

## HERO OF HILLSBORO

# Tells Inside Story of School Burning, Neglect of Insane

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a series of articles written exclusively for the CALL & POST newspapers by Phillip Partridge, former Highland County Engineer who set fire to Hillsboro's Jim Crow Lincoln elementary school and was subsequently sent to Lima State Hospital for the criminally insane).

BY PHILLIP PARTRIDGE

When I coached Junior High football last fall I couldn't help notice the stand-offish attitude between the white and colored boys. It seemed doubtful if the gap would ever heal.

The Saturday before the fire my boy Tom sold toy balloons in a drive to raise money for the hospital. That evening Tom told me "Why daddy, the colored people gave more money than the white people."—at least to him.

The Sunday before the fire our Presbyterian minister preached a sermon about people who deliberately violate the law, expecting to take the consequences, in order to bring about needed reforms. He drew a line at Carrie Nation, saying her work was not good because she was destructive. I disagreed somewhat with this, but the burning of the Lincoln School was a constructive, not destructive act, as it looked to me.

In the Sunday paper that same day there was an article about how people at 45 should start thinking about retirement and the years of slow decline—getting things comfortable so they could wait for death. This sickened me. I am 43 and no-where near wanting to think about death.

### Thought About Problem

I thought of the many things that needed to be done in the world and how little I had done. I thought about the school problem in Hillsboro and our comfortable home and yard and me sitting in a rocking chair year after year waiting for death and the problem going on and on. I thought of my four years here during which time I had hoped that desegregation in our organization was accomplished—and then two nights before the picnic with everybody present except our Negro employees.

I felt the bitterness of watching this go on without doing anything about it. Experience had taught me that, for me at least, the surest way to get answered on the prongs of public opinion and slowly scorched to death was to try to talk and argue this sort of thing. I am blunt and not tactful.

This pretty much made up my mind to go ahead. I did not dare think of my family and boys. This thing looked bigger than Hillsboro—maybe it involved millions of boys.

Every hour the secret world is closing in on us. We are asleep; we've got to be strong and sure enough to face whatever comes. We can't wait five or ten or twenty years for progress. We may not be a free nation that long.

I made a pact with myself that if I wake up at 2 a.m. the next morning that would be a sign to go ahead and you know the rest.

### Events Before Lima

The series of events that led up to my tour of duty at Lima State hospital is known to most of the readers of this newspaper. However a brief review might be in order for those who are not acquainted with them.

At about 1 a.m. on the morning



PHILIP PARTRIDGE

of Wednesday, July 7. I voluntarily signed a written confession substantiating my earlier oral confession that I set fire to the segregated Lincoln Elementary School in Hillsboro.

The law officials who received my confession were shocked as I knew they would be and expressed their sympathy and regrets at the duty that faced them.

Later in the day my good friends the Highland County Commissioners expressed their grief and shock at the news and asked me to resign my position as Highland County Engineer.

This I was reluctant to do since I had become very fond of Highland County. I asked them for time to think this over which they reluctantly granted.

The next morning they notified me somewhat frantically that I must resign by 1 p.m. at the latest or they would bring charges against me.

I wondered what charges they might bring since the act involved in my confession was in no sense a breach of my official responsibilities.

However it was easy to see that the Commissioners were in great distress from pressure being brought to bear on them and I took paper and typewriter in hand with the full intention of granting their request.

However as I tried to think how to word the letter the question came to me "Is this the right thing to do?"

### Painful Decision

After a time of painful indeci-

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# Tells Inside Story

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sion I knew I could not do it. I wrote the following letter, submitted it to the commissioners and walked out.

Highland County Commissioners  
Dear Sirs:

It is the right and duty of every citizens to take a firm stand for things he believes to be right.

Where the need is great and the problem difficult he must be prepared to make great sacrifices.

I was elected Highland County Engineer for a four year term on the Republican Ticket.

In accepting this office I did not agree to surrender my rights and duties as a citizen.

My acts as a citizen have offended some people.

I am not a habitual criminal nor one likely to repeat the offense.

The need for a county engineer in Highland County continues. There is none who knows the road and bridge problems of Highland County as I do.

I should be derelict in my duties both as a citizen and as County Engineer if I should resign under these conditions.

Respectfully yours  
and signed my name.

The next morning before seven o'clock there was a ring at the doorbell and my boy, Tom, ran tearfully upstairs to tell me that there were men at the door with guns.

I went down, admitted the Sheriff and Sheriff's Deputy and asked what they wanted.

They said they had a court order to take me to Lima State hospital and granted me time to finish shaving and breakfast.

These finished, I calmed my family's fears and started toward one of the most interesting experiences of my life.

(Continued Next Week)