

New Setback in the King Probe

The bullet that killed the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was so badly deformed on impact that the FBI is having difficulty proving it was fired by a rifle found near the assassination scene, it was learned today.

Tests thus far were said to have determined only that the

slug recovered from King's body was of the same caliber as the weapon -- a 30-06 Remington pump-action rifle with a telescopic sight.

Because of its soft point, it was learned, the bullet was so squashed that attempts to match the rifle markings against the barrel of the gun have met with no success.

Another new twist was added to the investigation of the slaying when witnesses reported that two white Mustangs were outside the Memphis rooming house from which the sniper fired the fatal shot at King, who was standing on the balcony of a nearby motel.

Witnesses originally reported only one white Mustang was parked outside the rooming house and disagreed on whether the killer had used it to flee.

The new eyewitness accounts said the two Mustangs had roared away from the rooming house minutes after the assassination. One vehicle, bearing Arkansas license plates, was said to contain a young man who had remained at the wheel while the killing was in progress.

The other reportedly was used by the assassin, who discarded the rifle on the street before getting into the empty vehicle and speeding off.

The Memphis police received a radio report minutes after the shooting that one of its officers in patrol car 160 was chasing a white Mustang, but the officer later said he never sent the report.

This led to speculation that someone had used the police radio frequency to transmit false information and throw pursuing police off the killer's trail.

The discarded rifle, traced through its serial number to a Birmingham, Ala., store where it was purchased new over the counter a few days before the slaying last Thursday, fired the

King's widow will play a larger role in the civil rights movement. See page 11.

same bullet as the Army's M-1 rifle.

It could not be determined whether the telescopic sight was obtained in the Birmingham store or whether the purchaser left any information about his identity.

Binoculars found in a rectangular blue leatherette case on the sidewalk a few feet from the rooming house entrance have been traced by authorities to York Arms Co., a sporting goods store about six blocks away, it was learned.

The binoculars were said to have been purchased there on the afternoon of the slaying, and the clerk who sold them has been interviewed several times by Memphis police and the FBI.

If the man who purchased the rifle in Birmingham and the man who bought the binoculars in Memphis is the same person who fled from the rooming house, then at least four persons have seen his face.

Besides the sales' clerks, the others are Mrs. Bessie Brewer, the landlady who rented an \$8.50-a-week room to the suspect, and Charlie Hugh Stephens, one of her tenants.

Mrs. Brewer and Stephens were re-interviewed Tuesday by

the FBI from descriptions of the man's features.

Stephens said the drawing did not resemble the fugitive and the man he remembered was much younger. Mrs. Brewer said she wasn't able to remember what the fugitive or the drawing looked like.

Stephens said the composite drawing was a full-face view, although he had seen only the man's profile. He said he recalled the man had a long thin nose but that the FBI drawing revealed a rather chubby face and a bulbous nose.

The only description of the suspect that has been made public was given Friday by Memphis Police Director Holloman. He said the man was between 26 and 32 years old, weighed between 165 and 175 pounds and was about six feet tall.

The suspect obtained a room from Mrs. Brewer between 3 and 3:30 p.m. Thursday. Dr. King was wounded fatally about 6 p.m. by one shot believed to have been fired from a common bathroom on the second floor of the rooming house, just a few steps from the suspect's room.

After the shot was fired, the man was seen walking from the direction of the bathroom down a dark hallway with rifle wrapped in a newspaper or blanket and with the blue leatherette bag in hand.

4/11/68
NY Post