

EMU

MEMORANDUM

TO: Josephine Moore, News Bureau director

FROM: Susan Hodges, News Bureau Informational Representative

RE: Incident in Erb Memorial Union - late afternoon, April 8, 1970

DATE: 4-8-70

The UO telephone exchange received a call from a student named Wintermin, a main desk employee, at about 3:30 p.m., that a fight was in progress in the region of the main desk and the fishbowl. The telephone exchange notified the Eugene Police and the ambulance service, then notified the News Bureau at approximately 3:48 p.m.

I arrived in the EMU some 2 minutes later, where small groups of persons were standing in the fishbowl discussing the fight and one person, a tall, blond man, was lying on the floor near the soda bar, bleeding from lacerations in his scalp. Some four police officers were present, interviewing witnesses.

Art Bushnell, the Emerald news editor, went with me, on the suggestion of Dick Reynolds, to talk with Christopher A. Biggs in a kitchen office about the incident. Reynolds, attending a staff meeting, had come out to witness the conclusion of the initial fight, which he observed was between a black and white person, then returned to the meeting, to return to the lobby again when the emergency buzzer in the EMU was sounded, some 10 minutes after the initial altercation.

Biggs is a student sodar bar employee. He was in the soda bar when the injured person was hit on the head by a chair. He was aware, earlier, that fighting had occurred between a black and a white, followed by "several other outbreaks in which trash cans and bins were thrown around."

Briggs' report to Reynolds reads that "the boy was injured in the soda bar by a coloured boy hitting him over the back of the head with a chair. The boy immediately collapsed. In the melee, nothing was seen of the attacker or any of the others involved in the fight." ~~He~~ ^{he} said several fights were going on, with one black and one white involved in each case. He had no idea why they started originally.

Briggs said the fights were violent and ~~he~~ ^{he} couldn't blame those present for not trying to break them up. The person who was injured had been quite passive throughout the incident, and looked like he was trying to defend himself. He slumped to the floor when hit - first falling across a table, then to the floor. The fighting immediately stopped, and the black persons involved, fled.

The following is information revealed by John Zagone, an employee of the main desk (a student), who asked that his name not be released to news media. He had been interviewed earlier by the police.

"I was walking to the post office just before my main desk duty, when I noticed a black guy and a white guy having a loud argument. The black guy suggested that they go outside and fight, but the white guy declined. The black guy then pushed the white guy, who hit back, and a fight started. They were on the floor, hitting and kicking each other, when the white guy seemed to have gotten the best of the black guy. Then, several other black persons pitched in and started beating up on the white guy. Anyone who tried to break up the fight was attacked by the blacks. Finally, the two fellows - the black and the white 1/- who were involved in the initial argument, separated and the white guy (who had black hair) walked into the main part of the EMU (the fishbowl). This had up to now taken place in the lobby.

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"Meanwhile a blond guy had been trying to help the white fellow first involved, and been getting pushed around. Finally, he said he wouldn't take it anymore, and became involved in another fight with the black guys. (This was the person who was ultimately injured). I reported the incident to the desk, and the emergency buzzer was sounded and the store closed. The police arrived at least 10 minutes later. The first fight had lasted only about 2-3 minutes. Now, the guy with black hair - the first white involved - tried to help his friend, but the blacks went wild. They started throwing big trash cans, ahh ~~tray~~ and chairs around, and threw a trash can at the black-haired white guy, who was sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall. Then another white intervened, saying "This is no way to make it," and tried to stop the fight. People came from outside the Union and the Fishbowl to watch the fight and seemed pretty horrified. When the fight escalated, it was because more blacks were getting involved; the whites stayed pretty much out of it. I tried to stop it, and got hit. Nobody would lay a hand on the black guys. Six or seven of them seemed to have gone crazy - throwing trash cans around. One picked up a chair and swung it around him to hit anyone who came near; he finally threw it at the blond guy who was injured. The police came about five minutes after this, and the black guys had taken off. "

"I'd say it was the fault, originally, of both the whites and blacks."

I checked with Sacred Heart at approximately 4:45, and learned that the injured man was named Steve Easton. Our student records do not show him enrolled. It was by then too late to check with the Registrar's office for this term. He was listed as in fair condition, with scalp lacerations. It had been the impression of some of those standing around him that he was unconscious briefly immediately after the chair hit him. The police indicated, by phone, that no arrests were made, but that an investigation into the incident is under way. ●