

TITLE: Investigation of Integration of the Greyhound Bus Station at McComb, Mississippi, and Assault on several members of CORE and several newsmen at McComb.

[Handwritten signature]

DATE OF INVESTIGATION: Dec. 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5, 1961.

DATE OF REPORT: December 8, 1961.

INVESTIGATED BY: A. L. Hopkins, Investigator

TYPED BY: M. Curry

On Thursday, November 30, 1961, I was dispatched to McComb, Mississippi, by Director Albert Jones of the State Sovereignty Commission to investigate the above matter and to observe any integration attempts in that city.

I had information before leaving for McComb that four white men had assaulted five Negro Freedom Riders on Wednesday, November 29, 1961, when they attempted to integrate the Greyhound Bus Station Cafe, and a white free lance television photographer from Jackson, Mississippi. In fact, I had observed this attack on the Negro Freedom Riders on television Wednesday night and Thursday morning.

Upon arriving in McComb, I ascertained that the five Negro Freedom Riders that arrived in McComb, Mississippi, on Wednesday, November 29, 1961, were Alice Thompson, c/f, age 22, 1934 Tupelo Street or (Miss. Street), New Orleans, Louisiana; Dorothea Smith, c/f, age 18, 2801 Metropolitan Street, New Orleans, Louisiana; George Raymond, Jr., c/m, age 18, 2322 Delachaise Street, New Orleans, Louisiana; Thomas L. Valentine, c/m, age 23, 1529 LaSalle Street, New Orleans, Louisiana; and Jerome M. Smith, c/m, age 22, 917 Tonti Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Johann Rush, w/m, age unknown, was the free lance photographer from Jackson, Mississippi, who was allegedly chased by a group of white men while attempting to take photographs of the integration attempts of the five previously named Negroes at the Greyhound

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Bus Station. Rush gave his address as 2982 Angela Circle, Jackson, Mississippi, and was allegedly chased from the bus station up an alley to Main Street where he hid in a clothes rack at the Holly Shop until he was escorted to the City Hall by the police.

Rush had previously been arrested that day (Wednesday, November 29, 1961), by the McComb Police and assessed a fine of \$20.00 and \$1.00 cost in City Court on charges of improper turning and running a red light. This arrest occurred after the Freedom Riders arrived at the Greyhound Bus Station and found it closed and departed in a taxi. Rush allegedly drove in this reckless manner in an attempt to follow the taxi. The police followed him to the Burglund office of Dr. James Anderson, c/m, where the five CORE agents had gone and arrested him.

Rush claimed that he was beaten by this white group but failed to identify his alleged assailants. Rush remained at the City Hall until Wednesday night at which time he left his rented automobile in McComb, was escorted to the I.C.R.R. Depot by McComb Police where he departed for Jackson by train.

According to local information and the Jackson Press, Rush was attempting to take photographs in hopes of selling the film to C.B.S. News. I contacted Chief of Police George Guy of McComb, Mississippi, and informed him that I was in McComb for the purpose of observing, but that if he felt that he needed help from the state level, I would contact the proper authorities and request help for him. I also contacted Sheriff Clyde Simmons of Pike County and Mayor Douglas of McComb and offered the same assistance.

They appreciated the cooperation but felt it would be best if the situation could be handled locally. They advised me that they would let me know if they decided to ask for help from the state level.

Chief Guy informed me that there were several F.B.I. Agents and representatives of the Civil Rights Department of the Justice Department in McComb, and that the Federal Government had enjoined he and the other city officials of McComb from interfering with integration attempts at the Trailways Bus Station. "That his hands were tied and if he should interfere, he felt that the U. S. Attorney General would send U. S. Marshals to McComb." Chief Guy indicated that he was going to attempt to keep order without violating the terms of the Federal injunction.

An investigation as to the number of F.B.I. Agents and Justice Department representatives in McComb at that time revealed that there were approximately 12 F.B.I. Agents and from 2 to 4 Justice Department representatives believed to be Assistant U. S. Attorney Generals there.

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There was no further trouble expected in McComb until the following day, Friday, December 1, 1961, when the Police Department expected six Negro Freedom Riders to arrive at 10:18 A.M. to further test the segregation laws of McComb and Mississippi.

There were several newspaper, radio and television reporters and camera men from many sections of the U. S. in McComb to photograph and report on matters there.

Chief Guy informed me that no arrest had been made as a result of the attacks on the Freedom Riders on Wednesday, November 29, 1961, but that he had information that the F.B.I. planned to enlarge sections of the film that had been shown on television in order to identify the white men involved.

I asked Chief Guy if he felt that it would be better for the Federal authorities to make this identification and possibly charge the men with Federal Civil Rights violations, or if it would be better for his force to make the identification and arrests and try these men locally. He evidently decided that it should be handled locally as a short time later the following listed white men were arrested, charged with disturbing the peace and placed under \$100.00 bond each.

~~Earl Ratcliff~~, w/m, 26, 320 Minn. Ave., McComb; ~~Claude McKenzie~~, w/m, 21, Rt. 1, McComb; ~~Johnny Thomas~~, w/m, 20, Rt. 1, Box 282, McComb; ~~Haskel Boyd~~, 1030 Wenable Street, McComb.

Chief Guy further informed me that he planned to notify the Negroes that claimed they were attacked to return to McComb to identify these men.

Early Friday morning, December 1, 1961, I re-contacted Chief Guy who informed me that Mayor Douglas would give a news release at 2:00 p.m. that day and he would give me a copy of this release before it was given to the press. A copy of this release is attached to this report.

Chief Guy introduced me to Honorable Norman Gillis, Jr., Attorney for Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey McGehee Owners and operators of the Greyhound Bus Station cafe in McComb. Mrs. McGehee is also manager of the bus station. Mr. Gillis informed me that the bus station cafe would be closed before the next group of Freedom Riders arrived at 1:30 p.m. that date. Chief Guy had information that six Freedom Riders (Negroes) would arrive at the Greyhound Bus Station in McComb at 1:30 p.m., December 1, 1961, from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. At the time he did not have their names.

The 1:30 p.m. bus arrived in McComb on time, the six Freedom Riders were aboard; they disembarked from the bus and entered what had formerly been the white waiting room and cafe. (The cafe was not in operation.) These Negroes remained in the bus station two to four minutes and then entered a 1961 red 4-door Chevrolet, driven

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by Tom Gaither, c/m, Field Director of CORE, who is stationed in Jackson, Mississippi. This automobile was parked near the front entrance of the bus station and was occupied by two Negro males (unidentified, other than as being students at Tougaloo College).

7 The bus station and the street on which it is located was being patrolled at this time by the entire McComb police force and the Pike County Sheriff's force.

The only disturbance that I observed while these Negroes were integrating the bus station was between a white t.v. camera-man and a group of white people who had gathered at the bus station and who evidently objected to his taking pictures of the integration of the bus station and of the crowd that had gathered. A group of white people started walking toward this photographer and he proceeded to the City Hall at a fast walk. The crowd followed him to City Hall; however, all of them were not following him for the purpose of doing violence as I observed several F.B.I. agents in the crowd. If there were any verbal threats or abusive language used or made to him, I was not close enough to hear it.

The photographer entered the City Hall and the police stopped the crowd at the front of the building. Two white men in this group had a fight and were carried into the police department. They were Charles Ray Pigott of New Orleans, Louisiana, who is a brother of the Pike County attorney and Steve Blailock a local resident who appeared to be about 18 years of age. Neither of these men were arrested as far as I was able to ascertain at the time.

The six Freedom Riders that arrived in McComb at 1:30 p.m. December 1, 1961, were identified as Thomas Peete Shreveport, Louisiana; Patricia Tate Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Jean Thompson, New Orleans, Louisiana; Claude Reese New Orleans, Louisiana; Lillie Bradford, New Orleans, Louisiana; and, George Raymond, New Orleans, Louisiana. These Negroes were not arrested and I was unable to get better addresses or descriptions of them.

Between 10:30 and 11:00 a.m., December 1, 1961, three white newsmen who were leaving the office of the McComb Enterprise Journal were attacked by four white men--Simmons Fentress, a Times Magazine reporter from Atlanta, Georgia was knocked through a plate glass window of the white sporting goods store located next door to the Enterprise Journal.

Don Uhrbrock, a Life Magazine photographer from Miami, Florida, and Don Underwood a Life Magazine reporter also of Miami claimed they were struck by this group. However, the three newsmen only identified Haskel Boyd, c/w/m, 20, as one of the assailants. Boyd admitted this attack but did not name anyone else as having assisted him. Judge Brumfield immediately revoked a 30-day suspended sentence that Boyd was under for a previous violation which had nothing to do with racial trouble. Boyd was carried to a local doctor to be treated for an injured hand that he received in this attack and the local doctor recommended that he be sent to a bone specialist. He was then carried to Jackson for further treatment.

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At 3:30 p.m. December 1, 1961, the six Freedom Riders that arrived at 1:30 p.m. boarded a south-bound bus without incident-- their destination was Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

On Sunday morning, December 3, 1961, Editor Oliver Emmerich of the McComb Enterprise Journal was attacked as he left a drug store in McComb enroute to church. The man that allegedly attacked Mr. Emmerich was later identified as Milton J. Stayton, ~~Ow/m~~, 43, of R.F.D. #3, McComb, Mississippi.

Stayton was charged with assault and battery, placed under \$1,000.00 bond and ordered to appear in court Monday morning at 9:00 a.m. in the City Court of McComb.

Stayton was tried Monday, December 4, 1961, on this charge and fined \$100.00 and sentenced to 30 days in jail. He appealed this case to the Circuit Court of Pike County.

Other reports follow regarding the McComb incidents.