

10-2-1962

Dad to Betty, 2 October 1962

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Recommended Citation

Silver (1907-1988), James W. (James Wesley), "Dad to Betty, 2 October 1962" (1962). *Correspondence*. 611.
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University, Miss.
October 2, 1962

Dear Betty:

Thought I had better write you something about the last few days before it gets mixed up in my mind or before I read too much about it all in the papers. It is hard, even now, to remember exactly what I saw on Sunday night. You should read the various New York Times accounts of everything because they are more informative than everything else together that I have seen so far.

Sunday afternoon your mother and I drove out to the airport, getting there just after the first batch (about 175) of marshals had arrived. They were brought to the campus in army trucks and everyone thought that they were going to settle down in a camp that had been provided for them, probably in the armory. So we were a little surprised to see them half surrounding the Lyceum when we got back to the campus. Your mother let me out by the post office and before I walked to the Lyceum I saw unloaded at the gym a bunch of mattresses. It looked as though (and this was confirmed by patrolman) that the Highway Patrol was giving up the US armory to the marshals and was moving into the gym. Over by the library I passed Dr. Cabaniss who seemed a little bitter in saying to me, "I suppose you are now satisfied." My answer was noncommittal. About the time I got back to the Lyceum the other marshals had arrived and the building was completely surround, man to man. We all assumed that it had been decided that Meredith would be registered, and soon. There were not more than a hundred and fifty students and other onlookers present.

I talked with the chancellor in front of Peabody and he stated that the game was being played out, that Barnett knew exactly what had happened and that the Highway Patrol was there to help the marshals to keep the peace. The small crowd was curious and somewhat jovial. Certainly at that moment the chancellor thought that it was all going smoothly; in fact, he seemed somewhat amused to see the script adhered to. This must have been about six o'clock.

Then, for two hours nothing happened. That is, Meredith did not put in an appearance and no one seemed to know where he was. Actually he had come to the campus and both the feds and the school authorities had agreed that he would be registered Monday morning, that it would not be proper to register him on the "sabbath." Sometime around seven the rumor had it that Meredith was on the campus and it seemed to reasonable people that he would come to the Lyceum, else there would be no reason for the marshals presence. But at no time was there made any announcement; in fact, as it turned out, there was not even a loud-speaker at the Lyceum. This was a major error on the part of everyone concerned.

The small crowd was slowly augmented and students began some rather frivolous activity. Yells, catcalls, etc. Two boys showed up in Confederate uniform and waved Confederate flags to the accompanying cheers. The talk got a bit nastier as time went on. A few cigarettes, lighted, were flung toward the marshals but they stood there stoically, with no show of emotion. Then a little violence began to take place, all perpetrated by students. Air was let out of the tires on the army trucks. A newspaper man, over towards the Fine Arts center, was roughed up a bit and the glass in his car smashed. The Highway Patrol made no effort to stop this but did take off the man and his wife. Someone else got the car off by driving it across the grass on the circle. Then I saw a big man (a student, I think) snatch a camera from a newsman and dash it to the ground and stomp on it. With patrolmen looking on students began to slash the tires of the army vehicles. Somehow the canvas top of one was set afire. The driver put it out, without any help from the patrolmen. Then someone threw a rock or a coke bottle which smashed the glass in the cab of one of the trucks.

About this time I saw and heard a marshal walk over to a patrolment and ask him if something couldn't be done about the crowd. The patrolman said that he couldn't do anything and walked off. The language being used by students at this time was pretty nasty and then a few rocks and (I did not see this) a piece of lead pipe was thrown from the rear of the crowd at the marshals. This time the marshals donned their gas masks (they may have done this once or twice before).

Your mother and I were on the curb but the crowd had moved up to the army trucks. There was an order, I think by the highway patrol, for the crowd to move back to the curb. A few patrolmen came up and started moving the crowd back a few feet. Your mother and I moved back and were half way to the flagpole when the tear gas shooting started. Exactly what happened is a matter of great controversy and I did not see enough to be able to say categorically what happened. Of these facts I am certain: the marshals for at least an hour had been thoroughly provoked and had taken it all with no show of emotion or movement. And the crowd was entirely student and faculty. The tear gas came in great quantity and the crowd took to its heels. We had a good start and were moving back gingerly in the dark when someone hit me broadside, knocking me to the pavement, tearing my pants, and skinning up my knees and elbow. But this was accidental; the student half apologized - he was just running faster than I was. Most people retreated at least to the Confederate monument. The marshals came about to the flagpole; then I heard them beat their sticks on the sidewalks and they retreated to the Lyceum. The grove was completely filled with tear gas for some minutes. The students were yelling like mad men and were, for the first time, indulging themselves in obscenities.

Then, for the first time, I saw the viciousness of the matter. About a dozen cars, obviously army sedans and obviously filled with marshals, came up to the Monument and turned up past the Y building. The thought that came to me was that they were bringing in Meredith and that the marshals had simply cleared the Lyceum for the event. (I was wrong on this for Meredith was already in his room in Baxter Hall.) The students picked up bricks at the New Science building and went after the cars which slowed down for the turn. At least 150 stones and bricks were thrown at the cars, at point blank range, and most of the cars had their windows smashed, the glass shattering over the six marshals in each car. This really scared me for I knew then that this was a first class riot.

Then a series of attacks on the Lyceum took place, up through the grove. The marshals would wait and then charge, the students would fall back and then charge. About this time people, many of them pretty rough looking, began to come in from town. After awhile I heard some of them saying that they were going to keep this up till the marshals ran out of gas cartridges. (It was lucky this didn't happen because if it had the marshals would probably have had to defend themselves with their pistols - which they never used.) The reinforcements came with a couple of trucks filled with ammunition.

Gen. Walker made a speech at the monument urging attacks on the Lyceum and is said to have led at least one attack. A fire engine was brought up about as far as the flagpole but the boys running it were driven off with tear gas. Much later a bull dozer started for the Lyceum, the drivers being driven off with gas, and so they let it go by itself, aimed for the Lyceum, but it diverted itself and stopped dead. I'm not sure when the rifle fire started but from the vicinity of the old science building and the Engineering building it kept up for most of the night. Mostly twenty-two bullets, but some of much caliber. The firing was toward the Lyceum but mostly

I think for the purpose of putting out the floodlights which had been placed in front of the Lyceum. Of course the marshals all this time were in deadly danger and, I think, some of them were hit. One marshal was hit (by what I don't know) in the throat and word got out that he was dying. The students were crying that the marshals had killed a co-ed but this turned out to be false. The girl was overcome with gas and that was all.

A few trucks of army men came up past the bridge over the IC track and as they turned the monument a tremendous gasoline fire was started in front of the old library - but the vehicles went right through the fire. This apparently enraged the rioters for, expecting another expedition, they set plans for a bigger and better fire, with cars in the highway covered with gasoline. About this time the rioters started throwing Molotov cocktails, each one of which set off a temporary blaze about the size of our house. The pavement in front of the library was pulled up to be used as obstruction material.

From then on the scene was about the same. The marshals stood their ground. Rifle and shotgun firing came more often. The newsman was shot in the back over by Ricks and was dead when he was found. Apparently the boys who had the blockade set up got tired and set it afire, burning four cars in the road in front of the old library.

I talked with a professional agitator from Atlanta who had a small car with three rifles in it. While I was there a rioter came up, said he needed a more powerful gun and Bruce (the agitator) handed him what he called a 30:06 and told him to bring it back later if he could. Bruce also went to town while I was watching and brought back five gallons of gasoline. He talked to me quite freely about what he called his right wing activities. Next morning I turned his name, car license no., etc., etc. to the marshals who had apparently picked him up already.

I guess it was about two that two squadrons of MP's marched in from the airport. They marched right through the mob to the Lyceum. Your mother and I went home about three AM. Got to bed (had two Notre Dame students in the house) about 3:30 and was not quite asleep at 4 when a large number of rioters came into the yard. Several threw stones at the house and then the whole place was lighted up, almost like day. The crowd ran down into the gully between our house and Evelyn Way's and we then saw the reason for their rush. This was the big push undertaken by the military. They were chasing the rioters off the campus and the lights were from their jeeps. I thought maybe the jeeps would be stuck in the little creek but they went over it like it was McAdamized. It wasn't so uneven as you might imagine because the soldiers could not fire and the rioters could throw rocks and use the few guns they had. As late as six in the morning they were still hollering in the distance, towards town.

You can read about the rest of the story in the Times. I've been interrupted so much since I started this that I'm quite sure it makes little sense. Today - now about 5PM Tuesday - the campus is ringed with 10,000 soldiers. Meredith has been to his classes for two days. The campus is filled with rumors of students withdrawing, coeds gone hysterical, etc., but most of the rumors are false. I haven't the slightest notion of the next step although I'm sure that there are students dedicated to killing Meredith when the chance arises. I have never known such hysteria or bitterness or hatred. I don't see how it can be tempered down and the Citizen council temperament will keep it going. Barnett last night put on a great show of demagoguery. His (and Eastland's) charges against the marshals are nonsense and there are many faculty who will testify to this when and if the Congressional inquiry comes off. But that is in the future. We are all safe and sound (your mother heats the C-rations for the troops in Evelyn's yard and we have them in for watching television). I'll write more later. We all read our
Dad