

'Pro-King' Cop Removed Before Slaying

By LES PAYNE

GARDEN CITY, N. Y. — Hours before the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in Memphis in 1968, the city's top law enforcement official removed from his post one of two detectives assigned to watch the civil rights leader.

The action was taken in the presence of men the official identified as federal agents.

Authorities said the removal was part of an emergency plan to protect the detective's life.

Ed Redditt, the black detective who was removed, had prepared a contingency plan to enable the police department to apprehend an assassin should an attempt be made on King's life while he was at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis.

Redditt's plan, never put into effect, called for the four-block area around the Lorraine being sealed off by patrol cars. All streets were to be closely watched in the event of an assassination attempt.

Redditt is known to believe that had his plan been in effect it would have been impossible for an assassin, shooting from the suspected flophouse across the street, to have escaped.

Police did not assign a replacement guard for King. But they did leave the detective's partner on duty.

It has been learned that Redditt and

his partner, both members of the Memphis police intelligence unit, watched King and his staffers at the Lorraine through binoculars from the fire station across the street.

The two-man unit earlier had provided security for King and his party and they continued to keep the police department informed of their movements and their visitors.

Redditt and his partner, W. B. Richmond, who is also black, had withdrawn from what would have been their normal positions with the King party because their presence, following recent riots in Memphis, had angered young local blacks.

The police were particularly concerned about a violence-prone black group called the Invaders. Although friendly with the nonviolent King and his associates, the Invaders led the outbreak of violence and looting a week earlier.

It was recently disclosed that some of the leaders of the Invaders were FBI informants and had touched off the violence which was directly responsible for King's return to Memphis the day before his assassination.

Ironically, on the day King was shot, April 4, the four armed members of the Invaders, who were providing security for King and his staff in the Lorraine, were seen leaving the motel — for unexplained reasons — just before 6 p. m., minutes before King was shot.

Although King himself never agreed to have the Invaders stand guard, some of his aides had agreed to their presence. One of the Invaders standing guard was an undercover Memphis police detective who provided information for the police and the FBI.

After Redditt was removed from duty, he was told at a meeting in police headquarters that the U.S. Secret Service had learned of a "contract" on his life.

Redditt protested, saying that he wanted to return to his post, but the city's public safety director at the time, Frank Holloman, insisted on the officer's removal. While driving home with

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his police guard, Redditt heard over the car radio that King had been assassinated.

For the next two days following the assassination, Redditt asked to return to work. Each request was denied. On the third day, a Sunday, he returned to work.

No further explanation of the "contract" on his life was ever offered by the police department. Redditt has refused to discuss the affair.

About a week before King was killed, sources said, FBI informers had told the Memphis police department that Redditt had shown some sympathy for King's cause by encouraging striking garbage workers — who were being supported by King's nonviolent marches — to stay away from work.

Redditt's partner on the King surveillance team was considered more loyal to the department, sources said. The partner remained at his post and reportedly was watching King through binoculars when the civil rights leader was shot.

The entire Redditt affair is another link in a chain of curious circumstances surrounding King in the days and hours prior to his assassination.

Recent disclosures that the FBI conducted massive surveillance on King have prompted several government inquiries. The Senate Intelligence Com-

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mittee said that its investigation uncovered no evidence that the FBI was implicated in King's murder or a coverup.

However, the committee chairman, Frank Church, D-Idaho, has called for a federal special prosecutor to investigate the assassination to resolve "many unanswered questions," including whether a bureau "vendetta" against King was related to his murder.

The Justice Department is reviewing the FBI's file on King and will soon make recommendations to Attorney General Edward Levi.

Redditt and the officials identified as having been present at the April 4 meetings at which Redditt was told of the "contract" on his life have refused to discuss the meeting.

Holloman acknowledged the report of a threat. "I did receive a report that there was a threat on Officer Redditt's life. Where it came from, I can't say."

Asked about the April 4 meeting with Redditt in the presence of a man identified by Holloman as a U.S. Secret Service agent and other federal authorities, Holloman said haltingly, "I

don't recall. Even if I did I don't think I would say."

An official of the U.S. Secret Service said he had checked the agency's records and found no indication that an agent had been sent to Memphis at that time.

At the police headquarters meeting, Holloman, according to sources, introduced Redditt to a "Secret Service agent down from Washington, D.C.," a man about six feet tall and weighing about 220 pounds.

A Mississippi highway patrolman, Holloman said, had overheard someone threatening to go to Memphis to kill Redditt. The threat allegedly had been relayed to the Secret Service and the agent had flown down to deliver the message to the Memphis police and Redditt.

The man identified as the Secret Service agent verified Holloman's account, sources said.

Also present, according to sources, were the Memphis police chief, an FBI liaison agent, two military intelligence officers, an official from the sheriff's office, a National Guard official and a representative of the Tennessee State Highway Patrol.

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