

Battle Flares, Nipped After Miss. Funeral

By CHARLES PORTIS

JACKSON, Miss. — Downtown Jackson, on a hot afternoon in June, 1963, is not the best place in the world for a marching funeral procession of 5000 Negroes, but they had one here Saturday and it was silent and orderly.

Police furnished a motorcycle escort, and the white citizenry gathered on street corners to watch, but did not interfere in any way.

But when the funeral march was over, a yelling mob of Negro youngsters made a frightening rush on Capitol st., the main business street, and wound up by throwing bricks and bottles at police who were trying to disperse them.

It was not the bloody race riot that may be coming to

Jackson any day now, but for a fearless act by the Justice Department's John Doar, it would have been.

As it was, heads were bloodied by billy clubs, and by bottles and rocks, but if the Negro demonstrators had ever broken through to Capitol st.—where a lot of rural whites were doing their Saturday shopping — it would have been a disaster.

The funeral procession was for Medgar Evers, 37-year-old N.A.A.C.P. field secretary who was shot and killed by a sniper at his home here Wednesday.

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An elaborate funeral service was held for him at 11 a. m. at a Negro Masonic lodge, and then the mourners marched through town, three abreast, in a serpentine column nine blocks long, to a funeral home not far from the business center of Jackson.

It was a mile-and-a-half hike. The temperature was 83 degrees. Mayor Allen Thompson and his City Council had never issued a permit for Negroes to march here, but they gave

one Saturday for the funeral procession. That gesture, an extraordinary one, reflects the fear and uneasiness that is felt in this citadel of segregation.

The march began about 12:45 p. m., and reached the Collins funeral home about 1:30. There was no trouble along the way. Leading the procession were local Negro ministers, and such notables as Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the N. A. A. C. P.; Dr. Martin Luther King and comedian Dick Gregory. There were a few whites scattered about in the column, most of them ministers in clerical collars. Almost every one was in black, and the women carried parasols.

Whites gathered in front of stores, filling stations and beer joints, and watched silently as the Negroes moved by. They did not seem to approve, but they did not picket up. Suddenly they began to run, and others joined them, including a good many

boys in short pants watched from, standing with one foot on the other because the concrete was hot.

At 1:30 the procession reached the funeral home on Farrish st., about 10 blocks off Capitol st. The area is a Negro business section, with a lot of little one-story taverns, cafes, clothing stores and a Negro Y. W. C. A.

The ceremony over, much of the crowd drifted away but the youngsters milled about in the street, and in a few minutes a group of teenage boys and girls began to sing and chant in front of the Y. W. C. A. "Freedom, freedom, freedom. We want freedom now."

After a little of this, they began to march down Farrish st., back toward Capitol, and the tempo of the chanting picked up. Suddenly they began to run, and others joined them, including a good many

Negro toughs who had come out of taverns and pool halls. They ran through a blockade of policemen—about a half dozen—and got all the way to Capitol, where they were finally turned back by a wall of blue helmeted policemen.

One white man at the scene, whose neck was literally red, jumped one of the Negroes, but police clubbed him and hustled him away in a squad car.

It was touch and go for a moment, but then the police managed to get the mob moving backwards with their billy clubs, and then the Negroes started throwing coke bottles at them.

And in about 10 minutes there were some 125 city police, highway patrolmen and deputy sheriffs moving down the street abreast and three deep, with carbines, shotguns and M-1 rifles at the ready.

"Please disperse, please get off the streets," said Deputy Police Chief J. L. Ray, through a bullhorn. "We issued you a permit so you could honor the dead, and now you are only dishonoring yourselves."

But they continued to throw bottles and yell curses at the police. There then developed a space, a no-man's land of cratching bottles—of about 100 yards between the police and the retreating Negro mob, which numbered about 500.

"Hold it, hold it tight here," said Chief Ray, baling his men at Griffith st., four blocks off Capitol. "There's a Justice Department man down there with them. Let the Justice Department see how they act."

He was speaking of John Boar, an aide to assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall, who was standing right in the middle of the flying bottles, trying to break up the mob.

Doar, standing in the no-man's land in his shirt sleeves waving frantically at the mob. "I stand for what's right, not fighting with bricks and bottles. Go back, go back, you can't win this way."

A number of Negro ministers, including Rev. S. L. Whitney, were also trying to break up the mob, pleading with them to return to their homes.

Police dogs were used on the streets to break up small gatherings of Negroes, and in one case, to scatter newsmen. Fire trucks were also brought to the scene, but the hoses were not drawn.

Among the 27 persons arrested, were two white men, Rev. Ralph Edward King Jr. and John R. Salter, members of the staff of the Negro college here. Rev. Mr. King was dragged from a second floor office on Farrish st., and arrested for no very clear reason. Salter was with him, but not resisting, was not dragged.

The Negroes who took part in the violence represented only a fraction of the crowd that turned out for the funeral.

At the services, the humble and the great paid final tribute to Evers—eulogized as a Negro who "could live in Mississippi and not hate."

President Kennedy sent Evers' widow a letter offering his "sincerest condolences."

Mr. Kennedy told Mrs. Evers:

"Although comforting thoughts are difficult at a time like this, surely there may be some in the realization of the justice of the cause for which your husband gave his life.

"Achievement of the goals he did so much to promote will enable his children and the generations to follow to share fully and equally in the benefits and advantages our nation has to offer."

In a postscript, the President said, "Mrs. Kennedy joins me in tendering her deepest sympathies."

More than 4000 mourners, including Mrs. Evers and two of her three young children, were present at the funeral services, conducted at the Negro Masonic Temple.

Roy Wilkins, a close friend of Evers' and the executive secretary of the N.A.A.C.P., delivered the principal talk.

He referred to Evers as a "martyr in the crusade for human liberty," and declared:

"For a little while he loaned us and his people the great strength of his body and the elixir of his spirit.

"If he could live in Mississippi and not hate, so shall we though we shall ever stoutly contend for the kind of life his children and all others must enjoy in this rich land."

Prominent Negroes among the mourners included United Nations Undersecretary Ralph Bunche.

(Boston Globe-N.Y. Herald Tribune)