



—Photo by The Times-Picayune.
BYRON DE LA BECKWITH is handcuffed as he enters a Criminal District Courtroom Thursday in the custody of a deputy sheriff.

Beckwith Target 'Jewish Activist'

Mississippian Allegedly
Had Bomb, Guns

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This story was compiled by The Times-Picayune staffers Bruce Nolan, John McMillan, Bob Ussery and Gordon Gsell.)

Federal sources say Byron De La Beckwith planned to attack a Jewish activist in New Orleans before he was arrested at the city limits Thursday, allegedly carrying a ticking time bomb and a small arsenal in his car.

The sources identified his intended victim as A. I. "Bee" Botnick, a former officer of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in Atlanta and New Orleans.

They added, however, Botnick left the city before Thursday, taking his family into hiding from their home at 5526 S. Galvez St. after receiving several threats recently.

Beckwith, who was twice tried but never convicted of murdering a civil rights leader in Jackson in 1963, said he came to New Orleans to sell some historical artifacts.

A police spokesman denied first-hand knowledge of the alleged plot against Botnick, but added, "I questioned the intelligence people and they neither confirmed nor denied it."

"They had to know he was going somewhere to commit a specific crime" in order to make the arrest, the spokesman said. He said the knowledge

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would have had to include the name of the victim.

The federal sources said Botnick had been active recently in his organization's work in Mississippi, Beckwith's ohme state. The nature of the work, however, remained unclear.

Late Thursday, Beckwith was being held on three state charges in lieu of \$53,500 bond.

In addition, federal authorities said they would charge him with violation of the Gun Control Act of 1968, which forbids possession of an explosive device.

Beckwith's bond was originally set at \$8,500 by Magistrate Robert F. Collins, who said he later increased it at the personal request of Police Supt. Clarence B. Giarrusso.

"This came at the request of the chief of police to me and the District Attorney's office," said Collins shortly after he increased the bond.

He said Giarrusso did not detail the reasons behind his request, but merely urged him to make the adjustment.

Collins said Giarrusso told him "there was a whole lot more to the case than that which had been made available at the time" the first bond was set.

Collins set the new bond without a hearing, but said a second

one would be held if Beckwith's attorney, Barry Viosca, an Indigent Defender Program lawyer, wished.

He also scheduled a preliminary hearing fro Oct. 9 to determine if there is enough evidence to hold Beckwith over for trial.

The increased bail was set against the attempted aggravated arson charge lodged against Beckwith after his arrest.

Earlier in the day, Collins had set it at \$5,000, later he jumped it to \$50,000.

Beckwith is also accused of aggravated assault and carrying a concealed weapon.

In 1963, Beckwith was twice tried for the Jackson, Miss., sniper slaying of Medgar Evers, a field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Both efforts ended in mistrials, however, and while the charges against him are still technically open, officials conceded that the case is essentially dead.

The 52-year-old Beckwith later ran for lieutenant governor in Mississippi, but lost.

Police stopped Beckwith and arrested him shortly after he entered the city on Interstate 10 near eastern New Orleans early Thursday morning.

They said they were tipped to his arrival, and apparently, his intentions.

TICKING TIME BOMB

They said Beckwith, a resident of Greenwood, Miss., was carrying a ticking time bomb set to explode within 12 hours, three rifles, a pistol, a 50-caliber machine gun barrel and a quantity of ammunition.

It was determined later the car's Mississippi license plate had been stolen last week from a Jackson banker's automobile.

In an interview after his arrest Thursday, Beckwith said his purpose in New Orleans was entirely legal.

"I came to town to sell some china that came from Beauvoir, which was the last home of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy," he said.

Beckwith said, when asked about the explosives allegedly found in his car, replied: "I was as astounded as you were to learn of this dynamite business."

He declined to say more about the accusation.

However, about another accusation, he said, "I don't understand the aggravated assault charge."

As for the allegation that he carried a concealed weapon, identified as a .45-caliber semi-automatic pistol, Beckwith said it was permissible under Mississippi law for a man in his situation to carry a weapon for protection.

"If you are a man of good moral character, or a woman, and if you need to carry a weapon, you can," he said.

Beckwith said he wanted to emphasize that Mississippi has a law against carrying a concealed weapon, but the consensus of officials he spoke to was that it would not apply to a person whose life was in danger.

"After all, our forefathers had to carry weapons to go to church; maybe we should get back to that," he said.

Beckwith said his life was threatened once on national television.

Asked about the status of the charge he murdered Medgar Evers, which has resulted in two mistrials, Beckwith said: "They passed that to the files, and threw it out."

He said he was sure if authorities had any new evidence it would have been brought forward.

"It seems that everybody that's concerned with the matter is willing to forget about it," Beckwith stated.

Beckwith explained the presence of three rifles and an object described as a machine gun barrel in his automobile by stating:

"I'm a gun collector. I've been trading guns since I was five years old."

No charge resulted from the discovery of the rifles and apparent machine gun barrel.

Gun collecting has been his hobby, his father's hobby and his son's hobby, Beckwith said.

"We like guns, and we like people who like guns," he said.

"It behooves people to keep guns in their houses," he added.

He said he would consider any law brought to bear against the right to bear arms "diabolical."

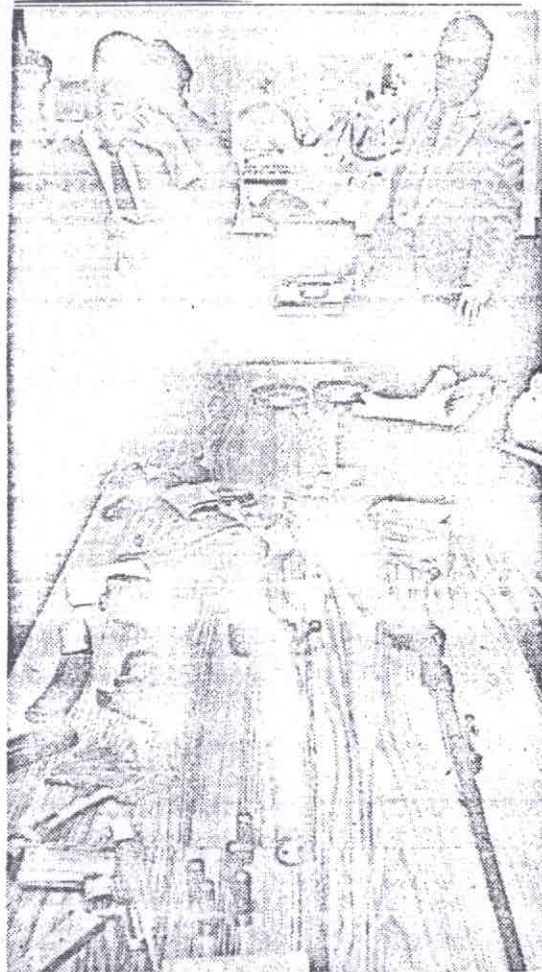
Police did not display the bomb allegedly found in Beck-

with's car, but showed newsmen the wooden box said to have contained the bomb along with other objects taken from the car, including boxes of bullets, several shotgun shells, a hatchet, a hunting knife, an ammunition belt and a metal ammunition box.

Police said the bomb consisted of sticks of dynamite connected to a timing device which could have been activated.

The box contained an insulated wire which extended through a hole in the box.

A veteran of World War II during which he received bullet wounds of the thigh at Tarawa and a 30 per cent disability classification, Beckwith was born in Sacramento, Calif., and lived in Colusa, Calif., until he was five years old.



—Photo by The Associated Press.

WEAPONS seized in the arrest of Byron de la Beckwith Thursday included three rifles, a pistol and ammunition displayed at Police Headquarters by Sgt. Frank Hayward (right). Also seized was a homemade dynamite bomb.