9-29-1962

Annotated article by George Metz to Birmingham News, 29 September 1962

George Metz

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/west_union_med

Part of the Journalism Studies Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://egrove.olemiss.edu/west_union_med/90

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Western Union Telegram Collection at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Telegrams to Media Outlets by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.
Oxford, Miss., Sept. 29 --- The key which the Justice Department must use to unlock the doors of Ole Miss for Negro James Meredith may well be one drawn gun.

And after two weeks of hoopalaa here and at Jackson, this bothers many Mississippi lawmen, who themselves carry guns and say they believe in segregation strong enough to use them.

Despite denials by both Attorney General Robert Kennedy and state officials that a compromise has been reached, rumors still that some agreement has been made between the Justice Department and Gov. Ross Barnett concerning the Meredith case.

Some credence is given to the rumors by reports circulated among peace officers that all marshals must do to bring Meredith onto the Ole Miss campus is to "pull a gun."

Lt. Gov. Paul Johnson, who addressed approximately 100 sheriffs, deputies, and other peace officers Thursday afternoon shortly before Meredith and an escort of U.S. marshals were to have arrived at Oxford, instructed the lawmen to let the marshals pass if they drew guns. "We will have then won our fight," Johnson was quoted as saying to sheriffs.
Highway Patrolmen received similar instructions.

Earlier Patrolmen, who wore steel helmets and carried gas masks and night sticks had been told to meet force with force. The only federal "invasion" they had been instructed to stand aside for was United States troops.

However, the Justice Department does not wish to send troops into Mississippi to force Meredith's entry into the all-white University of Mississippi. Neither does the state wish to close Ole Miss, or almost as bad—have its colleges and universities lose their accreditation. Further strife here could result in one or both.

Therefore, Uncle Sam and Mississippi both have reason for negotiating some "peace treaty." The Justice Department and the Kennedy administration, which made a campaign promise to southern states that federal troops would not be sent to the south to force integration, reportedly wants desperately to get Meredith admitted to Ole Miss—-and "save face"—-without doing so at point of a bayonet.

Some lawmen, disgruntled about instructions to
let the marshals through if they come armed, complain that this --- especially if a "deal" has been worked out between state and federal authorities -- makes a farce and "political show" out of earlier resistance.

One officer, veteran officer called the present Meredith crisis "just a political show by both sides." He predicted Meredith would not likely be admitted if and when Kennedy was insisted by Att. Gen. Kennedy agreed to stay out order Chief U. S. Marshal James McShane to draw his gun on Gov. Barnett, Lt. Gov. Johnson or whatever which ever state official --- in his way path of his next attempt register Meredith. Last announced registration attempt said pending Thursday afternoon during Meredith.

However, such an arrangement agreement would be a dangerous gamble on part of the Justice Department.

Should McShane draw his gun on Barnett, and a riot result, Mississippi police authorities could blame any possible bloodshed on federal authorities. This would be a worse black eye than U.S. Troops arriving.

Further credence is given to rumors of the "draw gun agreement" by the fact that Meredith --- and marshals turned back to Memphis Thursday afternoon after a crowd estimated at between 1,000 to 1,500 students and townspeople gathered at the to watch the entrance attempt. Approximately 1,000 students were on hand Sept. 20 to boo and jeer Meredith as he and two unarmed marshals confronted Gov. Barnett outside during his first registration attempt here.
Also, it was never satisfactorily explained why Highway Patrolmen were suddenly sent home Thursday after the scheduled entrance attempt by Meredith and Co. was cancelled.

Patrolmen had manned massive roadblocks at all campus entrances for more than a week. Moments before being ordered out of Oxford, they had worn gas masks and steel helmets and carried gas masks and night sticks as if dressed for pitched hand-to-hand combat.

However, both Friday and Saturday not a single uniformed Patrolman, other than resident patrolmen, was spotted in Oxford. Yet sheriffs still in the area Friday morning were requested by Gov. Barnett to remain on "stand by basis" en masse at the campus. Other than being advised they would be notified if Meredith attempted to enter, the sheriffs remained in the dark as to the next move plotted by state officials. A "next play", which had come fast and furious all week, never came.

Also, as one sheriff observed: "Meredith could ride in here in a taxi by himself and register."

Not a single entrance was apparently being watched.

Meanwhile, Gov. Barnett was found guilty of civil contempt of federal court and ordered arrested and fined $10,000 a day unless he purges himself of contempt charges.

He was given until 11 a.m. Tuesday by the United States Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals at New Orleans to act. Stipulations of the court were that he stop all resistance to court orders admitting
Also, the Meredith entry, even with a token display of armed force, could be sufficient to purge Gov. Barnett of contempt and still leave him a tarnished hero of the twentieth century for Mississippi and perpetuated in politics as long as he lives.

In any event, the final showdown is expected on Monday or Tuesday at latest. Sheriffs, who also left the university campus Saturday mid-morning, were instructed to return either Sunday night or early Monday morning.