

in the center of the 'crisis'



PAUL GUIHARD

1932-1962
European reporter killed during Ole Miss riot, Oxford, Miss.

When James Meredith tried to enroll in the University of Mississippi in the fall of 1962, he was turned away by Gov. Ross Barnett, who vowed no black person would attend the state's most prestigious white college.

Barnett did not have the authority to exclude Meredith, a federal court ruled, but the governor would not back down. After negotiations between federal and state officials failed, President Kennedy finally sent federal troops to ensure the safe enrollment of James Meredith. The stage was set for a battle at Ole Miss, and reporters from all over the world

nicknamed 'Flash' by fellow reporters. When he arrived at the airport in Jackson, Miss., a flight attendant who discovered he was French asked, "What are you doing in Jackson?"

"Can't you guess?" replied Guihard.

The woman paused, and then said in surprise, "Oh, yes, it's because of that Negro story."

Before Guihard was even out of the airport, he saw the signs of a battle that had become not only a racial crisis but also a contest between the highest levels of state and federal government. Several young men were handing out postcards addressed to

"It is an atmosphere not of crisis but of a carnival ... there are thousands of Confederate flags...They are fixed to the radio antennas of automobiles, they are in the buttonholes of men's suits. They are shown by the ladies ... and there's a feeling of relaxation in the crowd ... People are not at all aware of the enormity of their gesture, of its repercussions and of the interest it is creating all over the world.

"It's difficult to believe that you are in the center of the most serious constitutional crisis ever experienced by the United States since the War of Secession."

Then — as the crowd began to sing "Dixie" and a member of the White Citizens Council bellowed, "A Negroid America will lose her greatness!" — Guihard felt the tension rise. He wrote, "It is in these moments you feel there is a distance of a century between Washington and the segregationists of the South...The Civil War has never ended."

BATTLE OF OLE MISS

Guihard left Jackson for Oxford that day with a sense that he had entered an absurd but slightly terrifying drama.

At the campus of Ole Miss in Oxford, 300 federal marshals were stationed around the main building, where hundreds of angry whites had gathered to await James Meredith's arrival. (Meredith, in fact, had already been secretly taken to a dorm room and was under the protection of armed guards throughout the night.)

At about 8 p.m., just as President Kennedy an-



RIGHT
White men began gathering on the afternoon of September 30, 1962, to try to prevent James Meredith from enrolling at Ole Miss.

OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE
Troops gathered at Ole Miss to enforce a federal court order allowing James Meredith to enroll at the university.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW
James Meredith, the first black student to enroll at Ole Miss, was guarded by a state trooper as he left campus.

came to cover the story.

One of them was Paul Guihard, a French reporter based in New York City. The day Meredith was to enroll — Sunday, September 30, 1962 — was supposed to be a day off for Guihard, but his editors said the story in Mississippi had to be covered.

CIVIL WAR CONTINUED

Guihard was a tall, husky red-bearded bachelor known for his energy and enthusiasm and

President Kennedy that urged him to end "the war against nature which he is leading against the sovereign state of Mississippi."

In Jackson, Guihard discovered that a white mob had cordoned off the governor's mansion to protect Gov. Barnett from what they believed was a federal invasion. Guihard described the scene to his French readers as "absolutely unreal" in his dispatch that afternoon:



nounced on national television that the crisis at Ole Miss was resolved, a federal marshal was hit with a lead pipe by someone in the white mob, and a shower of rocks, bricks and bottles came down on the troops. The marshals responded with tear gas. Members of the white mob began firing guns.

Less than an hour later, Paul Guihard was found dead in front of a women's dormitory, killed by a bullet in the back.

By morning, the marshals had been reinforced by Army and National Guard troops, and nearly 200 people had been arrested. Weapons confiscated from the white mob included more than 40 shotguns as well as rifles, knives and blackjacks. Of the 300 marshals, 28 had been shot and 130 others were injured. A white man, Ray Gunter, was found dead from stray gunfire.

It is not known who shot Guihard, or whether the killer knew he was a reporter. But it was not uncommon for reporters covering civil rights crises to become victims themselves. During the Freedom Rides, white mobs lashed out at reporters and photographers who were attempting to document the violence. In Birmingham and Selma, reporters also were attacked. But they continued to bring the news of the Civil Rights Movement to the nation.

Paul Guihard was buried October 5 in Saint Malo, France, following a memorial service in New York attended by U.S. and French officials. President Kennedy expressed his apologies to the French press agency



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in a telegram, and the University of Mississippi student newspaper set up a scholarship fund in Guihard’s name.

Within two weeks of Guihard’s death, 20,000 troops were brought into Oxford to maintain calm.

James Meredith’s life at Ole Miss was marked by isolation and harassment, but his graduation day came without further violence. Four years later, Meredith was shot and seriously wounded during a one-man march through Mississippi. ●