

'We Too Shall Overcome' . . .

## Eye-witness Account of Dedham Clergymen at Selma, Alabama

*(Editor's Note: The following, gripping account of the scene today in strife-torn Selma, Alabama, was written for The Dedham Transcript by Rev. John Fallon of St. Mary's Church and Rev. Frederick Guthrie of St. Susanna's Church. They and Rev. John Crocker of St. John's Methodist Church, represented Dedham at the memorial services in Selma for Rev. James Reeb. Rev. Crocker remained in Selma for a while longer, but the two Catholic priests returned late Monday evening.)*

By REV. JOHN FALLON AND REV. FREDERICK GUTHRIE

On Monday morning at 6:30 some 90 people emplaned at Logan International Airport for Montgomery and then, Selma, Alabama.

Chartered by the Massachusetts unit of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the group included every race, color and creed; from a man of 80 — to the college students, from the Lieutenant Governor to priests, mini-

sters, and rabbis — all concerned with the fate of their fellow man.

Once on board the plane the captain informed us that the temperature at Montgomery was 45 degrees and that "it should be much warmer when we arrive."

Indeed, we intended to make it a lot warmer! Once in flight plans were drawn up to make a covenant between the people of Boston and Selma.

Upon landing at Montgom-

ery we travelled by private car and bus to Selma, some 50 miles away. We crossed the now famous bridge, the scene of Rev. James Reeb's beating and into the main part of the city.

Business as usual with no signs of anything to do with history in the making. We were left off at the entrance to the Negro community and all at once we could feel the

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## Eye-Witness -

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tension, state troopers with ropes and clubs in hand, some 100 of them, sneered as we marched into the Negro settlement, as we marched from the concrete sidewalk and macadam road into the muddy walks and streets of this community of oppressed.

It was now after one o'clock and we were instructed to enter Brown's Chapel for the Memorial Service to Rev. Reeb, which was scheduled to begin at two. We were given a lunch in the Pastor's Home, prepared by a score of women, all proud and more than happy to see us.

Once fed we proceeded to the Chapel, which already was filled as it had never been before. The pews, the aisles, balcony, and chancel were all occupied by members of the community, ministers, priests, nuns, and people from Canada, California, and Massachusetts and every other distant point in our continent.

As we waited for the start of the service we talked to some of the native people and heard their story of oppression, a story which would shock every reader, that this could be going on in our day.

When it became obvious that there would be a delay to the start of the service we were led in song. . . . "We Shall Overcome," "We Want Freedom Now," "That Old Time Religion," among others, all the while holding hands with our fellow human beings.

Dedham was well represented with Rev. John Crocker of St. John Methodist Church, (who remained in Selma) and the two writers sharing the same window sill.

The Chancel was occupied by the representatives of the major faiths and groups, from Bishops to our own Lt. Gov.

Dr. Martin Luther King's arrival was greeted with wild applause by the thousands outside the Church, and we new that the service was at hand. Dr. Abernathy, who led the service, pointed out the Ecumenical spirit of the day, and the Protestant Bishops, together with the Catholic Bishop, gave appropriate eulogies and then Dr. King followed with his stirring talk on the "Martyr of Selma."

When the service was concluded Dr. Abernathy announced that the Federal Court in Mobile had given permission for a march to the court house, a march which had been stopped by the "Rope of Love," at the edge of the community.

In announcing that we were about to march, we were instructed that we were to march in groups of three, with Dr. King and the Greek Bishop of America, together with Dr. Abernathy to be the first three, followed by the Catholic Bishop, Methodist Bishop and Rabbi, and the third group to be three Nuns, with the clergy to follow. Once outside of the Church we started the march, a mile in length, silently walking, heads bowed, (watched by the white community with hatred and troopers with their night sticks,) silently march-

ing to the County Court House.

Those of us at the start of the line waited at the court house some 40 minutes while the more than 4,000 people marched behind. A simple ceremony, consisting of prayers by Dr. King, a minister and priest, and the laying of the wreath in memory of Rev. Reeb at the Court House door, and the singing of the Freedom Anthem, "We Shall Overcome," was followed by the return march to Brown's Chapel.

Yes, we did accomplish something in the eight hours we spent in Selma; we saw oppression, we prayed, we showed the side we are on, and most important, we were in reality witnesses of Christ.

Once again we were offered food by the community, we broke bread with our brothers and were most warmly thanked for what little we did.

The trip back to Montgomery was more than eventful, in that we heard President Johnson's message to the country on the car radio and by this speech we heard sufficient reason for our presence.

At the airport a Negro, cut and bruised, arrived, as a concrete reminder of the fight for freedom. One of several students who had gathered to hear the President in Montgomery, he was rolled upon by the police on horseback.

Before dozing off to sleep on the return flight we could only meditate on the day's event and how best we could communicate to our own people, here in Dedham, our message and indeed the message for freedom.

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