

MEREDITH IS SHOT IN BACK ON WALK INTO MISSISSIPPI

Ambushed Negro Reported
in Satisfactory Condition—
Johnson Denounces Act

WHITE SUSPECT IS HELD

CORE Plans to Finish March
to Spur Voter Registration
and End Fear of Racists

By ROY REED

Special to The New York Times

HERNANDO, Miss., June 6—James H. Meredith, the Negro who desegregated the University of Mississippi in 1962, was shot in the back from ambush today as he walked along United States Highway 51 two miles south of here.

Mr. Meredith suffered what a hospital official called superficial wounds of the head, neck, shoulder, back and legs. He was reported to be in satisfactory condition after surgery to remove 60 to 70 pellets at a hospital at Memphis, 26 miles north of here.

Immediately after the shooting, which occurred at 4:15 P.M. Central standard time (6 P.M. Eastern daylight time), the police arrested a white man with an automatic 16-gauge shotgun. He was identified as Aubrey James Norvell, 40 years old, an unemployed former hardware contractor of Memphis.

Sheriff Lee Meredith of DeSoto County, said the suspect had admitted the shooting but had told him he did not know why he had done it. The sheriff said the man had been drinking.

At his Texas ranch, President Johnson deplored the shooting as an "awful act of violence" and ordered a Justice Department investigation. Page 29.

In New York City, the Congress of Racial Equality declared that it planned to take up his march from the site of the shooting to Jackson, the state capital. Page 28.]

Object of Hatred

Mr. Meredith, 32 years old, now a Columbia University law school student and a resident of New York, became an object of hatred among white Mississippians after he enrolled in their all-white, tradition-shrouded "Ole Miss."

He had already marched 28 miles of a 220-mile projected walk from Memphis to Jackson when he was shot today. The walk was a homecoming and a pilgrimage aimed at promoting Negro voter registration. It also was a personal test for Mr. Meredith to learn whether he and other Negroes still had reason to fear whites in Mississippi.

"The tension is high," Mr. Meredith had said this morning. "I can tell from the way the Negroes are acting along the way."

Sherwood Ross, a New York and Washington radioman acting as Mr. Meredith's press coordinator, was one of six men walking with him when the shooting occurred.

Mr. Ross, a white man, said he had heard a voice shout "James Meredith" twice from the woods at the roadside. He said he saw a white man standing in the brush.

The man raised a gun, he said, and Mr. Ross warned Mr.

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Associated Press Wirephoto

SHOT WHILE MARCHING: James H. Meredith on U.S. Highway 51 after he was wounded near Hernando, Miss.

Meredith Is Wounded on Rights Walk in Mississippi

SUSPECT SEIZED AFTER SHOOTING

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Meredith, "James, he's got a gun." The seven men scattered. Another witness said the marchers threw themselves prone on the pavement of the two-lane highway and an oncoming car had to stop to avoid running over them.

Then the shooting began. Several witnesses said they heard three blasts from the shotgun.

Mr. Meredith shouted, "Oh my God, oh, oh."

He crawled to the west side of the pavement and lay bleeding but conscious until an ambulance arrived less than five minutes later.

Blood soaked his checkered brown shirt behind his right shoulder. More blood flowed from the back of his head and neck.

He lay sprawled on the gravel shoulder of the highway, halfway up a gentle, shaded slope. His companions tried to make him comfortable.

Twice the wounded man pleaded, "Get a car and get me in it."

About 15 officers, including state troopers, sheriff's deputies and at least two agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, were in the vicinity. Sheriff Meredith said that apparently none of the officers had seen the assailant in the brush. Several reporters and photographers were also strung out behind the marchers.

The shots came from a clump of underbrush in a small woods east of the highway.

Suspect Apprehended

Sheriff Meredith said that Norvell was apprehended as he made his way toward his parked car nearby. The suspect wore a white shirt and smoked a pipe.

He was locked in the DeSoto County jail here while the prosecuting attorney, Ross Franks, investigated.

David Hoxie, administrator of the William B. Bowld Hospital, where Mr. Meredith received emergency surgery, said the shotgun pellets had caused 60 to 70 superficial wounds. He said Mr. Meredith was resting comfortably after surgery.

Mr. Hoxie said the doctors believed the wounds to have been caused by either buckshot or birdshot. Sheriff Meredith said he believed they were caused by No. 6 birdshot.

This type of ammunition is made up of a shell containing 200 to 230 pellets smaller than BB's. It is used primarily for hunting waterfowl, rabbits or squirrels. However, when fired from a distance of 100 feet it can kill a man.

Claude Sterrett, a young Negro businessman from New York who accompanied Mr. Meredith on his walk, said that the shotgun assailant had waved bystanders away before firing the shots that felled Meredith.

He reported that the man had twice shouted, "James Meredith." Then, Mr. Sterrett said, the gunman shouted, "I only want Meredith." Mr. Sterrett recalled that one shot rang out, followed seconds later by another one.

"Meredith started to run across the highway," Mr. Sterrett added, "and the man came up on the mound and took point-blank aim at Meredith from about 50 feet."

Mr. Sterrett told reporters that some two minutes elapsed between the time that the man and his gun first came into view and the time he started shooting.

"He took time to let us know he was there, to smile and wave his hand, before he shot," Mr. Sterrett said.

"The police were standing right there," he went on, "and they did nothing about it."

'Set-Up' Is Charged

"This was a definite set-up," Mr. Sterrett charged. "They told us outright. Two people in a blue and white car passed us six or seven times and shouted 'You won't get past Hernando.'"

Before the shooting, the marchers had met both hostility and warmth.

Only a few minutes before, a group of white youths in Hernando had blocked the path to heckle them and had ended by laughing and swapping jests with Mr. Meredith.

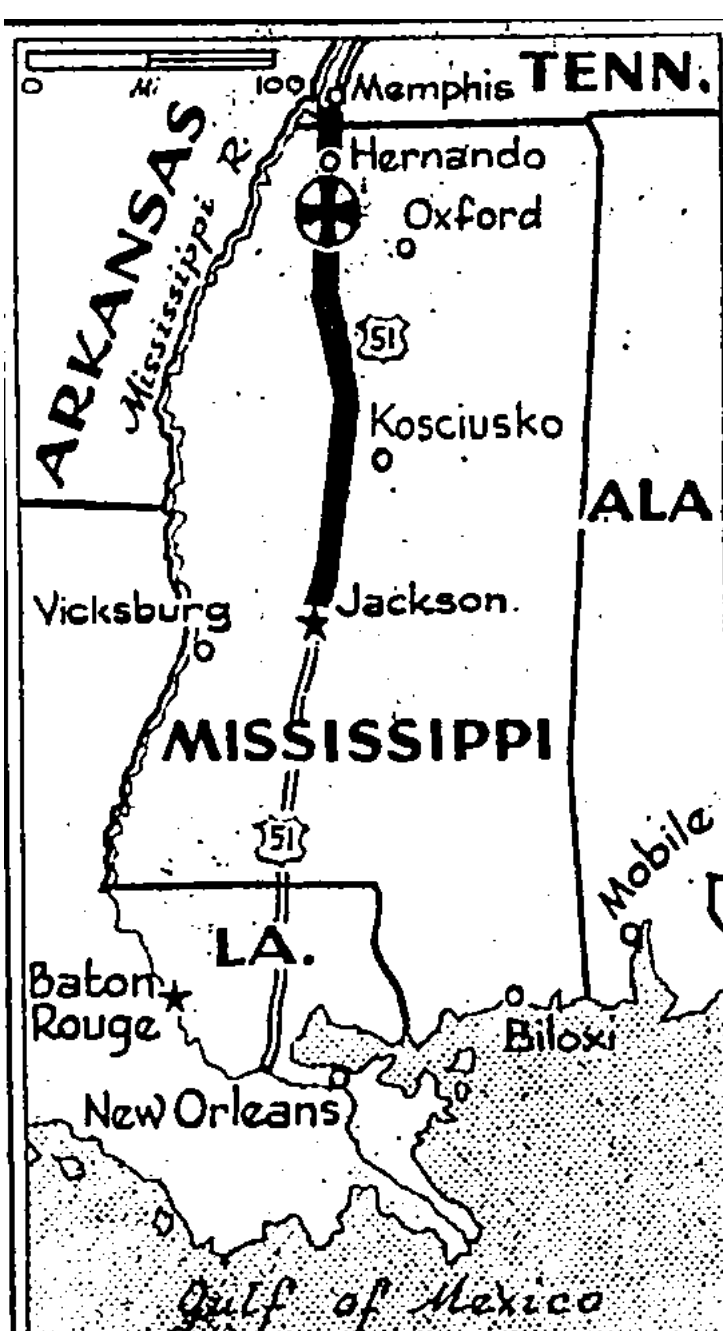
Today as Mr. Meredith passed Hernando, he and his companions were joined in their way by Bill Massey, a 21-year-old Negro soldier who said he wanted to accompany them for the rest of the day.

The marchers were kept under surveillance by F.B.I. agents who followed along the route in a car. A group of reporters was also behind the marchers at the time of the shooting.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Mer-



AFTER THE SHOTGUN WAS FIRED: James H. Meredith lies wounded on the shoulder of U.S. Highway 51 while reporters accompanying him take shelter behind an automobile.



SITE OF AMBUSH: Mr. Meredith was shot near Hernando (cross), after leaving Memphis on a 220-mile walk to Jackson.

dith was greeted by friendly Negroes and hostile whites as he attempted to prove to the Negroes of his home state that they had nothing to fear.

He entered Mississippi at 9:15 A.M. on the second day of his pilgrimage. Small crowds were already gathered in the morning hours as he crossed the state line, some 12 miles south of Memphis. Carloads of sightseers moved along the hot pavement, hoping to get a glance of one of the state's most controversial sons.

"I hope you make it safely," said a Negro woman in a starched cotton dress. "We're praying for you."

Mr. Meredith shook her hand and walked on.

"I Hope to Hell You Die"

A hundred yards further along a young white man in a neat cotton shirt shouted through his open car window:

"I hope to hell you die before you get there."

For Mr. Meredith, now a sophomore at the Columbia University Law School, the trip was his first visit home since he returned for his father's funeral in Kosciusko, Miss., a year ago. He had left the state soon after his graduation from the University of Mississippi in 1963.

Before they even crossed the state line, the small group of marchers were reviled by white motorists and passersby.

Once, a red car driven by a young white man swerved from a line of traffic and passed within inches of the group.

"The tension is high," Mr. Meredith said at one point, "I can tell from the way the Negroes are acting along the way."

As the day wore on, occasional groups of Negroes appeared along the roadside giving words of cheer to the marchers. Hard-eyed whites continued to ride by in cars, but in ever decreasing numbers.

Before they picked up the Negro soldier, Mr. Meredith's party included Joseph Crittenden, a Negro businessman from Memphis, who wore a stylish straw hat and a tropical suit; the Rev. Robert O. Weeks, a white Episcopal minister from Monroe, N. Y.; and Sherwood Ross, a white man employed by Radio Stations WWRL in New York and WOL in Washington. Mr. Ross is acting as Mr. Meredith's "press coordinator." A seventh man was unidentified.

In Memphis, neighbors described Norvell as a "very nice man—as nice a neighbor as you could ask for." The Norvells, who are childless, live outside the Memphis city limits. Mrs. Norvell works for a department store.

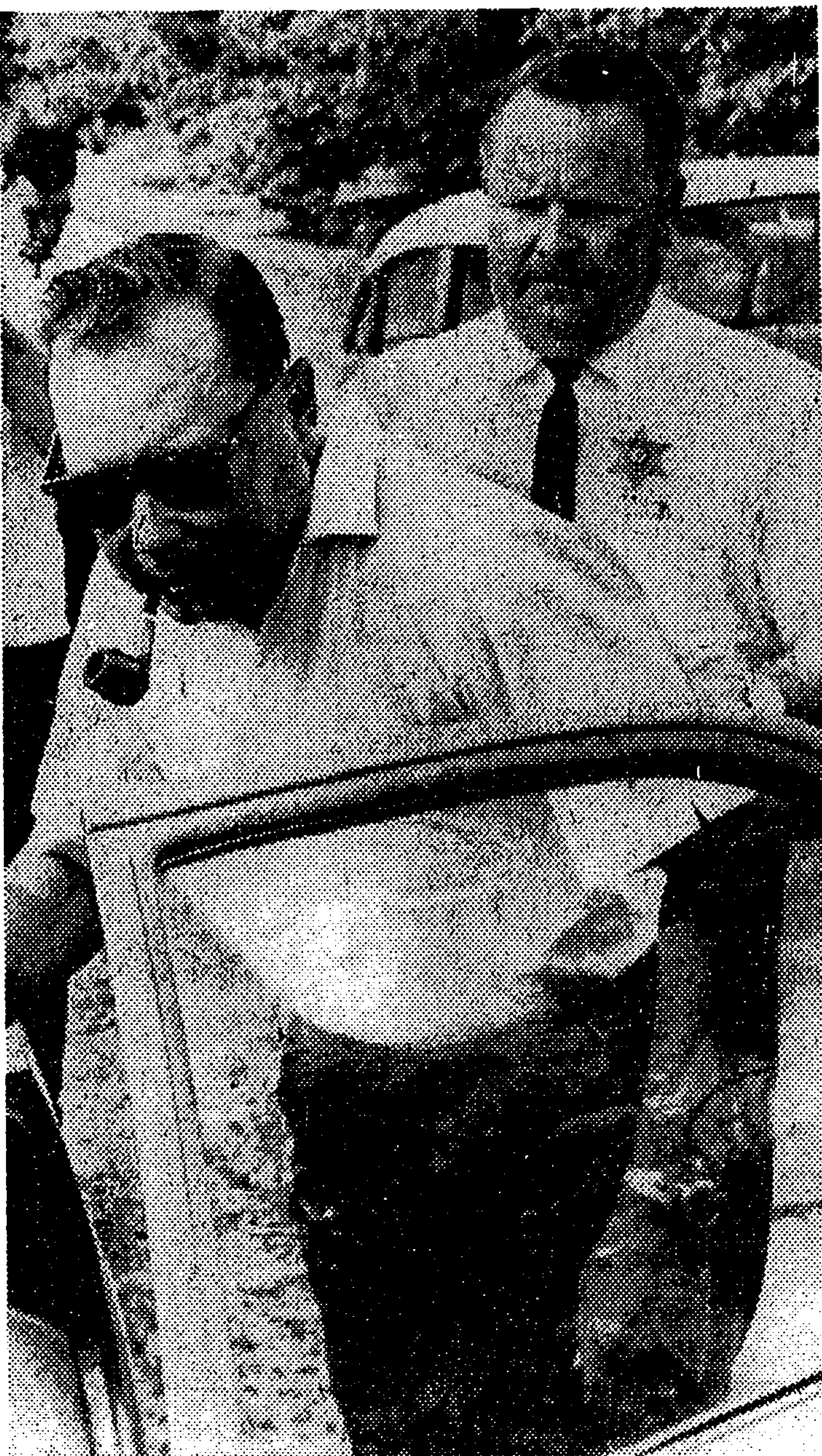
The police declined to divulge any further information about the suspect. The neighbors, however, added, that so far as they knew Norvell had not engaged in any anti-civil rights activities in the past.

Sheriff Meredith said that Norvell had said he "was not a member of any groups." Norvell was described as of stocky build, weighing about 185 pounds, and 5 feet 8 inches tall.

The suspect lives in a \$15,000 brick veneer home. His father operated a hardware store in the Raleigh section of Memphis and the son worked there. C. M. McClain, who owns the lot adjoining the Norvell property, said he had talked with the suspect several times and had never heard him mention civil rights.

Ray Hamilton Jr., editor of The Raleigh-Bartlett Star, a suburban Memphis newspaper, said he had been acquainted with Mr. Norvell between 1961 and 1964. He described Mr. Norvell as being thoroughly noncontroversial.

"I never heard him take a stand, for or against anything," Mr. Hamilton said. "He was just a plain person."



United Press International Telephotos

SUSPECT SEIZED: Aubrey James Norvell, unemployed hardware contractor from Memphis, is taken to police car.