

NEWS RELEASE

STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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688-0331

SASSER, GEORGIA, January 3 - A Sasser policeman has been charged with violating the civil rights of three field workers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) by forcing them to leave town during a drive to register Negro voters.

United States Attorney Floyd M. Buford said he has filed a criminal information against Denver Edgar Short, Sr., Sasser policeman. He said Short is charged with six counts of depriving citizens of constitutional rights.

Short had fired a pistol as a carful of SNCC workers who were driving in Sasser. He is charged with "illegally arresting Ralph Waldo Allen, Willie Paul Berein, Jr., and Prathia Lauranne Hall", all SNCC staff members. Berein, a student at Atlanta's Clark College, who worked for SNCC during last summer and during the Christmas holidays, said that Short arrested the occupants of the car, placed them in the Sasser jail and then transferred them to nearby Dawson, where they were held for five hours and then released. The federal action also said that Short allegedly forced Allen to leave Sasser. Allen, and SNCC Field Secretary Charles Sherrod, were arrested last August following a series of voter registration meetings. At that time police chief W. B. Cherry said that the two were charged with vagrancy because they had no visible means of support.

Sheriff Z. T. Matthews of Terrell County said that he had no information about the federal action. Matthews and his deputies, smoking cigars, cursing and packing pistols, invaded a church in Sasser last July where SNCC members were holding a voting meeting. Matthews said then that "We want our colored people to go on living like they have for the past 100 years."

Terrell County is the scene of the first voting suit under the 1957 Civil Rights act. The Atlanta-based SNCC has been conducting vote drives here and in Lee, Baker and Dougherty Counties for a year and a half. SNCC workers have been repeatedly arrested and harrassed by local law officers, four area churches have been burned, and two SNCC staffers were shot by night riders this summer.