

JAMES A. HOOD, 1942 - 2013

Student fought segregation at University of Alabama

BY REBECCA TROUNSON

James A. Hood, one of two black students whose effort to enroll at the University of Alabama in June 1963 led to Gov. George Wallace's segregationist "stand in the schoolhouse door" and who later forged an unlikely friendship with the former governor, has died. He was 70.

Hood, who left the university after eight weeks but returned years later to earn a doctorate there, died Thursday at his home in Gadsden, Ala., northeast of

Birmingham, according to a funeral home official.

The June 11, 1963, enrollment of Hood and Vivian Malone, who went on to become the first black graduate of the university, came during one of the most violent summers of the civil rights movement. The next day, Medgar Evers, a civil rights activist working for the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People in Jackson, Miss., was shot to death by a white supremacist. That September, four young girls were killed in the bombing of an [See Hood, AA5]



Associated Press

SCHOOLHOUSE DOOR

Vivian Malone and James A. Hood stand outside a doorway at the University of Alabama after registering for classes on June 11, 1963.

Southern civil rights fighter

[Hood, from AA1]

African American church in Birmingham, Ala.

Wallace had campaigned for governor in 1962 on a pledge to block any plans by the federal government to integrate Alabama's all-white schools and state university, the only public university in the country that remained segregated. In his inaugural address, he declared, "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

Hood was a student at Clark College in Atlanta and already considering applying to the University of Alabama to pursue a psychology degree when he saw a story in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that pushed him toward a decision. The article, which said it was based on a survey of students at Clark, claimed that blacks were not capable of higher thinking abilities.

Hood wrote a letter to the editor to complain about the article and received a reply printed on toilet tissue, he told the Crimson White, the University of Alabama's student newspaper, in 2003. He was told he wasn't smart enough to question the newspaper's editors, he said.

On a scorching June day, the first day of registration for the summer term, Hood and Malone waited in a nearby car while Wallace read a proclamation from the steps of the university's Foster Auditorium. In a series of actions Hood later described as a carefully orchestrated dance, Wallace publicly refused to move away from the building's door, prompting President Kennedy to call in the National Guard to force him to do so.

Wallace complied, allowing the two students, who were accompanied by a deputy U.S. attorney general and flanked by federal marshals, to enter the building and complete their enrollment. Hood later said he was not afraid, despite the angry reaction of a handful of students in his first days on

campus.

"I didn't have sense enough to be scared," he told the Green Bay (Wis.) Press-Gazette in 2005. "At 19 years old, I didn't believe I could die. I had been assured by the president of the United States that he would do everything in his power to assure that we would live."

But after two months, Hood withdrew from the university, saying later that his mother had feared for his life. He transferred to Wayne State University in Detroit, where he earned a bachelor's in criminal justice, followed by a master's in sociology from Michigan State.

Born in Gadsden on Nov. 10, 1942, Hood grew up in Alabama. After completing his master's, he became an educational administrator for Madison Area Technical College in Wisconsin, where he worked as the head of human and protective services for many years. But he returned to the University of Alabama three decades after he left, earning a doctorate in interdisciplinary studies in 1997.

Jennie Adams-Buggs,

who went to high school with Hood and is overseeing his funeral arrangements at her family-run mortuary, said he had moved back to Gadsden several years ago and had suffered a stroke in recent years. She said he was divorced and had several children, but there was no immediate information about his survivors.

Vivian Malone, who entered the University of Alabama with Hood, went on to graduate in 1964 with a degree in management. Malone, whose married name was Jones, died in 2005. Although she was the first black Alabama graduate, she and Hood were not the first to enroll at the university. Autherine Lucy had enrolled in 1956, but was forced to leave the university after riots broke out.

It was when Hood returned to Alabama and began researching the events of the past for his doctorate that he first met with Wallace, who was partially paralyzed as the result of a 1972 assassination attempt and by then mostly bedridden. Meeting many times at Wal-

lace's Montgomery home, the two developed an unusual friendship.

Hood had hoped Wallace would be well enough to present his doctorate to him at the university's graduation ceremony in 1997, but the former governor was too ill to travel. Nonetheless, the men spoke in interviews of their unlikely bond.

Wallace, who by then had publicly disavowed his segregationist views, apologized to Hood and Jones. And in a 1998 interview with the Chicago Tribune only months before his death, he called Hood a good friend. "He's a fine fellow, very intelligent," Wallace said.

Of his old adversary, Hood said he believed his apologies and change of heart were sincere.

"If George Wallace was a racist, then I was a racist too, because at the time I believed we were inferior to white folks," Hood told the Chicago Tribune. "That's what I was taught growing up in Alabama."

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DAVE MARTIN Associated Press

LATE-BLOOMING FRIENDSHIP

James A. Hood holds the hand of former Alabama Gov. George Wallace. The men who once squared off on civil rights became friends later in life.