

THE SAGA OF SELMA: A TAPE RECORDING BY ESCRU

One Reel: Approximately 1 hour on each side.

Speed: 3 3/4

Nearly all of the content of this tape was recorded live by the Rev. John B. Morris, Executive Director of the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity. A small portable recorder was used wherever he happened to be located, whether in Brown's Chapel or outside amid a throng of people. The listener can appreciate that there will be portions where the quality of recording reflects these circumstances. The connective narrative was added later at the studios of the Protestant Radio-TV Center in Atlanta and was necessarily of an informal nature. This schedule of approximate timing for the various sections is to assist in the use of the tape for program material where some editing and shortening is desired.

SIDE I -

Minutes:Seconds

Introduction :40

Narrative 6:10

The First Attempt to March, 3/7/65

Mobilization & the Second Attempt, 3/9/65

St. Paul's, Selma, 3/14/65

Mass Meeting, Brown's Chapel, Selma, 3/19/6535:25

Singing: "Freedom", "Jacob's Ladder" - 4:00

Invocation - 2:15

The Rev. Earl Neil, presiding - 1:10

The Rt. Rev. C. Kilmer Myers - 3:45

The Rt. Rev. George Richard Millard - 1:30

The Rev. F. D. Reese - 5:45

The Rev. James Bevel - 12:00

Singing: "We Shall Overcome" - 5:00

Benediction - Bishop Myers

Confrontation and Worship on the Sidewalk, Selma, 3/20/6522:00

Confrontation with Mr. Wilson Baker, Selma's police chief,
with Bishop Myers and Mr. Morris speaking - 4:00

No — Penitential Office, Bishop Millard - 6:00

No — Mr. Morris & singing, "We Shall Overcome" - 3:00

No — The Holy Communion (up to Prayer for the Whole State of
Christ's Church) Bishop Myers and the Rev.
Henri Stines - 9:00

SIDE II -

Narrative on Visit to St. Paul's, Selma, 3/21/65 2:30

Narrative on The Great March & Involvement of Churchmen, 3/21/65 ... 3:30/✓

Conversations with Churchmen Involved in March, 3/24/65 8:00✓?

At St. Jude's, Montgomery, on athletic field

The Rev. Walter Parker, food service

The Rev. Goldy Sherrell, an "all-the-way" walker

The Rev. Morris Samuel, security detail

Narrative on Danger and Death in Selma 1:40✓

Program at St. Jude's, Montgomery, 3/24/6512:00

National Anthem - 1:30

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. - 4:35

The Rev. Ralph Abernathy - :50

Dr. Ralph Bunche - :40

Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr. - 1:20

Singing: Harry Belafonte - 3:05

Final Ceremonies in Front of the Statehouse, Montgomery, 3/25/65, 37:50

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Mobilization & the Second Attempt, 3/9/65
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Narrative on Final Part - 3:30
National Anthem - 1:00
Descriptive Narrative - 2:00
The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. - 27:00
Singing: "We Shall Overcome" - 4:00
Final Narrative
Benediction

Narrative on Visit to St. Paul's, Selma, 3/28/65..... :20 ✓

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- Tape Available at \$4.00 from:

THE EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR CULTURAL AND RACIAL UNITY
5 Forsyth St., N. W. Atlanta 3, Georgia

THE SAGA OF SELMA: A TAPE RECORDING BY ESCRU

Recorded by: The Rev. John B. Morris,
Executive Director of ESCRU'

Introduction:

(Singing)

Narrative

These are the people of Brown's Chapel (refers to singing group in background), Selma, Alabama. They are determined people. The freedom song you hear now is being sung at a mass meeting sometime between the atrocity of the Edmund Pettis Bridge on March 7 and the beginning of the great march to Montgomery on March 21.

I was in Selma on March 7. My name is The Rev. John Morris. I'm Executive Director of The Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity. It was just coincidental that on March 7 I flew over to Montgomery from Atlanta with The Rev. Andrew Young of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. We drove on to Selma, and there plans for the march were well underway. I offered to walk with them, but Andy said to stay back and be of help in whatever phase followed. I did share the press conference with some of the SCLC people, and it was my opportunity to tell the people there gathered around the parsonage steps and the press that if the people of Selma were not allowed to make their walk to Montgomery beginning that afternoon, I was sure that we could call on churchmen from all over the country to come and help them walk--to walk with them and for them. I didn't know then what this would mean and what the next three weeks would bring.

They went off some 800 strong. Hosea Williams was selected by flipping a coin to lead the march. Andy Young, Jim Bevel and I got in a car and went downtown, parked near the bridge, and on the radio we heard the blow-by-blow account of the encounter on the other side, the encounter which rocked the nation and the world as the pictures of brutality and tear gas went out on the wires that night and the television the next morning and the newspapers. We couldn't see this on the other side. We did see the marchers though streaming up to the crest of the bridge and coming back over. We went immediately back to Brown's chapel and

there helped to minister to the wounded. We carried in young children who were hysterical. We assisted old ladies who were weeping. We bandaged up heads which were bloodied.

After the more seriously injured had been taken to the hospital, we began to discuss what kind of response would adequately meet this awful thing that we had witnessed. I suggested that we call for a ministers' march to Montgomery, that we call on the clergy of the nation to come in representative fashion into help bear this burden. After conferences on the telephone to Dr. King, the plan was accepted, and Dr. King issued a call that Sunday evening. He said in the call in part "No American is without responsibility. All are involved in the sorrow that rises from Selma to contaminate every crevice of our national life. The people of Selma will struggle on for the soul of the nation, but it is fitting that all Americans help to bear the burden. I call therefore on the clergy of all the faiths representative of every part of the country to join me in Selma." And the call continued and set the date for Tuesday morning, March 9.

I withdrew to a motel in Selma and began telephoning people around the country, Episcopalians and some other denominational people. The next morning the National Council of Churches Commission on Religion and Race joined the call, and by Tuesday morning there was an avalanche of response. I had said that Sunday afternoon as we'd made these plans that I thought perhaps we could get a hundred clergy, and I felt sure we could get twenty Episcopalians. Instead, by Tuesday morning, March 9, there were about a hundred Episcopal clergy in Selma and hundreds others from other churches, Jewish Rabbis, Roman Catholic clergy, persons of no faith at all, distinguished educators, Bishops; the country had come to Selma to show its concern, to say that what happened Sunday must not happen again, and if it happens again we're prepared to have it happen to us.

You know the story that day. We walked together out over the bridge again and confronted the troopers as the Sunday before, the people of Selma had.

There was no alternative but to turn around. There'd been a Federal court order against the march. We walked up to the point of confrontation with State authority. We turned around and went back to Brown's Chapel and had another mass meeting and Dr. King spoke. At that point I saw Bishop Pike. He came in. He had flown in on a charter flight from Louisiana where he had been speaking. He hadn't been able to get there in time for the march although he would have walked with us had he been there. It was good to have a Bishop of the church though speak at the mass meeting to the people of Selma to assure them of the concern of people far and wide and high and low. He was only one of six bishops who came to Selma before the ensuing three weeks were over. One of five hundred Episcopal clergy who came to Selma to show the concern of the Episcopal Church throughout the country, even as persons of all faiths and walks of life were coming to bring their concern. The conscience of America responded.

On Sunday, March 14, a group of Episcopalians went to St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Selma to worship. They were denied admission by a vestryman who said that the white and negro clergy would be allowed in and the white laity, but the negro laity would be excluded. This is a part of the story of Selma, and a part of the concern of this tape, but before we tell you more about that, we'll go to Selma to Brown's Chapel to listen to extended excerpts from the tape I made on my portable recorder of the mass meeting on Friday, March 19. Presiding at the mass meeting is the Rev. Earl Neil, the Episcopal Priest from Chicago, who went back to Selma after the March 9 gathering at the request of ESCRU, and there became one of the leadership persons primarily serving to orient newcomers, new clergy who came to town. I'll tell you something as we go along of who is speaking and what is happening.

Mass Meeting, Brown's Chapel, Selma, 3/19/65

Singing: "Freedom", "Jacob's Ladder"

The church was packed. I was perched up in a window, the only seat I could find by the time I got there. The quality of the tape seems dubious considering the circumstances--the circumstances in terms of those who were present is marvelous to behold, one of the most ecumenical services probably that's been held in recent time. This particular evening the mass meeting had a vitality about it, a spirit about it, that exceeded any I've been in over recent years in the South. An Episcopalian couldn't help but be a little glad to see Father Neil up there presiding.

(Singing continues)

The Rev. Earl Neil: Good evening, friends. We are opening mass meeting tonight with a brief devotion service. We call upon Father Don Clark of Detroit, Michigan, to lead us in the Invocation.

Morris: Father Clark is a Roman Catholic Priest who says the Invocation.

Father Clark: Let us Pray. Oh Lord, Almighty God, in the beginning you created all things and in it of your own divine perfections, and in the creation of man who crowned what you have done you have shown not only the richness of your diversity but your great unity. By our sins that we have divided ourselves one from another, brother hating brother, and only you and your grace can reunite us. As we gather here this evening, showing by our love for one another and by our fellowship that love which you intended always to exist among men, Grant that we may be recharged in our dedication to spread this unity to everyone. Take from our hearts resentment, laziness, the spirit of contentment and give us the spirit of prophecy, the spirit of bravery, the spirit of consuming love.

Morris: Others spoke that evening, but we'll move now in here, Father Neil introduced Bishop Meyers of Michigan.

Neil: ...words without action are totally ineffective...participation of bishops in the movement, and we have on the platform now two bishops, and first of all I'd

like to introduce the Bishop C. Kilmer Myers, who is the suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan. Bishop Myers is on the board of ESCRU, Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity which is in part responsible for my being here now, not that that is anything, but, you know, to give this recognition to a board member. Here is then Bishop Myers.

The Rt. Rev. C. Kilmer Myers: Like the sister, I had no idea when I arrived in Selma that I would be speaking at the gathering of any sort. My only desire was that my wife who was with me to stand with you for a time, knowing that the continuing fight somehow had to be with you with the support that we can somehow muster in other parts of the country. Now I think that there are two Episcopal Bishops who are here tonight who fortunately are not terribly wealthy. They may be. But in some form or another we are here to stay. You see, although the movement has the broadest aspects in meetings that you have all been engaged in, there is a sort of a side issue which is going on here tonight in Selma and probably tomorrow in the nature of somewhat of a family quarrel. I don't expect we'll lose the fight...(clapping) but, I think the thing I really want to say is that I am overcome by your... We've been too little and too late in the church. But somehow the people of Selma, the people of the other towns and the cities of the South are going to renew us, and we owe this to you. We might as well say it tonight. Because no white Christian, whether he's a bishop or the lowest member of a hierarchy or even below that, no white churchman is going to be free until you're free. And if there is any group in America tonight which is enslaved, it is the white people. In a way we white people ought not to be saying a word here tonight. We ought to be quiet, silent. We ought somehow to learn from you, you the people of Selma, and those who have joined you from the South in this movement, we ought to be learning the meaning of the words "courage and commitment and Christian discipleship." And you're teaching us, and we thank God for you.

Neil: ...The next person, the other Bishop, who is here, Bishop Millard from the Diocese of California. Perhaps you remember that the march Tuesday, Bishop Pike although he didn't join us for the march, did join us--he did postpone a service in Louisiana to come here to Selma. And Bishop Millard is the Suffragan Bishop of California.

The Rt. Rev. George Richard Millard: It is a very great pleasure to be here. Bishop Myers spoke of the dubious welcome...here tomorrow in Alabama. I called Bishop Carpenter to extend my best wishes this morning, and I got the message directly and personally (laughing)...go home! At a great mass meeting in San Francisco last Sunday night while we were waiting...of what the President would have to say...Bishop Pike was asked to give an invocation which he got slightly carried away with and asked that the Lord strengthen the spine of the President of the United States and got considerable ovation for his prayer (laughing)...On Tuesday...

Morris: Father Neil now introduces the Rev. F. D. Reese, Head of the Dallas County Voters League.

The Rev. F. D. Reese: Father Neil and all of our distinguished platform guests, all of our brothers and sisters, we are very happy again to see you tonight and to be a part of the powerful witnesses of the experiences of this great day. And you know, ...preparation for this great march which will begin on Sunday... I have this notice in my hand, I want to read it. "All residents of Dallas County who are twenty-one years of age and over who would like to march all the way from Selma to Montgomery--that's all the way--you have to be at this church tomorrow at 9:00 a.m. Now this announcement comes from the committee...people with good hearts, good feet (laughing), good minds, people who are willing to go all the way. You see, according to...we'll have about 300 people who will make the march all the way to Montgomery. Now we hope that when we get to Montgomery the

number will still be 300, so we want good persons who are physically able to go, mentally.....of course, you know Brother Wallace is still trying some tricks, ...And of course, if he's not trying them, he's getting his lieutenant to try them.And they gave me an injunction here, an injunction which prohibits the group from....loitering on...specific...ground on the way to Montgomery. And one good brother who owns some land down there I just got word might...on his plot of land, and so he went to his attorneys I'm sure and what have you and of course the... Clerk of Court from/...of Dallas County issued this writ of injunction. . So then I'm quite sure Rev. Bell.....If we can't sleep on the path out there, we might sleep on the highway, I don't know.

Morris: Mr. Reese continues.

Reese: ...Selma was involved in a big movement. Did you go down to Selma to see about all of those people down there? Well, they can read in the history book and see the pictures of how the people in Selma were treated across the Edmund Pettis Bridge on a certain Sunday. Do you know about that....? Did you go down to see those people? I can see you now you know with your walking canes... And I can hear your voice trembling, talking to your grandchildren, saying yes, I was there. And somehow that grandchild will get something from your very answer. Because when they ask you that question, he'll be trying to find a way to find a channel through which he can direct his own life, his own activities, and if my grandfather went to Selma in 1965, whatever year it might be...Something within him would say, You've got to go. (clapping). ...And as I said before, you will never know what it means, and I believe history will bear it out that you were an integral part of a great history-making movement, the Selma movement, and how thisknow that our ^{faith} ~~faith~~ has followed far in seeing that every qualified citizen would have a right to participate in his government.

Morris: Father Neil introduces the Rev. James Bevel now, Director of the Alabama Project of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Neil: ...has now become a flaming holocaust...I have the great privilege to introduce to you the Director of the Alabama Project, the Rev. James Bevel.

The Rev. James Bevel:

* * * * *

Morris: And so you've been to mass meeting in Selma at Brown's Chapel. That was Bishop Myers who said the Benediction. It's Friday night, March 19. Episcopalians are concerned for what will happen the next day. We know that we've been denied the use of the church, but it's our intention to walk or go nevertheless to St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Selma and in some way represent even out on the sidewalk the concern of churchmen across the country. Portions of the tape that follow are what happened on that Saturday, March 20. We walked out of Brown's Chapel about 150 strong, led by Bishop Myers and Bishop Millard endeavoring to walk to St. Paul's church where we would recite the Penitential Office. The next thing you hear is a confrontation between Bishop Myers and Mr. Wilson Baker, Selma's Director of Public Safety.

Bishop Myers: I see you every day in Detroit.

Mr. Wilson Baker: Well, I don't want to be here every day.

Bishop Myers: Well, we don't either.

Baker: Please back up into the church, sir.

Myers: We'd like to have freedom.

Baker: You've got freedom. You don't have freedom in Detroit? You have to come down here to--?

Myers: We're fighting for it up there too.

Baker: I'm not interested in freedom or anything. (much laughing in the crowd).
I'm interested in protecting the lives of people in this city. (laughing continues).
You are the guests of this city.

Myers: Can we say our prayers right here?

Baker: You certainly may.

Myers: Will you join us?

Baker: I certainly will. I don't need a written prayer. I pray directly to my own God through Jesus Christ.

Morris: Bishop Myers, before our prayers, I think that you might tell some of the people here why we wanted to go to St. Paul's. This is not just a regular march or anything. Indeed it wasn't intended to be a march.

Baker: It is a march, and I cannot permit it for your own sake.

Myers: The Episcopal Church, as you know, officially states in its canon law and in all of its public utterances that no one shall be denied entrance to the church to participate in any sacraments or rites whatsoever. The Bishop of Alabama and the priest of the parish of this--of the church in Selma has denied admittance to the sacraments of men and women, priests and laymen who belong to the Episcopal Church. This occurred last Sunday. Acting upon this, the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity organized--or proposed rather--a service at St. Paul's Church today. We requested the Bishop of Alabama for the privileges of the altar. I myself sent him a telegram as a Bishop in this church asking him if I might use an altar of the Episcopal Church, which is not just a church in Alabama.

aker: Don't talk to me, I'm not the Bishop. I'm not even Episcopalian.

Myers: It might help you to listen to it. And so, we ^{were} ~~will~~ refused this
by a Bishop of the Christian Church, and we are here because we don 't like this

in the Episcopal Church, and we think that anybody and everybody ought to have the right to worship and receive the sacraments of the Episcopal Church in Detroit in New York, Chicago and in Selma, Alabama. Amen. So let's say our prayers to that end.

Morris: The Bishop is going to lead us.

Millard:

~~Myers~~: Pass out as many of these leaflets as you can to the folks around please.

The minister and the people lead off on the first part of it. Have mercy (unison) upon me oh God...

(Morris: Bishop Millard leads us in the penitential office.)

SIDE II

Narrative on Visit to St. Paul's, Selma 3/21/65

Morris: On the other side of this tape, you heard something of the background of things in Selma and we carried you through Saturday afternoon, March 20 at a Eucharist on the sidewalk in front of Brown's Chapel in Selma. You heard something of the background of the situation in St. Paul's Church in Selma. The next day, Sunday, March 21, seven of us, three clergy, four laymen, black and white, arrived in front of St. Paul's at about ten minutes to 11:00. Four or five vestrymen immediately grouped themselves across the doorway and there we stood and talked for twenty minutes. They told us it was the policy of the parish to admit negro and white clergy and white laity, but not negro laity. We talked with them about the moral and theological implications of this. For the most part they only reiterated the vestry policy, although one vestryman in our discussion did say that it was his feeling that even if negro Episcopalians moved to town, he felt that they should go and start their own new congregation. Behind these vestrymen in the foyer in the corridor...there was a stained glass window of our Lord and the caption underneath "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

There was no press there. It was a quiet sunny morning. We finally left. As we drove down the street in a neighborhood that seems to have all of the primary white churches we saw around the doorway at each one...deacons or elders or vestrymen. It seemed apparent they were all there Sunday morning guarding the church from the church. That afternoon though our minds shifted now to the church militant to the church involved and active. For this was the day of the great march, Sunday, March 21. 8,000 or more strong we walked out of Selma over the bridge again for the third time. This time unhindered, indeed protected, by national guardsmen and a host of Federal people. Some of us walked eight miles that day. And then 300 persons walked all the way to Montgomery. They camped out several nights. The marvelous thing about the involvement of churchmen in the Selma to Montgomery march was not only the fact that so many were involved--countless numbers from all over the country--but the magnificent was the fact that so many were also involved in depth--serving quietly behind the scenes. We had clergy serving on the security detail. It was their responsibility to set up the campsite every night and take it down the next morning and move on to the next location and then to sit up all night and guard the marchers from whatever they needed to be guarded from. And there was some jesting that they guarded the marchers from the National Guardsmen and some said the FBI guarded the National Guardsmen. But so it went. People served quietly. They found a place. There were the clergy of ours from Pittsburgh who found their nitch within the food service detail, and we'll hear some of them in just a moment. There were the clergy who served on the security, some of transportation, some on communications,--there was a layman from New York who came in and dealt with public relations. ^{There} ~~who~~ was the wife of a priest from Chicago who dealt with office procedures and administration. There was a priest also who drove trucks all week long bringing in supplies and then he drove the trucks carrying the portable latrines from campsite to campsite. There they walked from Selma to Montgomery on Monday and Tuesday and on Wednesday they got to Montgomery to the outskirts of the city to the final campsite which was at St. Jude's Roman Catholic Church where there

was a complex of a school, a hospital and a church which had offered its facilities for the use of the campers, and some of us compared this with the statement we'd read in the paper only a few days earlier from the Episcopal Bishop who had told all of the marchers to go home. It's true that practically all of the Bishops and ecclesiastical heads did the same thing, but here we were received Wednesday evening in Montgomery at St. Jude's where now even more persons came from all over the country to be there for the finally encampment and then to be involved in the final march a few miles to the State House on the next day. I walked around the campsite there and it was very muddy and yet wasn't raining. It had been raining earlier that day. I walked around and talked with some of our people who were there. You will here now my talking with the Rev. Walter Parker from Pittsburgh and the other persons on the food detail, and you'll see the jesting and the fun and fellowship which along with the serious commitment and the real risks were to be found in Selma.

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Narrative on Danger and Death in Selma

It is now more than a week since James Reeb, one who came to walk on March 9, and he was attacked that same evening and died the following Thursday. And now as I record this, we know of one other, Viola Greg ^{Leung} ~~Lee~~ of Detroit. Many people will say that those who went to Selma went on a lark, for the fun of it. These two persons have not died in vain. They are symbolic of the nation's concern. They are symbolic of the fact that all who went to Selma risked possibility of being James Reeb or Viola ^{Leung} ~~Biosa~~. So while there was fellowship, fun, humor, as always there is when Christians are together, it was also serious business, and there was the seminarian who was slashed in the face, and there were those who were hit as well as those who died. And now we return to St. Jude's to the program for that evening to the singing of the National Anthem.

April 11, 1966

The Rev. Bruce Kennedy
128 Navy Road
San Francisco, California 94124

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

I write to you with regard to the tape which I believe John Morris sent to you some time in the early part of March. I would appreciate it very much if you could send that tape on to me. It is very important that I have it as part of the background material for the writing of a book about Jonathan Daniels.

The publishers are breathing down my neck at this time, so that if you would give immediate attention to this matter, I would be extremely grateful.

Sincerely,

William J. Schneider
Episcopal Chaplain to
Harvard and Radcliffe

WJS:dl

Morris: NARRATIVE ON VISIT TO ST. PAUL'S, SELMA, 3/28/65

On the Following Sunday a group of churchmen went back to St. Paul's Church in Selma and were received for the first time. It was an integrated group. The vestry changed their policy. This became a first breakthrough in Selma .