

12:40 am

Pike County/McComb TWO BOMBINGS

Two children were injured when a residence and a church -- both connected with the movement -- were bombed here last night. All but one of Mrs. Aleyaenne Quinn's eight rooms home in McComb were damaged by a blast believed to be dynamite at 10:50 pm, Miss. time. Mrs. Quinn's children, Jacqueline, 9, and Anthony, 5, were injured. A babysitter - also in the home at the time of the blast - escaped injury. An angry crowd of Negroes gathered at the home after the blast. When police arrived thirty minutes later, they were pelted with bricks and bottles. One police car was damaged and one Negro girl slightly injured by a ricocheting brick. Another group of Negroes formed a roadblock nearby and tried to stop all passing cars. In Baertown just south of McComb the Society Hill Baptist Church was almost completely destroyed by an explosion at 11:20 p.m. The church was used extensively for voter registration activities in 1961 and a majority of its members presently support the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The bombings are the eighth and ninth in Pike County since August 27th and the 13th and 14th since the summer began.

Jesse Harris, SNCC Project Director in McComb, had wanned Justice Department Civil Rights Division head Burke Marshall on September 9 (in a three page letter) of the worsening situation in Pike County. In a letter asking for increased federal support in the area he said: "We plead with you to take action now before it is too late." There has been no indication of any action taken on the letter. (essentially the letter summarized the bombings, beatings, threats that have occurred from August 27-Sept. 9th and pointed out the McComb SNCC staff's belief that someone could easily -- in fact, would -- be killed if there were not some change in the Justice Department and FBI position on what action to take. The letter also pointed out that the FBI force had been cut to 4 (from 16) which seemed to represent the attitude of the Justice Department, ie. now that the summer volunteers have gone home, federal officials can relax.)

19-year old Mrs. Johnnie Lee Wilcher -- Mrs. Quinn's babysitter -- heard the thrown bomb thump on the porch of the home. She was phoning for aid when it exploded. The two children were in a rear room at the time of the blast. If they had been in the front room they would probably have been killed. Mrs. Quinn was next door. Earlier in the evening she attended a district meeting of the Freedom Democratic Party in Jackson. At the scene of the Quinn bombing a policeman said: "All this happened because of those damn COFO workers down on Wall Street." A civil rights worker inspecting damage to the church was cursed by a policeman. Only the front door and rear frames of the church are left standing. The explosion came from the center of the church, which indicates the bomb was placed, not thrown. No one was in the church at the time.

Mrs. Quinn's two children who were slightly injured in last night's bombing were treated and released from a Jackson hospital today. Mrs. Quinn and the children held a press conference in Jackson with C.C. Bryant, a trustee of Society Hill Baptist Church. Bryant's barber shop was bombed in April and dynamite was exploded in his front yard in late June.

Meanwhile, Carolyn Quinn Beckenridge, a daughter of Mrs. Quinn, and Johnnie Lee Wilcher, the baby sitter, were picked up from the Quinn home at 7 a.m. today by men originally thought to be reporters. When nothing was heard from them for some time, Jackson called McComb police who said that the women had been booked, but would not indicate on what charges, and that they wanted to give them lie detector tests. The jail, however, refused to say they had a record of their whereabouts. City Attorney Reeves was contacted and said he would only give information to the attorney for the women. Meanwhile police brought the two women back to the Quinn house and were preparing to take them to Jackson for lie detector tests. Jesse Harris, of SNCC, and others refused to let police take the women. The officers called headquarters and left shortly thereafter without the women.

MORE - MORE - MORE

WATS report/ September 22, 1964 (Tuesday am)

12 midnight -- Tension continued to mount today (Monday) and helmeted county police poured into McComb. The state police had come in to McComb in the early hours of the morning and were still visible. A rally was held at the sight of the bombed church and was attended by about 150 people. During the rally Dennis Sweeney, 21, from Portland, Oregon, told of his conversation earlier in the day with Mrs. Quinn. He asked her if she had a place to stay and she said yes. But a moment later she broke down and cried saying she didn't know if they would want her to stay there because they might get their house bombed, too. Shortly after Dennis was finished speaking and encouraging people to support the voter registration drive he was arrested by police (state) and taken to be booked for inciting to riot. He was interrogated by plainclothesmen who appeared to be state investigators. They warned him that he wasn't wanted in town and said he'd better leave. One investigator told Sweeney that McComb was "a powderkeg that could blow up at any minute". They also questioned Sweeney about his father, where he worked; they took out all the contents of his wallet and ripped the pages out of his address book. He was then released.

Five others were arrested Monday night but later released. They were: Jesse Harris, project director; Cephas Hughes, Negro SNCC worker from Washington, D.C., Ursula Junk from Germany, Bill Powell from Britain and Roy Lee, a local resident.

Ursula Junk was the first to be questioned. She was interrogated by plainclothesmen who were surrounded by police who came in with intimidating remarks throughout. She asked what was she arrested for and was told "inciting to riot". Ursula then said "I have a right to call my embassy and have them provide a lawyer for me. The investigator answered: "When you enter Mississippi you ain't got no more rights. Didn't you know that." Ursula answered, "I heard about that but didn't know it could be true". And the investigator responded: "Unless you leave Mississippi voluntarily we are going to help you leave faster." The questioning continued -- was she engaged? No. Did she date niggers? The answer: "I go out with people." "You mean white people or niggers?" The answer: "I mean people". Then there followed a long period of time when Ursula's investigators tried to insinuate that she was a prostitute. For example they said they would have to give her a medical check up and asked did she have any venereal diseases. They asked where she lived, etc. After establishing that she was a Catholic one said: "oh those niggers climb on Catholics, too." Other policemen chimed in with similar taunts. Then followed a lengthy interrogation about communism. After the hour and a half of questioning from police she was taken into the Mayor's office where she was questioned by FBI agent Murphy for an hour. After Murphy established that Ursula was Catholic he said: "But you didn't go to church last Sunday". "Yes," she said, "I went to church with one of the Negro workers." "You offended the whole community...It was the feeling of the community that you came to church in order to demonstrate...and you still wonder what the reasons for the bombings were? The reason was you offended the community. Don't you see the connection? Church bombings and Mrs. Quinn's house?" (Ursula had been staying at Mrs. Quinn's).

Questions for Jesse Harris followed. He was told that they would "get him" for contributing to the delinquency of minors and for "inciting to riot". And then, "we are going to lock you up good," said the police. Bill Powell from Britain was next. When he asked Murphy, the FBI agent, if he complained to his embassy would anything be done Murphy replied by trying to convince him not to complain to his embassy but to give him (Murphy) his complaints.

Finally all five were released. Jesse Harris and Cephas Hughes were released separately, though and had to pass through a crowd of whites to get their car. They were followed to the Freedom House.