

Rev. Reeb's Selma Memorial: That 'Great Day' Stirred Souls

By BETTY WASHINGTON.
(EDITOR'S NOTE: CHICAGO DAILY DEFENDER writer Betty Washington is in the strife-torn Selma-Montgomery, Ala. area, gathering material for a series on the South which will soon appear in the pages of the DEFENDER. While on her mission, the writer has dispatched news stories of the hectic current events of the Dixie cities. This story depicts the Selma memorial march in honor of slain Universalist minister, Rev. James Reeb.)

The sun came up on a new day for America when the brave people of Selma, Ala. marched over the tension line and held an integrated memorial service on the steps of the Dallas County Courthouse.

Walking arm in arm, America's moral strength shoved back the barriers of bigotry.

And did it non-violently. March 14, 1965 will be remembered as the day when the "Ecumenical Council" met in the middle of

one of the South's most segregated cities and prayed for the salvation of the political power structure that would allow brave men to be slain while in the pursuit of justice.



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It was the day a memorial service had been scheduled for Selma's second martyr in the fight for freedom. Hardly had the banners been torn down for the slain Jimmy Lee Jackson, when the Rev. James Reeb was murdered reportedly by four local white men.

The service for Reeb was held in Browne AME Chapel, with Dr. Martin Luther King delivering the main address.

Meanwhile, the line at the "Berlin Wall" remained solid. Demonstrators stood toe to toe with Alabama state troopers and Selma city law officers. Quivers of apprehension passed among the demonstrators when Selma's Public Safety Director, Wilson Baker called on a loudspeaker for their attention and announced that a Judge had issued an order stating a march to the courthouse would be permitted. The crowd cheered wildly and joined in for two choruses of "We Shall Overcome."

A tall slender white student lifted a tiny Negro youngster into the air and told him, "We're going to march, son." "Are we going to be free?" the child asked. The young man cuddled the lad's head close to his chest and said, "We come closer to it every day."

At the same time, six white Roman Catholic nuns, who had stood beneath the blistering sun all day, bowed their heads in thanksgiving.

Teenage Selma lads started a chant that quickly spread from the front of the line all the way to the rear and eventually even to the front steps of Browne Chapel. "Two, four six, eight, move and let us demonstrate." "One, two, three, fo', Jim Clark must go."

Drunk with the spirit of the momentary victory, the throng of clerics and laymen who had come from every corner of the nation sang, "Ob, Wallace, seg-

regation's bound to fall. "Oh, Wallace, you can't kill us all. We're tired of your messing, tired of your jive. We'll have freedom in 1965."

The DEFENDER asked Baker if Judge Thomas had made the decision on which way the march would travel. He replied, "No. It was James Bevel."

Shoulder to shoulder Greek Orthodox archbishop Iakovas, paraded alongside Dr. Martin Luther King and the Rev. Ralph Abernathy. Also leading were the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, the Rev. F. D. Reeves, president of the Dallas County voters league and Rev. Andrew Young, one of King's most hard working lieutenants.

A Negro protestant clergyman walked arm in arm with two Catholic sisters. Behind them a petite nun looped her hands over the arms of two dark and stately ministers.

Then came Selma's Negro residents, college students, housewives, businessmen, lawyers, laborers, professors, doctors, teenagers and elderly people on canes. All were on their way to carry the cross of Christ and the burdens of a long-oppressed people to the courthouse and display it where the world would take notice.

Local white residents lined the sidewalks. Some sneered most of the faces wore blank stares.

Nobody jeered. As the marchers formed a mammoth bouquet in front of the courthouse, their numbers began to increase. It took nearly 30 minutes for the entire line to form into a mass.

With the late evening sun streaming down upon the "assemblage with a message" Dr. King lifted his powerful voice in praise of Jimmy Lee Jackson

and the late Rev. Reeb. An arrangement of orchid and white flowers was placed by King before the entrance to the court building. Newsmen from as far away as London joined the marchers and bowed their heads in prayer.

At one time during the brief service, a continual blast of horns shattered the silence of the marchers. Taking note of the disturbance, United Auto Workers President, Walter Reuther stated, "That's a good way for them to let off steam."

When King announced that the prayers would be followed by three choruses of "We Shall Overcome," in one voice, the mass of people, estimated at approximately 3,500 echoed the familiar and nostalgic lyric of the civil rights hymn.

Black and white hands joined. Smiling faces, black, white, brown and yellow proclaimed to the world that a new day had risen in Selma, Ala.

And although the battle was a long way from its completion, men and women had finally arrived at the point where they were not afraid to stand as an integrated body and in the face of death speak out for freedom and equality for all.