

Bizarre Connections Never End

Was Audie Murphy a Victim Of The Assassination Conspiracy?

Oct. 29, 1974: Ex-Teamsters Boss James R. Hoffa fielded questions from listeners on the Ed Busch Talk Show on WFAA in Dallas.

CALLER: Mr. Hoffa, about a month before the death of Audie Murphy, he had been to San Clemente to try to get President Nixon to release you from prison. Do you have any idea who might have been behind him, to do this?"

HOFFA: "A man named Kramer and a man named Ed Partin."

CALLER: "All right, now on the deaths of John and Robert Kennedy, do you have any idea what group might have been behind their deaths?"

HOFFA: "I think that it was Partin and the uh! ... Walter Sheridan group."

CALLER: "Uh, huh. Are you familiar with a man named Jim Braden, uh, charter member of La Costa?"

HOFFA: "No, I don't know 'em."

AFTER EIGHT years of gun barrel politics in America, another mystery death occurred — Audie Murphy, this country's most decorated war hero, died in a plane crash.

At the time, Murphy was embroiled in his own brand of politics — trying to get Richard Nixon to free ex-Teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa from prison.

Those knowledgeable of the behind-the-scenes maneuvering for or against Hoffa's release believe Murphy's death was no accident — that somehow he was caught up in the web of conspiracy that has been shaping America's fate for the past 12 years.

In the following article, nationally recognized investigative reporter Earl Golz details for TATTLER the intrigue surrounding Murphy's death and his mysterious involvement with the Teamsters and the President in the months before his death.

Some of the people involved have been in the news during the past decade in connection with assassination investigations.

Hoffa was prosecuted by Bobby Kennedy when Bobby was John Kennedy's attorney general. A national columnist once exposed Hoffa as having plotted to kill RFK.

The teamsters financed LaCosta

By EARL GOLZ

Special to the National Tattler

Country Club of which Mafioso Jim Braden is a charter member. Braden was in Dealey Plaza in Dallas when John Kennedy was assassinated.

Walter Sheridan, who prosecuted Hoffa and fought against his pardon, was among those indicted in Jim Garrison's abortive investigation of the Kennedy assassination. Sheridan, then chief investigator for an NBC special that was critical of the Garrison probe, was accused by Garrison of trying to bribe Perry Russo, one of Garrison's chief witnesses. Nothing came of the charge against Sheridan, as nothing fruitful emerged from Garrison's overall investigation.

Up to the time he died, Audie Murphy's attempts to free Teamster President James R. Hoffa were kept secret from even his closest friends in Dallas.

James O. Cherry, a long-time friend of Murphy's who retired as manager of Interstate Theaters in Dallas, said Murphy never told him about his efforts in behalf of Hoffa.

"I was with Audie a couple of weeks before he got killed," said Cherry, a pall-bearer at the funeral. "And nothing like that ever came up. I would be surprised at him being involved in anything like that."

Neither did Will Wilson, a fellow Texan and chief of the U.S. Justice Department's criminal division at the time, know of Murphy's involvement. Wilson recalled he was "bombarded" with documents purporting to show Hoffa was framed, but not from Murphy.

Wilson acknowledged that Hoffa's lawyer son, James R. Hoffa Jr., "came by to present their case to me a couple of times in connection with their getting a parole. But the parole thing was still pending when I left (in Oct. of 1971) and it was denied after that."

MURPHY MADE obtaining Hoffa's freedom in 1971 a full-time job. His baby face was seen coast to coast hawking any hope to spring from prison the man who once headed the richest union in the world.

Friends say Murphy's financial sources in 1971 dried up. He needed more than \$100,000 after going into debt to make a motion picture. And a fund to free Hoffa reportedly



AUDIE MURPHY



JAMES HOFFA

guaranteed a handsome bundle for the parties who could do it.

Murphy visited the San Clemente, Calif., White House in April, 1971, to deliver a document that Hoffa's friends had hoped would persuade President Nixon to intervene in the union leader's behalf.

The actor died, however, in a fiery plane crash May 28, 1971, seven months before Nixon signed an executive grant of clemency releasing Hoffa. Four others, including the pilot, also were killed.

One of Murphy's cohorts in the Hoffa venture, Arthur Egan, told me he doesn't think the plane crash was an accident. Egan said he last saw Murphy as he boarded the private plane at the airport in Atlanta, Ga.

"Murphy played a very prominent role in trying to free Hoffa," Egan said. "And I think it cost him his life. That's my firm opinion and I got to know Audie pretty well."

The National Transportation Safety Board found that the pilot of the plane was flying too low in a storm to clear the mountains near Martinsville, Va. He also tried "to continue flight into instrument weather conditions which were beyond his operational capabilities," the NTSB said.

Egan, a reporter for the Manchester, N.H., Union Leader was called before the Senate Watergate committee to testify about efforts to persuade the Nixon administration to release Hoffa. His testimony in executive

session lasted more than six hours.

EGAN WAS ONE of several intriguing characters involved in a bizarre tug-of-war to either free Hoffa or keep him locked up. His newspaper was indebted to Hoffa's union for loans totaling about \$2 million in Teamster pension funds.

His chief antagonist was Walter Sheridan, who deserves much responsibility for putting

Hoffa behind bars. Sheridan had been Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy's chief investigator for Kennedy's so-called "get Hoffa" squad.

Neither Egan nor Sheridan trust each other. Each accused the other of being unreliable in relating what happened in 1971.

The man in the middle was Edward Grady Partin, a tough-hided Teamster leader from Baton Rouge, La., whose testimony during Hoffa's jury tampering trial did most to get a government conviction.

Partin was convicted in 1973 on a federal extortion charge and was sentenced to seven years in prison.

MURPHY'S MAIN assignment was to get an affidavit from Partin recanting his testimony. Hoffa's forces thought such a confession would cause Nixon to intervene in Hoffa's behalf. Murphy got his chance in April of 1971 when he was given a 31-page deposition reportedly taken from Partin. The deposition states that representatives of the Justice Department had coerced Partin into information on Hoffa by threatening to send him to federal prison on charges pending against him.

"Now this, I don't doubt at all," Egan said. "This is the only time I believe Edward Grady Partin."

Partin was "luring these (Hoffa) people toward him by letting drop the possibility that he might change his testimony," said a New Orleans investigator who did an indepth study of Partin's activities.

EGAN MAINTAINS that Murphy "knew President Nixon" and took the Partin deposition to the San Clemente White House.

"I don't know whether it was ever given to the President himself," Egan said. "I think Murphy did have an entree to the White House."

Sheridan said, "you can't believe" Egan. He admitted, however, that "it turns out a lot of things he was saying were true. But, you know, it's always a mixed bag.

"He (Egan) has been trying for years to try to show that Hoffa was maligned," Sheridan said. "Of course, his newspaper got \$2 million from Hoffa.

"I think they were all in it for the money, except Egan. Egan was in to try and pay out the money that had been set up in this fund to get Partin prepared to change his testimony."

SHERIDAN CONFIRMED the authenticity of a transcript of a recorded telephone conversation between Egan and Partin in spring of 1961. I obtained a copy of the tape from a

source who said it was taken in 1972 from the Washington, D.C., presidential campaign headquarters of Sen. George McGovern, where Sheridan worked.

"It was one of a series of recordings that Partin made of conversations with Egan and other people (including Murphy) who were trying to get him to change his testimony," Sheridan said. "I had possession of this because I was writing a book ... and that particular tape was quoted in the book, along with others."

Egan said the transcript appears to be a composite of three telephone conversations he had with Partin in the spring of 1971.

After learning of transcripts in the possession of the Watergate committee, he said he knows anti-Hoffa forces had bugged his home phone, his ex-wife's home, his newspaper phone, and the phones he used at a hotel while he was working for Hoffa's release.

PARTIN TOLD this reporter he

"recognized" some of the conversations on the transcript Egan identified, "but I have never had it transcribed nor has anyone ever got it. I do have the tapes."

An unidentified party in Washington recently contacted Partin to try to get his original tapes and turn them over, he assumes, "to someone for an investigation.

"Frankly, it's something that I understand they are trying to tie with some more tapes in regard to Audie Murphy and a meeting in Apple Valley, Calif.," Partin said. "That was my gist of it -- that they have several other tapes that were incriminating on certain people that they want to verify before they proceed with the matter."

Partin asserted he has original tapes of about 20 telephone conversations in connection with his Hoffa problems, including some with Audie Murphy, former Sen. George Murphy of California and Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona.

FORMER SEN. MURPHY, Egan claims, "hand-delivered" a second copy of the 31-page deposition of Partin's to then Atty. Gen. John Mitchell in Washington after Partin "beat it out" of Los Angeles without signing it. This was the same document that Egan said Audie Murphy deposited at the San Clemente White House in April of 1971.

Egan tells Partin in the recorded telephone conversation that his publisher, William Loeb, also sent a letter applying pressure on Mitchell.

Loeb's letter, Egan says in the transcript, told Mitchell in 1971 "that Nixon politically is in trouble and he needs support. And he says I own the biggest newspaper in the state (New Hampshire) and we have the first presidential primary."

Egan also paraphrased Loeb's purported letter to Mitchell, who subsequently was named Nixon's campaign chief, that if Mitchell expected Loeb's newspaper "to support Nixon, by God ... I expect something in return."

IN THE TRANSCRIPT of the Partin-Egan telephone conversation, Egan said Audie Murphy wanted to know when the three were to meet in Dallas. He said they were to get a signed affidavit from Partin with the help of Lester May, a former U.S. assistant attorney in Dallas.

May confirmed the meeting had been planned, but said, "Partin failed to show up." He said he had met Murphy through May's brother-in-law, Dallas movie theater and radio station mogul Gordon McClendon.

Egan said he and Murphy waited for three days at the Sheraton Dallas Hotel but Partin failed to show up.

"Now apparently they had the (hotel) room bugged," said Egan, "because a couple of calls Murphy made turned up later on."