

Date 5/29/68

LELAND CLIFFORD PEARCE, Owner, Buckhead Ridge Subdivision, Okeechobee, Florida, was advised of the identity of the interviewer as a Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and of his rights as contained in an executed waiver of rights form. Upon signing the form PEARCE furnished the following information:

He was in the cattle business in Cuba in 1956 and 1957 and upon leaving Cuba he came to Okeechobee, Florida where he developed the Buckhead Ridge Subdivision, of which he is the sole owner. He is no longer in the cattle business and devotes all of his time to the developing of the subdivision and selling lots. He does not own any buildings or cottages on the property. For eighteen years, prior to going to Cuba, he was in the cattle business in Belle Glade, Florida. While in Belle Glade he became acquainted with WILLIAM PIERCE, who also went to Cuba in the 1950's to promote a middle east fiber called "Raine". He did not associate with WILLIAM PIERCE and in fact only spoke to him about a half a dozen times. He does not know what line of business WILLIAM PIERCE is in now nor does he know how he could be located.

He is not now nor has he ever been a member of the Ku Klux Klan nor is he sympathetic to their cause. He does not know the following individuals; BOB and WILLIAM BRICKLEY, BEN THOMPSON, EDDIE WILBURN nor JIM GARRISON, although he has read about JIM GARRISON in the paper. He did not do any building while in Cuba nor did he believe WILLIAM PIERCE did any building while in Cuba. He has never been to Kansas City, Kansas or Kansas City, Missouri, and in fact the only places he has been outside of the State of Florida are New Orleans for a cattle auction in the early 1950's, New York City, Washington, D.C., Thomsville, Georgia and Cuba. He does not own a plane nor does he do any flying.

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On 5/18/68 at Okeechobee, Florida File # 44-1854
by SA RONALD TODD/dmc Date dictated 5/23/68

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He did not kill MARTIN LUTHER KING nor does he know who did nor does he know who might have been involved in the murder of KING. There is a member of the local Ku Klux Klan, JOHN THOMAS BOWLES, who was capable of participating in the murder of KING. BOWLES has a strong hatred for Negroes and was recently tried in Martin County, Florida for beating up a school superintendent because of his efforts in integrating the schools. BOWLES owns a small two passenger Cessna airplane that he keeps on Hog Island which is next to Buckhead Ridge. It is an open field without any lighting facilities. Deputy CURTIS WRIGHT, Glades County Sheriff's Office, had asked PEARCE to keep an eye on the airplane, particularly if the Klan was planning anything, so that BOWLES' whereabouts could be accounted for. He recalls that on the evening of the murder of MARTIN LUTHER KING he made it a point to check the airplane and noted that it was gone. The next morning, around seven AM, while on his way to Okeechobee for coffee he noted that the plane was there; however, when he returned approximately an hour later the plane was gone. It was either the day following the death of KING, April 5, 1968, or the next day, April 6, 1968, that the airplane was gone and stayed gone for about two or three days. He had been told by BOWLES' girl friend, MART KNIGHT, a barmaid at the Fin and Feather Bar in Buckhead Ridge that BOWLES had gone to Tampa to get his teeth fixed. BOWLES' wife, GERALDINE, is presently seeking a divorce although he believes they are still living together. He sold BOWLES a couple of lots in Buckhead Ridge and BOWLES built a home on one and his brother-in-law, CHARLES P. CRIZZAFFE, built the Ridge Apartments on the other lot. There are about sixteen units in the apartment. CRIZZAFFE is a businessman who lives in Tampa, Florida. BOWLES and his wife, GERALDINE, manage the apartments for CRIZZAFFE.

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He has never been a member of the Ku Klux Klan and does not know anyone who is or was a member of the Klan.

There are no other BEN THOMPSONS who are fishermen in the Miami-Key West, Florida area as far as he knows, noting his father, BEN THOMPSON, SR. died in November, 1967, while residing at 4220 N. W. 23rd Avenue, Miami. His father gave up full time fishing in 1954 when he had heart trouble. Prior to that, in 1952, his father sold his boat. From 1952 to November, 1967, his father was semi-retired and only fished occasionally. When his father was much younger, he worked on a wrecking tug and at times, went to Cuba on this tug. However, his father did not own any business in Cuba. He has never been to Cuba himself and he has never had any interests in Cuba.

During the time he was a commercial fisherman, he has had a great many individual deck hands, however, to his knowledge, none of these individuals had ever served any time in a prison or penitentiary.

He has a relative named RONNY PIERCE who is about 35 years of age and who is a fisherman living in Marathon, Florida. As far as he knows, RONNY has never been in any trouble.

Photographs of JAMES EARL RAY were shown to him and he felt the photographs showing RAY by himself, with the picture of RAY with sunglasses, looked familiar, however, he could not be sure of this identification. Possibly he may have seen photographs of RAY in the newspapers or on television.

He emphatically denied being involved in this matter in any manner or under any circumstances. It is a complete mystery to him if or why his name would be used in this matter. If someone is using his name on this regard, then the identity of this individual is unknown to him.

The following descriptive data was obtained through observation and interview:

Name	BENJAMIN LARNARD THOMPSON, JR.
Sex	Male
Race	White

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Date of birth	February 23, 1929
Place of birth	Key West, Florida
Height	5'8"
Weight	140 pounds
Eyes	Blue
Hair	Brown
Complexion	Ruddy
Build	Medium
Marital Status	Married