

# Exclusive From Selma: 'MY NIGHT IN HELL'

- See Columns 1 And 2 Below

## Defender Writer Tells Ala. Terror

By BETTY WASHINGTON

SELMA, Ala.—To be in Selma, Ala., and not know fear is to exist in a fantasy world.

For the dread of being subject to a brutal attack plagues even the most militant rights leaders and palpitates one's senses into sluggish fright.

I have never known such fear as was experienced on my first night here, when I allowed myself the expensive privilege of forgetting my dusky presence alone could be sufficient reason to stir hatred and an attempt at violence.

What started out to be a quiet evening meal in the company of the Rev. Willis Tabor, a Chicago minister, ended in a run-

ing match in which we—under other circumstances—would have been handed a trophy. The running was quiet, and for the most part stationary, but inside we were fleeing.

After one forkful I informed the minister that I did not intend to eat or pay for cold food. We asked to have our supper reheated. In the interim two circumstances evolved that marked us for danger.

First, the other demonstrators upon completing their meals had begun to file out. In addition, Rev. Tabor, had scribbled an angry message to the management on a napkin.

He had planned, he said, to hand it to the maitre D' as we left. The message read, "We have been waiting patiently for a long period of time seeking to be served food we really needed. It was interesting to observe how all of the customers who came in after us were served before we were."

"We made a complaint, which we presume was the reason for added delay in our being served. If we were in error in making the complaint, we apologize. It is our prayer that you will forgive us."

This later was to become another obstacle to our continued good health.

Our errors in judgement were to continue to allow mute evidence that something foul was burning. Our first hint that we were in danger came from the faces of the Negro men and women whose duty it was to clear the tables.

As we ate, they spoke to us with their eyes and with their movements. Not a word passed between us. Yet fear began to fill the atmosphere as strongly as if they had shouted "run for your lives." The tension had become so electric that eating was impossible.

After my companion paid the bill he called for a Negro taxicab. The line was busy. He then asked a blond clerk for the number of another cab company and was told, "I am sorry—I don't have that information." Placing the call to the Negro cabbie for the second time, we were informed he would be along shortly.

Rather than stand outside in the dark, we took seats on a salmon covered leather sofa in the lobby and we were immediately confronted by three white men who had emerged from the hotel office. One of them asked in a loud voice, "Are you registered here?"

My friend answered "no, we are not." The well-dressed white man replied, "Please get up, we are." As two of the three men forged themselves onto the leather sofa, I asked, unthinking, if they would like

it had been allowed to sit.



BETTY WASHINGTON



SELMA MARCHERS MARK TIME

Civil rights demonstrators in Selma, Ala. display varying clothing styles as they battle to keep warm in damp, chilly breeze which swept the street where they camped out during

the night. They vowed to stay in the street until police arrested them or allowed them to proceed with their march. (UPI Telephoto)

See SELMA, Page 2

# Selma

Continued From Page 1

to have the whole sofa. The same one looked at me and harshly responded, "No."

What had been smoldering apprehension sprang into such horror that we began to pray for the arrival of the taxi cab.

By this time remarks were being exchanged that were meant to terrify us. They succeeded.

Outwardly cool, it would have been impossible to realize the extent of our anxiety. On the other hand, it is possible they interpreted our outward composure to be fear-inspired arrogance.

The situation by this time had evolved into a crisis manipulated by the hands of the clock. When I joined the clergyman, who was standing near the entrance, I decided we could not face alone what evidently was to come, and placed a call to Brown Chapel, central meeting place for the demonstrators.

I had hoped, and did presume, someone would come after us or at least inform them of our situation should they arrive too late. The line at the church was busy, but our fate began to form a grotesque picture impossible to blot from the imagination.

It was at this point that my minister friend came to the booth and whispered to me, "A group of toughs are gathering outside. Things don't look too good. Tell them to hurry."

As I attempted to reach the church office for the second time, I thought how useless it would be to attempt to barricade myself in a telephone booth and wondered if others in the movement, if not the movement itself, should be endangered by asking them to spoon the two of us out of the jam.

Emotion was the victor, and I placed the call again. Once more the line was busy. Under such circumstances in Chicago, one would ask the operator to interrupt the call for emergency or simply telephone the police. Neither of these acts would have brought results in Selma, they may even have worsened our plight.

I thanked God when Rev. Tabor beckoned to me that the taxi had finally arrived. With all deliberate speed we walked out of our first 'Hell' and into the second. Not 50 feet from us stood a band of about six club and pipe carrying white youths.

One of them menacingly held a shining silver object. I see it now, without being able to determine what kind of instrument it was. As we walked to the cab, they turned in our direction, their eyes filled with hate. Still terrified we placed the situation before the driver and asked him to get us away from there as fast as was lawful.

Upon entering Brown Chapel, we were caught up in a swarm of beautiful brown people with smiling white faces sprinkled in, and were in the process of regaining our composure when it was announced that three Unitarian - Universalist ministers had been attacked on the streets of Selma and that one of them had been beaten into unconsciousness.

We then felt the weight of answered prayer as we joined the congregation in meditation that Rev. James Reeb's life would be spared.

Selma is not like any other little town. It is infected with vermin of racial hatred. To be here is to slowly suffocate, although the skies are fair and the temperature calm, the comfort index registers zero.