

By Paul W. Valentine
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MEMPHIS, April 16—There is growing speculation among Memphis police detectives that Martin Luther King's assassin was a disinterested professional killer—not a racist ideologue—who left an elaborate trail of phony clues to confuse his pursuers.

They won't say who they think hired the killer or why, but the evidence, they say, points to a well-paid professional job.

Frank C. Holloman, director of Fire and Police has maintained a stony

silence on progress of the April 4 murder investigation, as has his chief of detectives, William Huston. But sources in the department indicate that the "hired killer" theory is gaining momentum.

One notion is that the killer began his preparation six or eight months ago by dissolving his real identity and manufacturing a new personality known as "Eric Starvo Galt, 36, unemployed merchant marine."

Surrounding himself with phony credentials, he waited patiently in various cities for the right opportunity to fulfill his assignment.

In Birmingham, meanwhile, Jefferson County Sheriff Mel Bailey told United Press International that there is evidence that the assassin was in Birmingham while Dr. King was jailed in the city last October and November.

Bailey said he believes the murder may have been the result of a conspiracy and that Birmingham could well have been the original site planned for the assassination.

Dr. King came to Birmingham to serve a five-day sentence for holding a demonstration on Easter Sunday, 1963,

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In violation of a court order. Bailey kept Dr. King under heavy guard throughout his stay in Birmingham.

The sheriff said his theory is only conjecture but that "it is based on evidence uncovered so far in the case."

The right opportunity came April 4 in Memphis. Dr. King had arrived the day before, and television and local newspapers had announced the motel and room number where Dr. King was staying.

The assassin rented a room in an adjacent building under the name "John Willard," fired the fatal shot and fled, leaving an enormous trail of finger prints, clothing, binoculars, a rifle and an expended shell in his wake.

Federal authorities said today they are satisfied John Willard and Eric Starvow Galt are the same person.

Memphis detectives say evidence that the killer was hired at a substantial price is reflected by his ability to purchase a "white mustang" automobile and follow Dr. King around the country for several months without apparently holding a job.

The detectives are leery of the physical evidence left by the killer

"He was supposed to have shot King with a pump rifle," one said. "Well, there was a spent shell found on the bathroom floor of the rooming house, and a pump rifle won't eject a shell automatically. It won't come out unless you pull back on the pump mechanism."

He noted that the discarded Remington 30.06 pump rifle found on the street near the rooming house was inside a Browning automatic rifle packing box. He suggested that the assassin actually had two rifles, using the Browning automatic to kill Dr. King and planting the Remington as a red herring. Even if the expended shell found in the bathroom matches the Remington, he said, the killer could have fired it at an earlier date and planted the shell to match the Remington.

The FBI has the Remington and other physical evidence at its laboratories in Washington and has not revealed its findings.

Memphis detectives look at the assassin as an incredibly "cool" character who didn't seem to mind being obvious. Dressed neatly in a business suit and necktie, he rented an \$8.50-a-week

with a clean, new... proceeded to leave finger... prints around the bathroom and... a bag full of clothing, a rifle with telescopic sight and a pair of binoculars on the street as he fled.

"It was better than a television show, the way he did it," said one officer.

Most of the items dumped in the street, they speculate, will lead to blind alleys. The killer was casual about his finger and hand prints either because he is an alien or because he thinks he is one of the few American adults who has not been fingerprinted at one time or another, they say.

They discount the possibility of a Ku Klux Klan conspiracy in the assassination. "Shucks," said one, "with all this reward money (\$100,000) being offered here, if it was the Klan, they would have turned each other in a long time ago."

In Atlanta, meanwhile, two cab drivers said they gave rides to the man identified as Galt immediately after the assassination. They made the claims after identifying Galt from sketches circulated by the FBI.

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