

Courthouse Square Is Authentic Picture of Occupied Town

by Kenneth L. Dixon

IN OCCUPIED OXFORD, Miss.—This dateline is no joke.

Oxford is occupied—as thoroughly as any occupied town I saw on foreign soil in World War II.

By dawn today, the campus at Ole Miss appeared to contain more soldiers than students. A huge bivouac stretched from the grove in the Lyceum building on down toward the main entrance.

Out at the Oxford-University airport a much larger encampment was stretched out along the ground lining both sides of the single strip runway.

Already an Army field kitchen was set up, starting to serve breakfast to the troops. It had come in during the night, along with the hundreds of other military units that poured steady streams into this town that has become the center of the nation's and the world's attention.

When the sun came up, the campus had been almost cleared of the skeletons of burned cars and trucks, but the broken glass and stones still remained to remind all of the terror of night before last.

A vagrant breeze still brought traces of tear gas—some of which was exploded last night when the troops saw any sign of a crowd gathering in the area of Baxter Hall where Negro James Meredith became the first member of his race to officially spend the night on the Ole Miss campus as a student.

He spent the night there—but whether he slept or not is anybody's guess.

More tear gas was exploded in downtown Oxford about 6 o'clock this morning—just two blocks from Courthouse Square. An hour later, soldiers were not sure whether it had been done by one of their own troops or by someone who had stolen some of the tear gas bombs reported missing last night.

Courthouse Square last night was an authentic picture of an occupied town. Lights blazed on all sides of the courthouse itself throughout the long night, and the deserted parking and street areas surrounding it saw soldiers being put through bayonet drills—lunging and charging to the cries of “Yaaah—Huh! Yaaah—Huh!” of squad leaders.

Most of the practicing troops had just arrived, riding into town half asleep in the canvas covered backs of huge Army trucks.

Once on the scene they soon became adjusted to the situation. A couple of hundred of them spent the night on the grounds surrounding the courthouse, sleeping on the grass with raincoats spread over them and helmets or packs for pillows.

This morning they rose and stretched and rubbed their eyes and took up their posts—helping occupy this American town with American troops.

It was clearly apparent most of them didn't like their present job—but just as clear that they were going to follow orders and do it.

They snapped into a combat crouch and pointed their bayoneted carbines straight at the driver of each car stopped at the roadblocks. They methodically went through glove compartments and trunks, searched under the seats to be sure that no contraband weapons were being smuggled in. But once the search was over, many of them thanked the drivers courteously and seemed almost apologetic about the incident.

This morning their almost eager friendliness was apparent. Where yesterday they were defensively terse in dealing with townspeople and newsmen, today they were more relaxed and willing to engage in conversation.

Suddenly they seemed to realize what occupying troops have discovered throughout the world and throughout the centuries.

As the streets gradually became lined with mostly silent civilians, they clearly sensed that although they held a town in captivity, they were the real captives.