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HUNT FOR KILLER IS 'ENCOURAGING'

Rumor Persists that Police
Know Slayer's Identity

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Special to The New York Times

MEMPHIS, April 6—The director of the Memphis police department said this morning that the investigation to identify the assassin of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "is very encouraging."

Frank C. Holloman, who was a Federal Bureau of Investigation inspector before retiring and becoming the Memphis Police and Fire Director, refused to meet with reporters, however.

And his spokesman, who presented a prepared statement dictated by Mr. Holloman, said that no details of the investigation would be released now lest the nationwide investigation be jeopardized.

There was a persistent report relayed by sources close to the investigation that the Memphis police and F.B.I. agents knew the identity of the young white man who shot Dr. King with a rifle Thursday night as the civil rights leader prepared to leave his motel for dinner.

Silent on Arrest

The police and the Federal agency refused to say if they were about to make an arrest.

Memphis homicide detectives and Federal agents were said to be working "in several states," including Mississippi.

The main suspect in the slaying, which touched off nationwide rioting, is a white man in his late 20's. The man, who gave his name as John Willard, checked into a dilapidated rooming house about two and a half hours before Dr. King was slain on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel on Memphis' South Side.

The rooming house, referred to by Memphis newspapers as a "flop house," is a half block from the motel. The police said that Dr. King's killer had shot from a bathroom at the rear of the rooming house, 205 feet 3 inches from the motel.

One clue being followed by Federal investigators is a \$20 bill that Willard gave to Mrs. Frank Brewer, resident manager of the rooming house, in payment for an \$8.50-a-week room.

The police also recovered a 30.06-caliber Remington rifle and a small suitcase that Willard was believed to have discarded as he fled from the scene after the fatal shot had been fired. The rifle and the suitcase were sent to Washington for analysis.

Fatal Bullet Studied

The bullet that killed Dr. King also has been recovered and sent to Washington for examination. Dr. J. T. Francisco, Memphis Medical Examiner, said that the bullet had been found in Dr. King's skin.

In an interview in Memphis yesterday afternoon, Attorney General Ramsey Clark said that the "projectile" that had killed Dr. King and a rifle found on the street both were in Washington.

More than \$150,000 in rewards had been posted by this morning for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the assassin.

The city offered a \$100,000 reward and private citizens were offering \$6,000 more. The owners of the two Memphis newspapers, The Commercial Appeal and The Press Scimitar, offered \$50,000.

The police would not say if any tips had been received.

Police Statement

Mr. Holloman's statement, which was released shortly before noon, said:

"The investigation is proceeding with all resources of the Memphis police department, Federal Bureau of Investigation and other agencies. The investigation at this point is very encouraging, and I feel very deeply that the success of the investigation and the conviction of the individual responsible for the murder of Dr. Mar-

tin Luther King Jr. is of paramount importance.

"The furnishing of any more details at this time might jeopardize either the investigation or the conviction of the individual responsible.

"As soon as we feel we are in a position to make further announcements, we will do so without delay."

When he was reading this statement, the spokesman for Dr. Holloman read, "The conviction of the individual or the individuals responsible." He said that he had not meant to say this, that Mr. Holloman had said that only one individual was being searched for.