS

Edited by Marc Schleifer

**PUBLISHED BY MARZANI & MUNSELL, INC.
NEW YORK**

WANTED BY THE FBI

INTERSTATE FLIGHT - KIDNAPING
ROBERT FRANKLIN WILLIAMS

Photograph taken May, 1961

FBI No. 94,275 B



Aliases: Bob Williams, Robert F. Williams

DESCRIPTION

Age:	36, born February 26, 1925, Monroe, North Carolina	Complexion:	dark brown
Height:	6'	Race:	Negro
Weight:	240 pounds	Nationality:	American
Build:	heavy	Occupations:	free lance writer, freight handler, janitor, mechanic
Hair:	black	Scars and Marks:	scar left eyelid, scar left nostril, scar on collar of right leg.
Eyes:	brown		

Fingerprint Classification: 19 L 1 R 100 8 Ref: T R T
M I T IO A A T

CAUTION

WILLIAMS ALLEGEDLY HAS POSSESSED A LARGE QUANTITY OF FIREARMS, INCLUDING A .45 CALIBER PISTOL, WHICH HE CARRIES IN HIS CAR. HE HAS PREVIOUSLY BEEN DIAGNOSED AS SCHIZOPHRENIC AND HAS ADVOCATED AND THREATENED VIOLENCE. WILLIAMS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.

A Federal warrant was issued on August 29, 1961, at Charlotte, North Carolina, charging Williams with unlawful interstate flight to avoid prosecution for kidnapping (Title 18, U. S. Code, Section 1073).

IF YOU HAVE INFORMATION CONCERNING THIS PERSON, PLEASE NOTIFY ME OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FBI OFFICE. TELEPHONE NUMBER IS LISTED BELOW.

Headed Flyer No. 290
September 6, 1961

DIRECTOR
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.
TELEPHONE, NATIONAL 8-7117

PROLOGUE

Why do I speak to you from exile?

Because a Negro community in the South took up guns in self-defense against racist violence—and used them. I am held responsible for this action, that for the first time in history American Negroes have armed themselves as a group, to defend their homes, their wives, their children, in a situation where law and order had broken down, where the authorities could not, or rather would not, enforce their duty to protect Americans from a lawless mob. I accept this responsibility and am proud of it. I have asserted the right of Negroes to meet the violence of the Ku Klux Klan by armed self-defense—and have acted on it. It has always been an accepted right of Americans, as the history of our Western states proves, that where the law is unable, or unwilling, to enforce order, the citizens can, and must, act in self-defense against lawless violence. I believe this right holds for black Americans as well as whites.

Many people will remember that in the summer of 1957 the Ku Klux Klan made an armed raid on an Indian community in the South and were met with determined rifle fire from the Indians acting in self-defense. The nation approved of the action and there were widespread expressions of pleasure at the defeat of the Kluxers, who showed their courage by running away despite their armed superiority. What the nation doesn't know, because it has never been told, is that the Negro community in Monroe, North Carolina, had set the example two weeks before when we shot up an armed motorcade of the Ku Klux Klan, including two police cars, which had come to attack the home of Dr. Albert E. Perry, vice-president of the Monroe chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The stand taken by our chapter

resulted in the official re-affirmation by the NAACP of the right of self-defense. The Preamble to the resolution of the 50th Convention of the NAACP, New York City, July 1959, states: "... we do not deny, but reaffirm, the right of an individual and collective self-defense against unlawful assaults."

Because there has been much distortion of my position, I wish to make it clear that I do not advocate violence for its own sake, or for the sake of reprisals against whites. Nor am I against the passive resistance advocated by the Reverend Martin Luther King and others. My only difference with Dr. King is that I believe in flexibility in the freedom struggle. This means that I believe in non-violent tactics where feasible and the mere fact that I have a situation pending before the U.S. Supreme Court bears this out. Massive civil disobedience is a powerful weapon under civilized conditions, where the law safeguards the citizens' right of peaceful demonstrations. In civilized society the law serves as a deterrent against lawless forces that would destroy the democratic process. But where there is a breakdown of the law, the individual citizen has a right to protect his person, his family, his home and his property. To me this is so simple and proper that it is self-evident.

When an oppressed people show a willingness to defend themselves, the enemy, who is a moral weakling and coward is more willing to grant concessions and work for a respectable compromise. Psychologically, moreover, racists consider themselves superior beings and they are not willing to exchange their superior lives for our inferior ones. They are most vicious and violent when they can practice violence with impunity. This we have shown in Monroe. Moreover, when because of our self-defense there is a danger that the blood of whites may be spilled, the local authorities in the South suddenly enforce law and order when previously they had been complaisant toward lawless, racist violence. This too we have proven in Monroe.

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It is remarkable how easily and quickly state and local police control and disperse lawless mobs when the Negro is ready to defend himself with arms.

Furthermore, because of the international situation, the Federal Government does not want racial incidents which draw the attention of the world to the situation in the South. Negro self-defense draws such attention, and the Federal Government will be more willing to enforce law and order if the local authorities don't. When our people become fighters, our leaders will be able to sit at the conference table as equals, not dependent on the whim and the generosity of the oppressors. It will be to the best interests of both sides to negotiate just, honorable and lasting settlements.

The majority of white people in the United States have literally no idea of the violence with which Negroes in the South are treated daily—nay, hourly. This violence is deliberate, conscious, condoned by the authorities. It has gone on for centuries and is going on today, every day, unceasing and unremittent. It is our way of life. Negro existence in the South has been one long travail, steeped in terror and blood—our blood. The incidents which took place in Monroe, which I witnessed and which I suffered, will give some idea of the conditions in the South, such conditions that can no longer be borne. That is why, one hundred years after the Civil War began, we Negroes in Monroe armed ourselves in self-defense and used our weapons. We showed that our policy worked. The lawful authorities of Monroe and North Carolina acted to enforce order only after, and as a direct result of, our being armed. Previously they had connived with the Ku Klux Klan in the racist violence against our people. Self-defense prevented bloodshed and forced the law to establish order. This is the meaning of Monroe and I believe it marks a historic change in the life of my people. This is the story of that change.

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Chapter 1

SELF-DEFENSE PREVENTS BLOODSHED

In June of 1961 the NAACP Chapter of Monroe, North Carolina, decided to picket the town's swimming pool. This pool, built by WPA money, was forbidden to Negroes although we formed one third the population of the town. In 1957 we had asked not for integration but for the use of the pool one day a week. This was denied and for four years we were put off with vague suggestions that someday another pool would be built. Two small Negro children had meantime drowned swimming in creeks. Now, in 1961, the City of Monroe announced it had surplus funds, but there was no indication of a pool, no indication of even an intention to have a pool. So we decided to start a picket line. We started the picket line and the picket line closed the pool. When the pool closed the racists decided to handle the matter in traditional Southern style. They turned to violence, unlawful violence.

We had been picketing for two days when we started taking lunch breaks in a picnic area reserved for "White People Only." Across from the picnic area, on the other side of a stream of water, a group of white people started firing rifles and we could hear the bullets strike the trees over our heads. The chief of police was on duty at the pool and I appealed to him to stop the firing into the picnic area. The chief of police said, "Oh, I don't hear anything. I don't hear anything at all." They continued shooting all that day. The following day these people drifted toward the picket line firing their pistols and we kept appealing to the chief of police to stop them from shooting near us. He would always say, "Well, I don't hear anything."

The pool remained closed but we continued the line and crowds of many hundreds would come to watch us and

shout insults at the pickets. The possibility of violence was increasing to such a proportion that we had sent a telegram to the U.S. Justice Department asking them to protect our right to picket. The Justice Department referred us to the local FBI. We called the local FBI in Charlotte and they said this was not a matter for the U.S. Justice Department; it was a local matter and that they had checked with our local chief of police, who had assured them that he would give us ample protection. This was the same chief of police who had stood idly by while these people were firing pistols and rifles over our heads. This was the same chief of police who in 1957 had placed two police cars in a Klan motorcade that raided the Negro community.

Attempt to Kill Me

On Friday, June 23, 1961, I went into town to make another telephone call to the Justice Department and while I was there I picked up one of the pickets and started back to the line at the swimming pool, which was on the outskirts of town. I was driving down U.S. Highway 74 going east when a heavy car (I was driving a small English car, a Hillman), a 1955 DeSoto sedan, came up from behind and tried to force my lighter car off the embankment and over a cliff with a 75-foot drop. I outmaneuvered him by speeding up and getting in front of him. Then he rammed my car from the rear and locked the bumper and he started a zig-zag motion across the highway in an attempt to flip my light car over. The bumpers were stuck and I didn't use the brake because I didn't want it to neutralize the front wheels.

We had to pass right by a highway patrol station. The station was in a 35-mile-an-hour zone and by the time we passed it the other car was pushing me at 70 miles an hour. I started blowing my horn incessantly, hoping to attract the attention of the highway patrolmen. There were three patrolmen standing on the opposite side of the em-

bankment in the yard of the station. They looked at the man who was pushing and zig-zagging me across the highway and then threw up their hands, laughed, and turned their backs to the highway.

He kept pushing me for a quarter of an hour until we came to a highway intersection carrying heavy traffic. The man was hoping to run me out into the traffic, but about 75 feet away from the highway I was finally able to rock loose from his bumper, and I made a sharp turn into the ditch.

My car was damaged. The brake drum, the wheels, and the bearings had been damaged, and all of the trunk compartment in the rear had been banged in. After we got it out of the ditch, I took the car back to the swimming pool and I showed it to the chief of police. He stood up and looked at the car and laughed. He said, "I don't see anything. I don't see anything at all." I said, "You were standing here when I left." He said, "Well, I still don't see anything." So I told him I wanted a warrant for the man, whom I had recognized. He was Bynnum Griffin, the Pontiac-Chevrolet dealer in Monroe. And he said, "I can't give you a warrant because I can't see anything that he's done." But a newspaperman standing there started to examine my car and when the chief of police discovered that a newspaperman was interested, then he said, "Well, come to the police station and I'll give you a warrant."

When I went to the police station he said, "Well, you just got a name and a license number and I can't indict a man on that. You can take it up with the Court Solicitor." I went to the Court Solicitor, which is equivalent to the District Attorney, and he said, "Well, all you got here is a name and a number on a piece of paper. I can't indict a man on these grounds." I told him that I recognized the man and I mentioned his name. He said, "Wait a minute," and he made a telephone call. He said, "I called him and he said he didn't do that." I again told him that I had recognized the man and that I had the license number of

the car that he had used. Finally the Court Solicitor said, "Well, if you insist, I'll tell you what you do. You go to his house and take a look at him and if you recognize him, you bring him up here and I'll make out a warrant for him." I told him that was what the police were being paid for; that they were supposed to go and pick up criminals. So they refused to give me a warrant for this man at all.

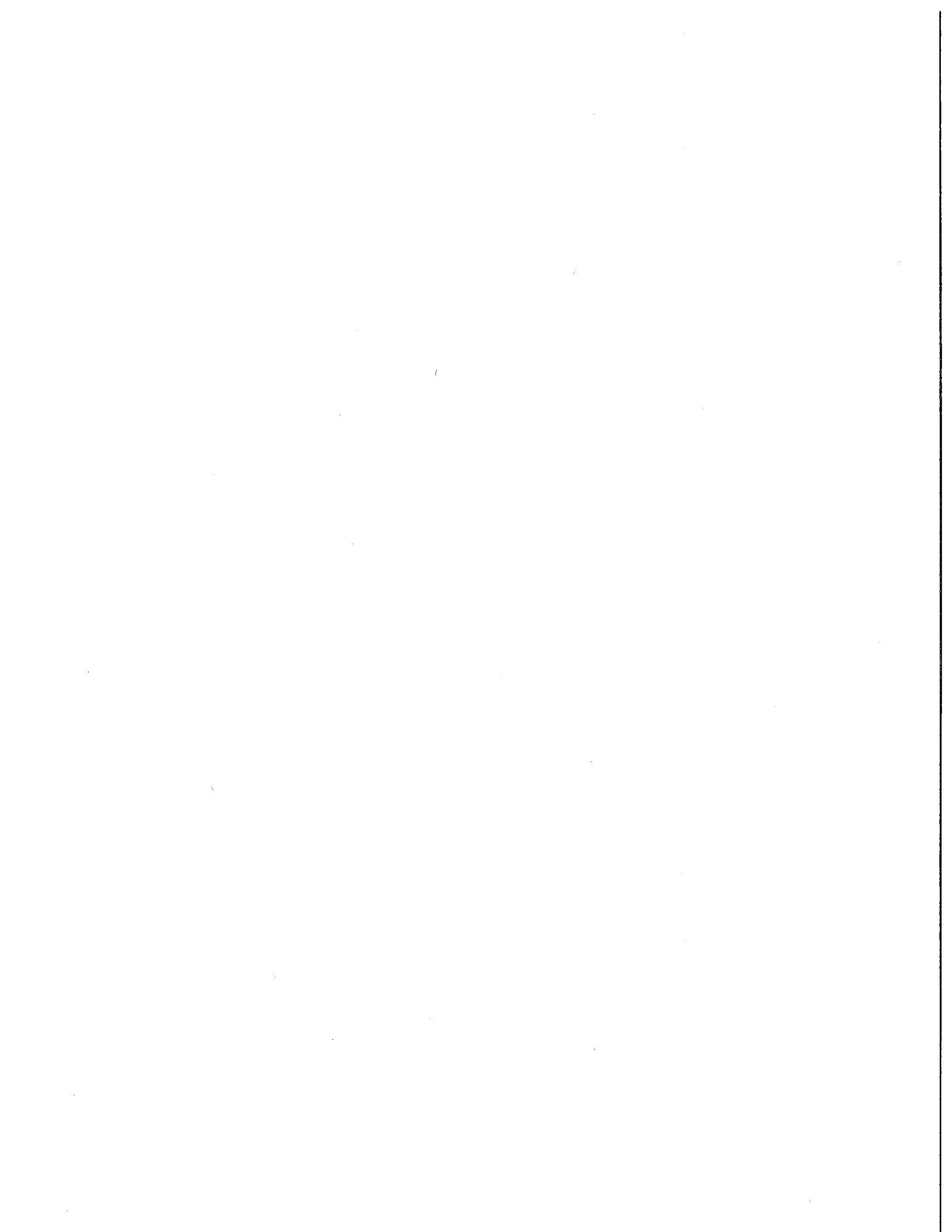
"God Damn, The Niggers Have Got Guns!"

The picket line continued. On Sunday, on our way to the swimming pool, we had to pass through the same intersection (U.S. 74 and U.S. 601). There were about two or three thousand people lined along the highway. Two or three policemen were standing at the intersection directing traffic and there were two policemen who had been following us from my home. An old stock car without windows was parked by a restaurant at the intersection. As soon as we drew near, this car started backing out as fast as possible. The driver hoped to hit us in the side and flip us over. But I turned my wheel sharply and the junk car struck the front of my car and both cars went into a ditch.

Then the crowd started screaming. They said that a nigger had hit a white man. They were referring to me. They were screaming, "Kill the niggers! Kill the niggers! Pour gasoline on the niggers! Burn the niggers!"

We were still sitting in the car. The man who was driving the stock car got out of the car with a baseball bat and started walking toward us and he was saying, "Nigger, what did you hit me for?" I didn't say anything to him. We just sat there looking at him. He came up close to our car, within arm's length with the baseball bat, but I still hadn't said anything and we didn't move in the car. What they didn't know was that we were armed. Under North Carolina state law it is legal to carry firearms in your automobile so long as these firearms are not concealed.

I had two pistols and a rifle in the car. When this fellow



started to draw back his baseball bat, I put an Army .45 up in the window of the car and pointed it right into his face and I didn't say a word. He looked at the pistol and he didn't say anything. He started backing away from the car.

Somebody in the crowd fired a pistol and the people again started to scream hysterically, "Kill the niggers! Kill the niggers! Pour gasoline on the niggers!" The mob started to throw stones on top of my car. So I opened the door of the car and I put one foot on the ground and stood up in the door holding an Italian carbine.

All this time three policemen had been standing about fifty feet away from us while we kept waiting in the car for them to come and rescue us. Then when they saw that we were armed and the mob couldn't take us, two of the policemen started running. One ran straight to me and he grabbed me on the shoulder and said, "Surrender your weapon! Surrender your weapon!" I struck him in the face and knocked him back away from the car and put my carbine in his face and I told him we were not going to surrender to a mob. I told him that we didn't intend to be lynched. The other policeman who had run around the side of the car started to draw his revolver out of the holster. He was hoping to shoot me in the back. They didn't know that we had more than one gun. One of the students (who was seventeen years old) put a .45 in the policeman's face and told him that if he pulled out his pistol he would kill him. The policeman started putting his gun back into the holster and backing away from the car, and he fell into the ditch.

There was a very old man, an old white man out in the crowd, and he started screaming and crying like a baby and he kept crying, and he said, "God damn, God damn, what is this God damn country coming to that the niggers have got guns, the niggers are armed and the police can't even arrest them!" He kept crying and somebody led him away through the crowd.

Self-Defense Forces Protection

Steve Pressman, who is a member of the Monroe City Council, came along and he told the chief of police to open the highway and get us out of there. The chief of police told the City Councilman, "But they've got guns!" Pressman said, "That's OK. Open the highway up and get them out of here!" They opened the highway and the man from the City Council led us through. All along the highway for almost a third of a mile people were lined on both sides of the road. And they were screaming "Kill the niggers! Kill the niggers! We aren't having any integration here! We're not going to swim with niggers!"

By the time we got to the pool, the other students who had gone on had already started the picket line. There were three or four thousand white people milling around the pool. All the city officials were there including the Mayor of Monroe. They had dark glasses on and they were standing in the crowd. And the crowd kept screaming. Then the chief of police came up to me and he said, "Surrender your gun." And I told him that I was not going to surrender any gun. That those guns were legal and that was a mob, and if he wanted those guns he could come to my house and get them after I got away from there. And then he said, "Well, if you hurt any of these white people here, God damn it, I'm going to kill you!" I don't know what made him think that I was going to let him live long enough to shoot me. He kept saying, "Surrender the gun!" while the white people kept screaming.

The City Councilman reappeared and said that the tension was bad and that there was a chance that somebody would be hurt. He conceded that I had a right to picket and he said that if I were willing to go home he would see that I was escorted. I asked him who was going to escort us home. He said "the police." I told him that I might as well go with the Ku Klux Klan as go with them. I said I would go with the police department under one condition.

He asked what that was. I told him I would take one of the students out of my car and let them put a policeman in there and then I could rest assured that they would protect us. And the police said they couldn't do that. They couldn't do that because they realized that this policeman would get hurt if they joined in with the mob.

The officials kept repeating how the crowd was getting out of hand; somebody would get hurt. I told them that I wasn't going to leave until they cleared the highway. I also told them that if necessary we would make our stand right there. Finally they asked me what did I suggest they do, and I recommended they contact the state police. So they contacted the state police and an old corporal and a young man came; just two state patrolmen. Three or four thousand people were out there, and the city had twenty-one policemen present who claimed they couldn't keep order.

The old man started cursing and told the people to move back, to spread out and to move out of there. And he started swinging a stick. Some of the mob started cursing and he said, "God damn it, I mean it. Move out." They got the message and suddenly the crowd was broken up and dispersed. The officials and state police knew that if they allowed the mob to attack us a lot of people were going to be killed, and some of those people would be white.

Two police cars escorted us out; one in front and one behind. This was the first time this had ever been done. And some of the white people started screaming "Look how they are protecting niggers! Look how they are taking niggers out of here!"

As a result of our stand, and our willingness to fight, the state of North Carolina had enforced law and order. Just two state troopers did the job, and no one got hurt in a situation where normally (in the South) a lot of Negro blood would have flowed. The city closed the pool for the rest of the year and we withdrew our picket line.

This was not the end of the story of our struggle in Monroe in 1961. By a quirk of fate the next episode in-

involved the Freedom Riders and their policy of passive resistance. The contrast between the results of their policy and the results of our policy of self-defense is a dramatic object lesson for all Negroes. But before I go on to that I have to describe how our policy of self-defense developed and how the Negro community in Monroe came to support my conclusion that we had to "meet violence with violence."

The story begins in 1955 when, as a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, I returned to my home town of Monroe and joined the local chapter of the NAACP.

Chapter 2 AN NAACP CHAPTER IS REBORN IN MILITANCY

My home town is Monroe, North Carolina. It has a population of 11,000, about a third of which is Negro. It is a county seat (Union County) and is 14 miles from the South Carolina border. Its spirit is closer to that of South Carolina than to the liberal atmosphere of Chapel Hill which people tend to associate with North Carolina. There are no trade unions in our county and the south-eastern regional headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan is in Monroe.

There was also, at the time of my return, a small and dwindling chapter of the NAACP. The Union County NAACP was a typical Southern branch—small, not very active, dominated by, and largely composed of, the upper crust of the black community—professionals, businessmen and white-collar workers.

Before the Supreme Court desegregation decision of 1954, the NAACP was not a primary target of segregationists. In many places in the South, including Monroe, racists were not too concerned with the small local chapters. But the Supreme Court decision drastically altered this casual attitude. The Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Councils made it their business to locate any NAACP chapter in their vicinity, and to find out who its officers and members were. Threats of violence and economic sanctions were applied to make people withdraw their membership. Chapters, already small, dwindled rapidly.

A Veteran Returns Home

When I got out of the Marine Corps, I knew I wanted to go home and join the NAACP. In the Marines I had

got a taste of discrimination and had some run-ins that got me into the guardhouse. When I joined the local chapter of the NAACP it was going down in membership, and when it was down to six, the leadership proposed dissolving it. When I objected, I was elected president and they withdrew, except for Dr. Albert E. Perry. Dr. Perry was a newcomer who had settled in Monroe and built up a very successful practice, and he became our vice-president. I tried to get former members back without success and finally I realized that I would have to work without the social leaders of the community.

At this time I was inexperienced. Before going into the Marines I had left Monroe for a time and worked in an aircraft factory in New Jersey and an auto factory in Detroit. Without knowing it, I had picked up some ideas of organizing from the activities around me, but I had never served in a union local and I lacked organizing experience. But I am an active person and I hated to give up on something so important as the NAACP.

So one day I walked into a Negro poolroom in our town, interrupted a game by putting NAACP literature on the table and made a pitch. I recruited half of those present. This got our chapter off to a new start. We began a recruiting drive among laborers, farmers, domestic workers, the unemployed and any and all Negro people in the area. We ended up with a chapter that was unique in the whole NAACP because of working class composition and a leadership that was not middle class. Most important, we had a strong representation of returned veterans who were very militant and who didn't scare easy. We started a struggle in Monroe and Union County to integrate public facilities and we had the support of a Unitarian group of white people. In 1957, without any friction at all, we integrated the public library. It shocked us that in other Southern states, particularly Virginia, Negroes encountered such violence in trying to integrate libraries.

We moved on to win better rights for Negroes: economic

rights, the right of education and the right of equal protection under the law. We rapidly got the reputation of being the most militant branch of the NAACP, and obviously we couldn't get this reputation without antagonizing the racists who are trying to prevent Afro-Americans from enjoying their inalienable human rights as Americans. Specifically, we aroused the wrath of the Ku Klux Klan and a showdown developed over the integration of the swimming pool.

The Ku Klux Klan Swings into Action

As I said, the swimming pool had been built with Federal funds under the WPA system and was supported by municipal taxation; yet Negroes could not use this pool. Neither the Federal government nor the local officials had provided any swimming facilities at all for Negroes. Over a period of years several of our children had drowned while swimming in unsupervised swimming holes. When we lost another child in 1956 we started a drive to obtain swimming facilities for Negroes, especially for our children.

First, we asked the city officials to build a pool in the Negro community. This would have been a segregated pool, but we asked for this because we were merely interested in safe facilities for the children. The city officials said they couldn't comply with this request, for it would be too expensive and they didn't have the money. Then, in a compromise move, we asked that they set aside one or two days out of each week when the segregated pool would be reserved for Negro children. When we asked for this they said that this too would be too expensive. Why would it be too expensive, we asked. Because, they said, each time the colored people used the pool they would have to drain the water and refill it.

They said they would eventually build us a pool when they got the funds. We asked them when we could expect it. One year? They said No. We asked, five years? They said No, they couldn't be sure. We asked, ten years? They

said that they couldn't be sure. We asked finally if we could expect it within fifteen years and they said that they couldn't give us any definite promise.

There was a white Catholic priest in the community who owned a station wagon and he would transport the colored youth to Charlotte, N.C., which was twenty-five miles away, so they could swim there in the Negro pool. Some of the city officials of Charlotte saw this priest swimming in the Negro pool and they wanted to know who he was. The Negro supervisor explained that he was a priest. The city officials replied they didn't care whether he was a priest or not, that he was white and they had segregation of the races in Charlotte; so they barred the priest from the colored pool.

Again the children didn't have any safe place to swim at all—so we decided to take legal action against the Monroe pool.

First, we started a campaign of stand-ins of short duration. We would go stand for a few minutes and ask to be admitted and never get admitted. While we were preparing the groundwork for possible court proceedings, the Ku Klux Klan came out in the open. The press started to carry articles about the Klan activities. In the beginning they mentioned that a few hundred people would gather in open fields and have their Klan rallies. Then the numbers kept going up. The numbers went up to 3,000, 4,000, 5,000. Finally the *Monroe Inquirer* estimated that 7,500 Klansmen had gathered in a field to discuss dealing with the integrationists, described by the Klan as the "Communist-Inspired-National-Association-for-the-Advancement-of-Colored-People." They started a campaign to get rid of us, to drive us out of the community, directed primarily at Dr. Albert E. Perry, our vice-president, and at myself. The Klan started by circulating a petition. To gather signatures they set up a table in the county courthouse square in Monroe. The petition stated that Dr. Perry and I should be permanently driven out of Union County be-

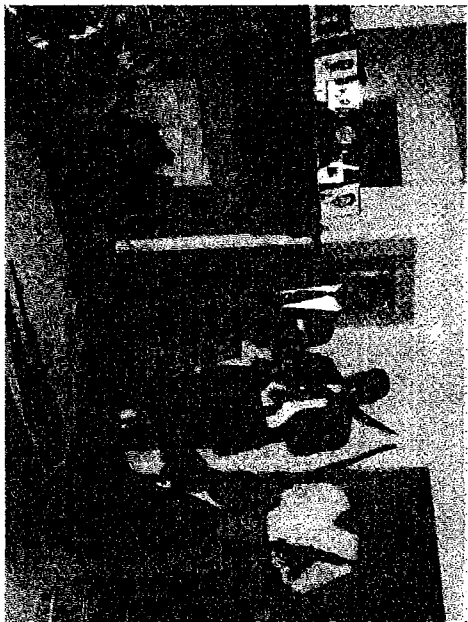
cause we were members and officials of the Communist-NAACP. The Klan claimed 3,000 signatures in the first week. In the following week they claimed 3,000 more. They had no basis for any legal action, but they had hoped to frighten us out of town just by virtue of sheer numbers. In the history of the South, in days past, it was enough to know that so many people wanted to get rid of a Negro to make him take off by himself. One must remember that in this community where the press estimated that there were 7,500 Klan supporters, the population of the town was only about 12,000 people. Actually, many of the Klan people came in from South Carolina, Monroe being only fourteen miles from the state border.

When they discovered that this could not intimidate us, they decided to take direct action. After their rallies they would drive through our community in motorcades and they would honk their horns and fire pistols from the car windows. On one occasion, they caught a colored woman on an isolated street corner and they made her dance at pistol point.

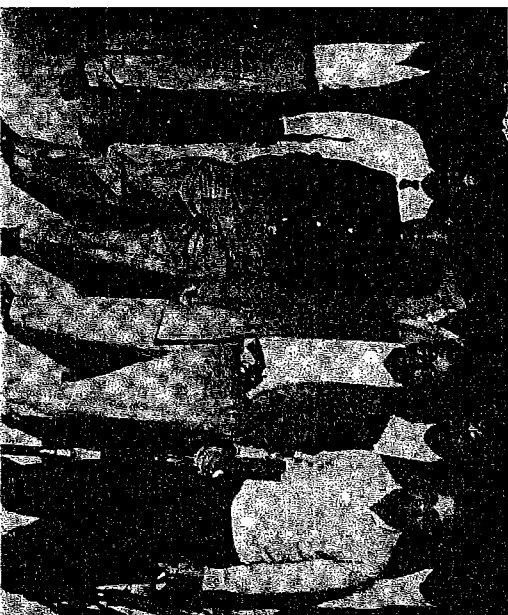
At this outbreak of violence against our Negro community, a group of pacifist ministers went to the city officials and asked that the Klan be prohibited from forming these motorcades to parade through Monroe. The officials of the county and the city rejected their request on the grounds that the Klan was a legal organization having as much constitutional right to organize as the NAACP.

Self-Defense Is Born of Our Plight

Since the city officials wouldn't stop the Klan, we decided to stop the Klan ourselves. We started this action out of the need for defense, because law and order had completely vanished; because there was no such thing as a 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution in Monroe, N.C. The local officials refused to enforce law and order and when we turned to Federal and state officials



Above: Arms in the Perry living room. Dr. Perry at left, next is Robert F. Williams.



Below: Guards at Dr. Perry's home with odd assembly of weapons.

Asian Flu Strikes Schools In Virginia, Carolina

—By M. Tolson Jr.

CAROLINA
EDITION

Journal and Guide

ASIAN FLU--
"What To Do"
Helpful Advice from an Expert
Page 20

VOL LVII No. 41

NORFOLK, VIRGINIA, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1957

20 PAGES PRICE 15 CENTS

CITIZENS FIRE BACK AT KLAN

Ku Kluxers Use Guns At Monroe, NC

Shots Exchanged Near Residence Of NAACP Head

Special to Journal and Guide
MONROE, N. C. — It has been reported here that a group of Ku Klux Klansmen, some of them robed and masked, swapped gunfire with a group of colored citizens near the home of the president of the local NAACP branch late Friday night.

Police officials say that the shots were fired, but Union county NAACP Vice-President Robert H. Williams said

that on a group of more than 50 colored citizens near the home of Dr. NAACP president, Dr. A. P. Perry.

Mr. Williams also said that when someone in the colored gathering summoned the two police officers came over to disarm them.

Police Chief A. A. Manney has a different version of the affair, however. He says that several police cars were in the vicinity of "about 50 cars" that "disbanded" when a Klan car drove its path. The chief said that he had instructed his men to get in front of the car and if any violence occurred to stop the procession.

STEVEN TAYLOR North Carolina law forbids the wearing of masks by adults in public gatherings. Chief Manney said that he had had reports that some of the Klan men were robed.

Police officers in cars in the crowd said that they still hear "what sounded like a machine gun" the doctor's house" even though they deny

One of the few papers that covered the attack of the Ku Klux Klan on Dr. Perry's home and the shooting back by defenders. The national press remained silent.

to enforce law and order they either refused or ignored our appeals.

Luther Hodges, who is now Secretary of Commerce, was the Governor of North Carolina at that time. We first appealed to him. He took sides with the Klan; they had not broken any laws, they were not disorderly. Then we appealed to President Eisenhower but we never received a reply to our telegrams. There was no response at all from Washington.

So we started arming ourselves. I wrote to the National Rifle Association in Washington which encourages veterans to keep in shape to defend their native land, and asked for a charter, which we got. In a year we had sixty members. We had bought some guns too, in stores, and later a church in the North raised money and got us better rifles. The Klan discovered we were arming and guarding our community. In the summer of 1957 they made one big attempt to stop us. An armed motorcade attacked Dr. Perry's house, which is situated on the outskirts of the colored community. We shot it out with the Klan and repelled their attack and the Klan didn't have any more stomach for this type of fight. They stopped raiding our community. After this clash the same city officials who said the Klan had a constitutional right to organize met in an emergency session and passed a city ordinance banning the Klan from Monroe without a special permit from the police chief.

At the time of our clash with the Klan only three Negro publications—the *Afro-American*, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, and *Jet Magazine*—reported the fight. *Jet* carried some pictures of the self-defense guard. Our fight occurred two weeks before the famous clash between the Indians and the Klan. We had driven the Klan out of our county into the Indian territory. The national press played up the Indian-Klan fight because they didn't consider this a great threat—the Indians are a tiny minority and people could laugh at the incident as a sentimental joke—but no one

wanted Negroes to get the impression that this was an accepted way to deal with the Klan. So the white press maintained a complete blackout about the Monroe fight.

After the Klan learned that violence wouldn't serve their purpose they started to use the racist courts. Dr. Perry, our vice-president, was indicted on a trumped-up charge of abortion. He is a Catholic physician, and one of the doctors who had been head of the county medical department drove forty miles to testify in Dr. Perry's behalf, declaring that when Dr. Perry had worked in the hospital he had refused to file sterilization permits for the County Welfare Department on the ground that this was contrary to his religious beliefs. But he was convicted, sentenced to five years in prison, and the loss of his medical license.

* * *

The Kissing Case

In October, 1958, two local colored boys, David Simpson, aged 7, and Hanover Thompson, aged 9, were arrested on the charge of rape, which is punishable in North Carolina by death.

This was the famous "Kissing Case." What had happened was that David and Hanover got into a game of "cowboys and Indians" with some white children one afternoon. After a while, the white girls in the group suggested they play "house." One of the little white girls, Sissy Marcus, sat on Hanover's lap and suddenly recognized Hanover as her old playmate. For Hanover's mother worked for Sissy's mother and until Hanover reached school age his mother had taken him with her when she went to work at the Marcus house.

When this little girl discovered that Hanover was her old playmate she kissed him on the cheek. Later on in the afternoon she ran home and told her mother how she had seen Hanover and how she was so happy to see him again that she had kissed him.

Mrs. Marcus got hysterical when she heard this and she called the police. Before the two boys had even gotten home they were arrested and thrown into the county jail. If a person is arrested for rape in North Carolina he is not permitted to see anyone for a period of time while the police investigate. Therefore the police didn't notify the boys' parents.

A few days later when we finally found out what had happened and where the two missing boys were, we tried to get help. But the national office of the NAACP wouldn't have anything to do with the case because it was a "sex case." A seven-year-old white girl had kissed a nine-year-old Negro boy on the cheek and the national office didn't want any part of it.

The children were sent to the reformatory soon after they were arrested. I called the civil rights lawyer, Conrad Lynn, and he came down from New York. First thing, he went to talk with Judge Hampton Price, who had passed sentence.

The Judge said to Lynn that he had held a "separate but equal hearing." Lynn asked him what he meant by a "separate but equal hearing." And the Judge told him how on the morning of the trial he had called in Mrs. Marcus and her daughter, and Mrs. Marcus had made a statement, and they were sent home, and then in the afternoon the two Negro mothers were summoned to the Judge, and their boys were brought in. Then the Judge said to Lynn, "I told them what Mrs. Marcus had told me and then since they were guilty—I sent them up for fourteen years at the reformatory."

The NAACP national office still wasn't doing anything about the case but an English reporter who was a friend of Lynn's visited the reformatory and sneaked out a photograph of the boys, which appeared along with a story on the front page of the Dec. 15, 1958, *London Observer*. Then all of Europe got wind of the case and there were protest demonstrations in London, Rotterdam, Rome, and

court, Mrs. Mary Ruth Reed. Mrs. Reed was eight months pregnant. She was the victim of an attempted rape by a white man who came to her house, drove her from her house, and then beat her. He caught her while she was trying to escape down the main highway and he knocked her to the ground. Mrs. Reed's six-year-old boy was running along on the side and when the white rapist beat his mother the boy picked up a stick and started hitting the man over the head with it while his mother escaped. She went to a neighbor's house and her neighbor called the police and gave her aid. The neighbor was a white woman and she came to court that day with Mrs. Reed. She came and testified that she had seen the defendant chasing Mrs. Reed and that Mrs. Reed had come to her house in an excited and hysterical state, without shoes, and with her clothes torn from her. This testimony required considerable courage on the part of Mrs. Reed's white neighbor.

During the trial the defense attorney arranged for the defendant's wife to sit at his side just as if she were also involved in the case. Then the defense attorney appealed to the jury. He said, "Judge, Your Honor, and ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you see this man. This is his wife. This woman, this white woman is the pure flower of life. She is one of God's lovely creatures, a pure flower. And do you think this man would have left this pure flower for that?" And he made it appear as if the colored woman was actually on trial. Then the defense ended by saying, "It's just a matter of whether or not you're going to believe this woman or this white man. Judge, Your Honor, this man is not guilty of any crime. He was just drinking and having a little fun." The man was acquitted.

Mrs. Reed had several brothers, and they had wanted to kill her white attacker before the trial began. But I persuaded them not to do anything. I said that this was a matter that would be handled legally. That we would get a lawyer—which we did. We brought a lawyer all the way from New York who wasn't even allowed to take the floor

in court. So I was responsible for this would-be rapist not being punished.

The courtroom was full of colored women and when this man was acquitted they turned to me and they said, "Now what are you going to do? You have opened the floodgates on us. Now these people know that they can do anything that they want to us and there is no prospect of punishment under law and it means that we have been exposed to these people and you're responsible for it. Now what are you going to say?" And I told them that in a civilized society the law is a deterrent against the strong who would take advantage of the weak, but the South is not a civilized society; the South is a social jungle, so in cases like that we had to revert to the law of the jungle; that it had become necessary for us to create our own deterrent. And I said that in the future we would defend our women and children, our homes and ourselves with our arms. That we would meet violence with violence.

My statement was reprinted all over the United States. What I had said was, "This demonstration today shows that the Negro in the South cannot expect justice in the courts. He must convict his attackers on the spot. He must meet violence with violence, lynching with lynching."

The next day in an interview with the *Carolina Times* I again pointed to the lack of protection from the courts. I said, "These court decisions open the way to violence. I do not mean that Negroes should go out and attempt to get revenge for mistreatments or injustices..." I made this statement again on the same day over a Cincinnati radio station and later that evening in a telecast interview in Charlotte I again made clear I spoke of self-defense when the courts failed to protect us.

Since the principle is so obvious, I couldn't understand the commotion my statement aroused, or why it should receive so much national publicity. Two years previously, when we had shot up the Ku Klux Klan in self-defense not a single white newspaper in America reported the incident.

We were only serving notice that we would do more of the same, that Negro self-defense was here to stay in Monroe. So I didn't feel we were doing anything new. I realize now that we were establishing a principle, born out of our experience, which could, and would, set an example to others.

Looking back, it is clear that racists made a big error in publicizing our stand. Even though it has caused me and my family a great deal of suffering, the result has been to force a debate on the issue and it shook up the NAACP considerably out of its timid attitudes and forced an official reaffirmation from the NAACP of the right of Negroes to self-defense against racist violence.

Chapter 3

THE STRUGGLE FOR MILITANCY IN THE NAACP

Until my statement hit the national newspapers the national office of the NAACP had paid little attention to us. We had received little help from them in our struggles and our hour of need. Now they lost no time. The very next morning I received a long distance telephone call from the national office wanting to know if I had been quoted correctly. I told them that I had. They said the NAACP was not an organization of violence. I explained that I knew that it was not an organization of violence. Then they said that I had made violent statements. I replied that I made statements as Robert Williams, not as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. They said that, well, because I was an official of the organization anything that I said would be considered NAACP policy. That we were too close together. And I asked them why if we were so close together they hadn't come to my rescue all this time when I had been the unemployed victim of the Klan's economic pressure and when I had had all of my insurance canceled as a poor insurance risk. I asked them why they didn't then consider our closeness.

Suspension, Distortion & Re-election

In the next few hours Roy Wilkins of the NAACP suspended me from office. I didn't learn about it from the national office. I first heard that I was suspended when Southern radio stations announced and kept repeating every thirty minutes that the NAACP had suspended me for advocating violence because this was not a means for the solution of the race problem and that the NAACP was against Negroes using violence as a means of self-defense.