

Dear Mr. Weissburg,

Here are some clippings
from the Tennessean. I

made a set for you and
for Mr. Ray. ^{it was to have}
^{been in 1944}
Sent 1/8/44

I stapled ones
together that come from
the same paper.

Thanks again for
your hospitality.

The Tennessean
1100 Broadway
37202

Regards,
Sheila Wisner

'Please clear my name: I did not kill Dr. King'

Florida man denies role in assassination

By KIRK LOGGINS
and SUSAN THOMAS

Staff Writers
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The black man linked by a white Memphis businessman to the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. denies he had anything to do with the shooting, which rocked America and the world April 4, 1968.

Frank Holt has told *The Tennessean* he wants to clear his name — and a polygraph exam he took yesterday appears to support his claim of innocence.

"I didn't do it — oh, no, no, no," Holt said, shaking his head, when questioned by *Tennessean* reporters who tracked him through public records to a homeless shelter in Orlando, Fla., Friday afternoon.

Holt, now 62, flatly denied any involvement before, during or after the civil rights leader's assassination.

He said he was often a customer at Jim's Grill, a restaurant operated by Loyd Jowers, the man who now claims to have arranged the King assassination.

Jowers, who now lives in Martin, Tenn., poses a convoluted conspiracy story, in which money changed hands to hire a man other than James Earl Ray to kill King.

Jowers conspiracy claims have drawn international attention since *The Observer* of London first brought them to light a week ago. ABC News correspondent Sam Donaldson traveled to Memphis last week to interview Jowers for the *Primetime Live* program, which was broadcast nationally Thursday.

However, Jowers and four Memphis residents tied to him say they cannot tell what they know without immunity from prosecution. Lawyers involved have tried to control the flow and interpretation of information about the claims.

However, one witness, Willie Akins, 63, told *The Tennessean* that Jowers told him repeatedly Holt was the triggerman. Holt's name has circulated among reporters in Memphis for several days. Shelby County District Attorney General John Pierotti said



Frank Holt, a former Memphis resident, relaxes after taking a polygraph examination.

he, too, has heard Jowers name Holt as the triggerman.

But Holt, who worked as a produce packer in Memphis in 1968, contends he barely knew Jowers and has no knowledge of a plot to kill King, arranged by Jowers or anyone else.

"Jowers is lying," Holt said. "Jowers ain't give me no money."

Jowers hung up on a reporter when told of Holt's statements. Jowers' attorney, Lewis Garrison of Memphis, did not return a reporter's call for comment.

Holt said he knew Frank Liberto, the now-deceased Memphis produce dealer whom Jowers has named as the man who paid him a large sum of money to arrange

the assassination.

Holt said he had heard Liberto tell a number of produce workers, shortly before King's death, that King "was going to start trouble and the only way to stop trouble is to kill the s.o.b.," then it won't be no trouble."

But, Holt said, he never discussed any assassination plan with Liberto, Jowers or anyone else.

King, who launched the Southern civil rights revolution with the Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott in 1955, had gone to Memphis to help striking city sanitation workers in spring 1968.

Friday, Holt said that he was at Jim's Grill, Jowers' small cafe on Memphis' South

AN

aid in Nashville, TN

TODAY'S TOPIC **WHO SLEW THE DREAMER?**

Special report

Frank Holt spent a half-hour strapped into a polygraph chair yesterday answering eight questions posed by a state-licensed polygraph examiner; afterward, the examiner said he believes Holt is telling the truth when he says he had nothing to do with the King assassination, on 11A.

Who is Frank Holt? The Florida man says nothing could have shocked him more than hearing someone was blaming him for the murder of the civil rights leader, on 11A.

Loyd Jowers, the retired businessman who claims a role in an assassination conspiracy, says he knows who really pulled the trigger, and that it's not James Earl Ray, on 10A.

In the 24 years since he recanted his confession that he murdered Martin Luther King, James Earl Ray has consistently said he was a scapegoat in a complex and convoluted plan to kill King involving a mysterious man named Raoul, on 10A.

Ray said yesterday that Jowers should not be given immunity to testify before a grand jury about a plot to kill King, on 10A.

Main Street, when King was shot as he stepped onto the balcony of the nearby Lorraine Motel.

He said he did not hear a shot and was unaware of the shooting until a police officer came into the restaurant and told patrons King had been shot. Holt said he was told to leave the grill, which he did, and walked home.

Holt, who has spent his life as a manual laborer, appeared stunned when reporters told him Friday that some people in Memphis are saying he was hired and paid to shoot King.

"I want to clear my name," Holt said after learning of the accusation that he shot King, a hero to most black Americans.

Holt agreed to take a polygraph test at the request of *The Tennessean*, and the newspaper flew him to Nashville for a test yesterday, at the office of private investigator Charles R. Scott.

Scott concluded — after interviewing Holt for half an hour and measuring his responses to eight questions about the King assassination — that Holt was truthful when he denied any involvement in or knowledge of the crime.

"That old man couldn't beat a polygraph if he'd killed somebody," Scott said.

Scott said he believes Holt answered all of his questions truthfully, including one

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FROM PAGE 1A

about whether he had "ever been questioned by the authorities about the shooting of Dr. King."

Holt insisted in interviews Friday and again yesterday that he was never questioned by police.

He stuck by that story even when he was confronted yesterday with an FBI agent's report, dated April 17, 1968, recounting a brief interview with Holt. FBI agent Harley E. Gylfe wrote in the report that Holt told him a story similar to the one he tells now.

Pierotti said he thinks it is possible that Holt could have forgotten talking to Gylfe.

Holt, who admits to drinking heavily when he was younger, "has probably been talked to by a lot of police in his lifetime," Pierotti said. "A street person would be around a lot of police at different times."

Holt said he cannot imagine why Jowers would falsely accuse him.

"Maybe Jowers thought I was dead," Holt said.

Holt said he moved away from Memphis in 1969 and has spent most of his time in Florida since then.

He said he did not flee Memphis to avoid prosecution — and has returned there a number of times to visit, most recently in 1982.

"I wasn't running from nothing," Holt said. "I didn't have no reason not to come back."

Pierotti said Holt's denial of any involvement in the King killing supports Pierotti's contention that Jowers' story is "a bunch of bull."

Holt is "obviously the patsy in this whole thing," Pierotti said, adding:

"I think we're going to be able to shoot holes all through this thing."

Pierotti labeled Jowers' conspiracy story "a sham and a fraud" when it appeared last Sunday — without the names of any alleged

participants — in the *Observer* of London.

The Shelby County prosecutor said "somebody in the media" told him at mid-week that Holt was the

man Jowers said he paid to kill King.

Pierotti said an investigator on his staff Thursday uncovered a 1968 report stating that Jowers con-

firmed to Memphis police on April 7 that Holt was one of the customers in his restaurant at the time King was killed.

Akins, who once owned a cab

**Frank Holt is
"obviously the patsy
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JOHN PIEROTTI
Shelby County district attorney
general

company with Jowers, has said Jowers told him a number of times over the years that Holt fired the fatal shot from bushes at the rear of Jowers' restaurant. According to Akins, Jowers said Holt then jumped off a retaining wall and ran away, after handing the rifle back to Jowers. Akins, who lives in south Memphis, is on probation for a manslaughter conviction in neighboring DeSoto County, Miss., in 1989.

But, Pierotti said, Jowers' statement to police three days after the killing would tend to exonerate Holt of any participation in the King assassination.

Pierotti questioned how Holt could have fired a shot from the rear of the building and returned to the restaurant without attracting anyone's suspicion, especially at a time when police were questioning everyone who had been in the area.

Pierotti said he does not know why Jowers would want to fabricate a theory about the King assassination in which he implicates himself.

Pierotti said he plans to send an investigator to interview Holt. ■



P. Casey Daley ● Staff

Willie Akins, above, says businessman Loyd Jowers told him repeatedly that Frank Holt shot the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Akins, of south Memphis, once owned a cab company with Jowers.

Case strong against Ray in King's assassination

By CHUCK CLARK

Regional Editor

It was March 10, 1969, when prison escapee James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to murdering the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. outside his Memphis motel room.

It was just three days later that Ray recanted his confession, saying he was framed in a conspiracy to slay the civil rights leader.

But more than Ray's guilty plea says he was the gunman who killed the hero of a race of Americans struggling for equality.

He bought a rifle linked to the assassination. He was staying in a rooming house nearby, under an assumed name. There is evidence he stalked King for weeks across the South.

Still, in the 24 years since he recanted his confession, Ray has consistently said he was a scapegoat in a complex and convoluted plan to kill King involving a mysterious man named Raoul.

And claims by a Memphis businessman that he helped organize a plot to kill King for a buddy — also involving a mysterious man named Raoul — has some wondering whether Ray, indeed, was somebody's fall guy.

"I didn't kill Martin Luther King," Ray said in an interview with *The Tennessean* yesterday, repeating his contention that he was coerced into pleading guilty. "Everyone wanted a plea except me."

Some of the evidence against Ray is ambiguous; for example, neither medical evidence gathered during King's autopsy nor a detailed engineering study conducted for Congress could precisely determine the bullet's origin.

Nor could ballistics experts directly tie the bullet that killed King to a 30.06 rifle

bearing Ray's fingerprints. Not enough markings remained on bullet fragments removed from King's body to prove it was fired by Ray's gun, but the bullet did come from a 30.06 rifle.

But a 1979 congressional inquiry into Ray's claims of conspiracy concluded that the right man is behind bars. A broad range of evidence, the inquiry said, indicated Ray was King's assassin:

- Ray was in several places at the same time as King in the weeks before the assassination, including Selma, Ala.; Atlanta and Memphis. Congressional investigators concluded the stops were more than just coincidence and considered them evidence Ray stalked King.

- Ray had purchased the 30.06 rifle in Birmingham, Ala., the week before the slaying. Although Ray had been using the alias Eric Starvo Galt exclusively for several months, he used another name — Harvey Lowmeyer — when buying the rifle. Ray initially bought another gun in Birmingham, but exchanged it the next day for the higher power 30.06.

- On the day King went to Memphis for the last time — April 3, 1968 — Ray checked into the New Rebel Motel on the outskirts of the city. The next day, the day King was assassinated, Ray checked into the rooming house across from the Lorraine Motel, where King was staying. Police recovered a newspaper bearing Ray's fingerprints with a story about King, mentioning he was staying at the Lorraine.

- At the rooming house, Ray rejected the first room he was shown in favor of Room 5B, which had a view of the Lorraine. Police found a chair pushed under the window of Ray's room. By standing on the chair Ray would have a clear view of

the motel.

- The bathroom from which experts say King's assassin likely fired the fatal shot was just down the hall from Room 5B, which Ray rented using the name John Willard.

- On the day of the assassination, another rooming house tenant said he heard a shot and then saw a man run from the bathroom carrying something under his arm. This tenant and another one who also saw a running man could not definitely say it was Ray.

- Witnesses outside the Lorraine pointed to the rooming house when police asked them where the shot came from.

- Minutes after the shooting, police recovered a bundle near the doorway of an amusement company near the rooming house. The bundle contained a 30.06 rifle, a pair of binoculars, two cans of beer and a newspaper, all bearing Ray's fingerprints.

- At the time of the shooting, Ray claims, he was not at the boarding house but had driven to a service station to have a tire repaired. The owners of that station said they never saw Ray that day, and no other witnesses could be found to place Ray there at the time of the shooting.

- Ray left Memphis immediately after the shooting, at 8:01 p.m. April 4. He drove to Atlanta and then fled to Canada. He was caught in England two months later.

Although the congressional committee concluded that Ray was the assassin, some of King's associates believe there was no way the shot that killed their leader came from the rooming house above Jim's Grill. Many others continue to believe Ray was not acting alone in the assassination. ■

Ray against immunity for Jowers

He hopes classified files will be released

By DWIGHT LEWIS

Staff Writer

West Tennessee businessman Loyd Jowers should not be given immunity to testify before a grand jury about a plot to kill Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., James Earl Ray said yesterday.

"I don't think he needs immunity," Ray said. "If he is not given immunity, he can subpoena records in the King case that have been classified by the federal government and ordered sealed until the year 2025.

"I think those classified records being held by the Justice Department can help my case. If he is given immunity, there would be no reason for him to subpoena those records."

Ray said the classified records would show that he was coerced into pleading guilty to killing the civil rights leader on April 4, 1968.

Ray made his comments during an interview at the state's Riverbend Maximum Security Institution where he is being held.

Jowers operated a grill across the street from the Lorraine Motel in Memphis when King was murdered. During an interview broadcast Thursday night on ABC News' *Primetime Live*, Jowers said he found someone to kill King as a favor for a friend, now-deceased Memphis produce dealer Frank Liberto.

Jowers and four others have asked for immunity to testify before a Memphis grand jury about the plot.

Shelby County District Attorney General John Pierotti has said he will not grant



"I think those classified records being held by the Justice Department can help my case."

JAMES EARL RAY

Convicted in King assassination

immunity to Jowers.

Meanwhile, William Pepper, a London attorney who has been representing Ray since 1988, said yesterday he has no doubt that Jowers accepted the contract from Liberto to have King assassinated.

Pepper's comments came after he was told that former Memphis resident Frank Holt had passed a polygraph exam indicating that he had no part in King's death.

"I think it is time for the attorney general in Memphis to take seriously these allegations and look into this case very closely the statement of these witnesses," Pepper said. "We had hoped this would be done in a court of law, and preferably before a grand jury." ■

Jowers says Ray just a 'decoy'

Bid for immunity will not happen, prosecutor says

Memphis businessman who claims a role in the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., says he knows who really pulled the trigger.

It was not James Earl Ray, Jowers said. But in his only public statements so far on the King case, Jowers would not identify the man he claims is the real triggerman. And Jowers stopped short of saying he actually hired King's assassin.

In an interview last week with Sam Donaldson of the ABC News *Primetime Live* show, Jowers acknowledged finding someone to kill King as a favor to a longtime friend, now-dead Memphis businessman Frank Liberto.

Jowers said he received money and a rifle to carry out the killing. Jowers also said he found a triggerman, as requested. But Jowers' lawyer, Lewis Garrison of Memphis, stopped him from giving further details.

To tell anything more, Garrison said, Jowers must be granted immunity from Shelby County District Attorney General John Pierotti. That, Pierotti says, will not happen.

Jowers and Garrison have refused repeated requests by *The Tennessean* to talk about the King case. In his interview with ABC, Jowers told of an intriguing conspiracy he supposedly "helped carry out for friendship and money."

Jowers' story, as told to Donaldson, has gaps and is incomplete, but this is how



GARRISON

he says the King assassination came about:

Jowers said Liberto, his longtime friend, approached him offering money to carry out the conspiracy.

Liberto asked if Jowers knew someone who could be hired to kill the civil rights leader, Jowers said, adding:

"I told him I thought I knew someone who'd probably do it."

Jowers told Donaldson he felt beholden to his old friend.

"Frank Liberto done me several large favors, so I owed him a favor, or at least I thought I did," Jowers said on *Primetime Live*. "He asked me to handle some money transaction — hire someone to assassinate Dr. Martin Luther King."

After Jowers told Liberto he could find someone, a large amount of cash was delivered to him at Jim's Grill, a small bar and grill Jowers then owned on South Main Street in Memphis. Jim's was across a vacant lot and a side street from the Lorraine Motel, where King was then staying.

In the days before the shooting, Jowers said, a man he described only as "Raoul" showed up at the grill with a rifle in a box.

"He asked me to hold the rifle until he made the arrangements, or we made the arrangements, one or the other of us, uh, for the killing," Jowers said.

About the same time, Jowers said, Liberto told him he had arranged for a cover, assuring that no police officers would be on hand at the Lorraine when the shooting was to



Loyd Jowers is shown on an investigative report on the King assassination by the A&E cable channel that was televised in 1988 or '89.

occur.

And, Jowers said, Liberto told him arrangements had been made for a "decoy" to draw suspicion away from those responsible.

That decoy, Jowers believes, was James Earl Ray.

Ray pleaded guilty in 1969 to killing King but immediately recanted his confession. Ray is now serving a 99-year prison sentence in Nashville.

The day of King's murder, Ray checked into the boarding house above Jim's Grill, using the alias John Willard. Ray had escaped

from a Missouri prison.

Ray, Jowers told ABC, was to be framed as King's killer.

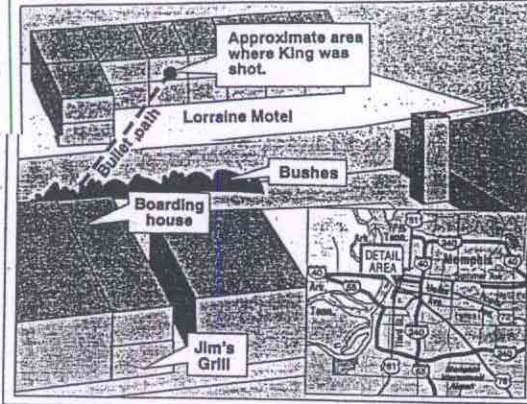
"He was part of [the plot to kill King], but I don't believe he knew he was part of it," Jowers said.

Jowers would say no more about King's April 4, 1968, murder, but said he had no animosity toward the charismatic man.

"A portion of it, naturally, was for the money," Jowers said. But "any involvement I might've had in it was doing a friend a favor." ■

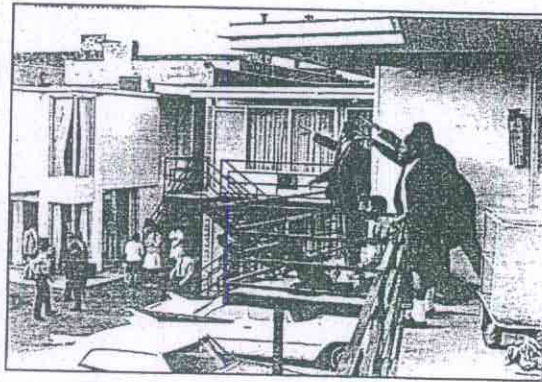
King assassination scene

Investigators have long said the bullet that killed the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was fired from the bathroom of a rooming house above Jim's Grill, across a street and a vacant lot from the Lorraine Motel. James Earl Ray was staying at the rooming house and pleaded guilty but later recanted. Loyd Jowers, the owner of Jim's Grill, now says someone else fired the fatal shot from bushes nearby.



Kent Travis/The TENNESSEAN

Looking back



AP ● File

In this photo reprinted from April 4, 1968, the body of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. lies on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. Some members of the civil rights leader's entourage point to the rooftop of the boarding house from where the shot that killed King was believed to have been fired.

What they said

"Frank Liberto done me several large favors, so I owed him a favor, or at least I thought I did. He asked me to handle some money transaction — hire someone to assassinate Dr. Martin Luther King."

— Former businessman Loyd Jowers of Martin, Tenn., interviewed last week on *Primetime Live*.

"I wasn't running from nothing. I didn't have no reason not to come back."



PIEROTTI
county general.

— Frank Holt, Florida man Jowers says was triggerman in King slaying.

"That old man couldn't beat a polygraph if he'd killed somebody."

— Charles R. Scott, Tennessee-certified polygraph examiner, referring to test taken by Frank Holt.

Holt "has probably been talked to by a lot of police in his lifetime. A street person would be around a lot of police at different times."

— John Pierotti, Shelby County district attorney general.

Questions former Memphian was asked

The text of the questions asked of Frank Holt during his polygraph examination, and his responses:

Polygraph examiner: Regarding whether or not you were paid by Loyd Jowers to shoot Dr. King, do you intend to answer all of my questions truthfully?

Holt: Yes.
In 1968 were you paid \$10,000 to shoot Dr. Martin Luther King?

Holt: No.
Have you ever been questioned by the authorities about the shooting of Dr. King?

Holt: No.
Did Loyd Jowers hire you to shoot Dr. Martin Luther King?

Holt: No.
Did you shoot Dr. Martin Luther King?

Holt: No.
In 1968 were you involved in any plot or conspiracy to kill Dr. Martin Luther King?

Holt: No.
Were you inside Jim's Grill when Dr. King was shot?

Holt: Yes.
Did you see anybody shoot Dr. King?

Holt: No.
Do you know for sure who shot Dr. King?
Holt: No.

Test indicates no involvement

Ex-Memphian passes lie detector exam

By KIRK LOGGINS and GAIL KERR Staff Writers

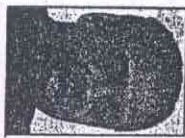
A Nashville polygraph examiner said yesterday former Memphis resident Frank Holt is truthful when he says he had nothing to do with the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968.

Charles R. Scott, a private investigator and polygraph examiner, strapped Holt into a polygraph chair yesterday and interviewed him for a half hour before asking him eight questions about King's assassination — and about former Memphis businessman Loyd Jowers' claim that he hired Holt to shoot the civil rights leader.

Holt, 67, now a Florida day laborer, denied that he shot King, had any involvement in a plot to shoot King or knows who shot King.

"He showed no stress on the test, and in my opinion he was being truthful about the whole incident," Scott said. "In my opinion, he doesn't know anything other than what he's heard or read."

Scott, who has been a state-licensed polygraph examiner since 1979, said Holt's answers "failed to



"He showed no stress on the test, and in my opinion he was being truthful about the whole incident. In my opinion, he doesn't know anything other than what he's heard or read."

CHARLES R. SCOTT
Licensed polygraph examiner

show any deception." He said polygraph judgments are based on test subjects' breath, heart rate and nervous system responses.

Scott began conducting polygraph tests while he worked as an investigator for the Metro public defender's office in 1979-82. He has been a private investigator and polygraph examiner since 1988.

Polygraph tests are not considered evidence in Tennessee courts, but local officials say they are valuable tools for finding the truth in many instances.

Polygraph tests, known as the detector tests, were invented around 1925.

A strap is attached around the subject's chest to register their breathing, another strap circles their upper arm to record blood pressure, and a third is taped to the hand to register "skin resistance,"

more commonly known as sweaty palms. The straps are attached to a diagnostic recording device that records ink lines on paper.

The lines measure a person's physical reactions when asked questions. To see if a person is faking or on drugs, the examiner asks a set of control questions, such as "Are you wearing shoes?" or "Do you drink coffee?"

The key to their validity, the credibility and skill of the test administrator.

"I'm all in the administration of the test," said Cecil Branstetter, a prominent local attorney. "I've had some cases that I thought it good that my client go ahead and take that test, as a means for the government to lay off him, to show that he is innocent."

Can a person beat the test? Branstetter says it is possible but not likely if the test administrator is

qualified.

Mental impairment, lack of sleep or drug use might affect the test.

But Branstetter said, "Very few people can beat it. If a person is totally amoral and has no conscience whatsoever, they might could fool it."

Scott said he considered Holt competent to take a polygraph test, despite other people's description of Holt as mentally "slow."

"He understands right and wrong. He has a very detailed memory of that period. I feel he understands what's going on."

Scott said a valid polygraph exam can be run on a person of low intelligence if it deals with major events in his or her life.

"I asked him how he felt about the King shooting. He said he was grieved by it, like any other black person."

"That old man couldn't beat a polygraph if he'd killed somebody."

"I don't think he could run a chart that consistent if he had killed King — or if he had killed anybody."

Scott told Holt, as he released the straps on the polygraph machine:

"Mr. Holt, I think you had nothing to do with it [the King assassination]."

"I know I didn't," Holt replied. "When you start yanking you're going to have trouble." ■

'Why me?' laborer asks

Startled Florida man wonders how he tripped into murder controversy

By SUSAN THOMAS
Staff Writer

ORLANDO, Fla. — Nothing short of a lightning bolt could have shocked Frank Holt more than hearing that someone was blaming him for the murder of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

"Huh? What?" he mumbled

record, no kind of way, never did, here nor nowhere else. No, no, no, ... I didn't do it."

And now Holt, a tall and well-groomed man with short, snowy white hair, is tired but determined to do three things.

First, he wants his name cleared. Second, he wants to return to his normal life, the kind where a man can live simply and happily in virtual obscurity, known only to his family and friends.

And third, this shy man with a

grandfatherly grin wants to know why his name got caught in the national spotlight.

"I just don't know," he says, rubbing his weary eyes.

Frank Holt — no middle name — was born Aug. 4, 1931, in the rural delta farmlands of Darling,

and his mother tended him and his two sisters and brother.

As a teen-ager, Holt says, he spent his days hunting, fishing and attending high school until he decided to quit in the 11th grade and say goodbye to his family's farm life. He set out for the bright lights of bigger cities.

In 1956, Holt said, he made his way to Titusville on Florida's Atlantic coast, where he fell for the eternal warm weather. Although he made stops in New York and other spots along the East Coast,

"I didn't do nothing. I ain't got no record, no kind of way, never did, here nor nowhere else. No, no, no. ... I didn't do it."

FRANK HOLT

Holt has spent most of his life in central Florida — except for the two years he made his way to West Tennessee.

From 1967 to 1969, Holt says, he lived in a boarding house in Memphis, working as a packer at M.E. Carter Produce Co.

HAVING A DEEP WITH HIS DUCKIES WITH his memories of the brutal assassination of King.

Holt says he left Memphis in 1969 and headed back to Florida, where he has lived full time, only returning to Mississippi several times through the years to visit his family and friends.

Until he heard the accusation against him Friday night, Holt said, his life has been a good one, working by day as a laborer in the Orlando area and spending his nights at the Salvation Army shelter or Orlando Union Rescue Mis-

Contributors

Tennessean staffers who contributed to this special report included: Shella Wissner, Bob Sherborne, Frank Gibson, Ellen Ballinger, Ted Rayburn, Janet Shouse, Heather Fritz.

Travis, Deloras Delvin and Glenda Washam.

sion, where employees describe him as "friendly, quiet, honest and a gentleman."

That is the life Holt says he enjoys. And it is the life Holt wants back.

"This has been something," he adds, still shaking his head slowly in stunned dismay over this moment of unwanted limelight.

"But I'm gonna make it ... least, I hope so." ■



P. Casey Daley ● Staff

Frank Holt of Orlando, Fla., now has three goals: to clear his name, get back to his old life and find out how he got entangled in talk of an assassination plot.

Arranging hit on King

FRI DEC 17 '68

Ex-grill owner alleges plot

By SHEILA WISSNER
and KIRK LOGGINS

Staff Writers

Retired businessman Loyd Jowers, 67, told a national television audience last night he agreed to find a man to assassinate the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. for money and friendship.

In an interview with Sam Donaldson broadcast on last night's *Primetime Live* program, Jowers said he found a killer as a favor for a friend, now-deceased Memphis

produce dealer Frank Liberto.

"Liberto done me a large favor, so I owed him a favor — or at least I thought I did," Jowers told Donaldson.

Jowers said Liberto eventually came to him to repay the favor. And it was a large favor, he said:

"He asked me to handle some money transactions. Hire someone to assassinate Dr. Martin Luther King.

"He asked me if I knew someone. And I told him I thought I knew someone, I prob-

ably did."

Jowers said Liberto also offered to pay him a large sum, adding a "portion" of his motivation was money.

Asked by Donaldson if he found someone to kill King, Jowers replied: "Yes, sir."

But Jowers' lawyer, Lewis Garrison, cut short the questions, saying, "He cannot answer that ... He's gone as far as he can."

Jowers, who owned Jim's Grill in Memphis when King was assassinated April 4, 1968, said James Earl Ray did not kill the civil rights leader.

Ray pleaded guilty in 1969 to King's murder, but recanted three days later, saying a

'done as favor'

man named Raoul had asked him to buy a rifle in a gun deal.

Ray, who was renting a room above Jim's Grill on the day King was killed, may not have known he was part of the conspiracy, Jowers said.

Liberto told him the police "wouldn't be there that night," Jowers said, and also told him there would be a "decoy" to draw suspicion away from those responsible.

Presumably, that decoy was Ray.

Jowers also said a man with a name sounding like "Raoul," who looked "Mexican" or possibly "part Indian," and talked with an accent, delivered to Jowers a rifle

for the killing.

Garrison said the real triggerman is believed to be still living and that "we are working currently to locate him."

Jowers and four others have asked for immunity to testify before a Memphis grand jury about the plot.

One of those five, Willie Akins, 63, told *The Tennessean* that Jowers has told him several times over the past 15 years that Jowers hired and paid the triggerman.

In his interview with Donaldson, Akins said an unnamed "friend" asked him to get

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GARRISON



PIEROTTI

nity:

"There's a guy who says that he is guilty of a capital crime, and I'm supposed to give him immunity?"

Pierotti has said he will not call a grand jury to look into the conspiracy claims, which he terms a "sham."

"If there is a Mafia, and if they wanted somebody hit, they're sure not going to do it this way. They are not going to give it to some amateur who runs less than a five-star restaurant."

Pierotti also said he is going to stop talking to reporters about the case until more information is obtained:

"We can't do anything in this atmosphere. It's my policy to be as open as I can. But we can't do any work ... I won't do interviews anymore. When we find out something, then we will tell you. We can't talk to you every day, all day long." ■

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someone "out of the way" because he was afraid the man would talk too much.

Akins said the "friend" eventually told him the person needed to be eliminated because "that was the man who killed King."

Donelson said that Akins told him he found the triggerman, a "slow-acting, kind of retarded black man," who disappeared before Akins could "pop him."

According to Donaldson, a Memphis woman saw Jowers disassembling a rifle moments after the shooting.

Another witness will say that Jowers showed him the rifle the day after the assassination and told him it was the weapon that killed the

civil rights leader, Donaldson reported.

In 1979, Donaldson said, a House subcommittee came across Liberto's name while investigating the King assassination. Subcommittee chairman Walter Fauntroy said a witness reported hearing Liberto say on the evening King was killed to "kill the s.o.b. — my brother in New Orleans is going to take care of you with \$5,000."

The brother in New Orleans was the chief aide to Carlos Marcello, a Mafia chief, Fauntroy said.

Shelby County District Attorney General John Pierotti has said he wants to talk with Akins, Jowers and the other witnesses:

"I think we would be derelict if we did not look into it."

But, the prosecutor said, he will not grant Jowers' request for immu-