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Theory triggers probe

Did lawmen set up King?

Wayne Chastain is a veteran newsman who, while writing for the Memphis Press-Scimitar, was one of the first reporters on the scene after Martin Luther King Jr. was shot. He has investigated the King murder for eight years.

By Wayne Chastain
Pacific News Service

MEMPHIS — Martin Luther King Jr. may have been the victim of "security stripping" — a technique used by intelligence agencies to expose a victim to assassination by removing his protection.

This theory persuaded the U.S. House of Representatives to create a special 12-member committee to investigate both the 1968 King murder and the 1963 assassination of John Kennedy.

The black caucus in the House, led by Rep. James Farmer, is the King case, and responsible for breaking a stalemate and pushing the investigation through according to several committee appointees.

The most information was given to me about this theory by two investigators: J. Edgar Hoover, director of the best-selling magazine, "Rush to Judgment," and Abby Mann, an Academy Award-winning screenwriter and author of "The Executioner's Song."

They are Saturday reporter Les Brown from scores of interviews with King in the King investigation.

Ed Redditt, a black Memphis police detective in charge of protecting King, was removed from his post across the street from the hotel where King was shot just two hours before the slaying. Redditt said he had set up a team to keep King from being shot, but it was never activated.

The director of the police department, James E. White, a former FBI agent, said Redditt had worked with the FBI. Redditt said he was removed because a murder plot against King had been discovered. After being removed, he was watched by plainclothesmen for two days, he was put under guard, but never heard another word about the murder plot.

Redditt said he learned after the assassination that the Memphis police had heavily infiltrated a black militant organization called the Invaders that was directly responsible for King's removal to

agency offices having any record of sending an agent to the meeting.

But representatives from the FBI, military intelligence, National Guard and other agencies were there.

• Redditt's assistant told investigator Mark Lane that he, too, had left the command post opposite King's hotel before the slaying, but refused to discuss the circumstances of his removal.

• An informal security force of four members of a local black militant group, including one undercover Memphis police agent, also was relieved from duty just before the murder, by someone in the King entourage. Stationed with arms on the same floor as King, they were already downstairs when the shooting took place.

• The only two black firemen assigned to the fire station across from King's hotel, Redditt's command post, were also "stripped away."

Both were transferred temporarily to other stations the night before the murder. One, Floyd Newsom, said the deputy chief of the Fire Department told him the transfer order and come from the Police Department.

• According to Redditt, "The FBI never talked to me about this even though I told my story to anyone willing to answer." Newsom also says he has never been questioned by a law enforcement agency about his removal.

• Arthur Murtagh, a former FBI agent in Atlanta, has said agents in the Atlanta office "literally jumped for joy" when they learned King had been assassinated. He said the FBI intelligence squad in Atlanta (King's hometown) was assigned "to somehow or other get King, to bring him down, break him or destroy him."

After the murder, Lane says the same Atlanta intelligence squad was assigned by Hoover to head the investigation. "My superiors, both in the Atlanta bureau and Washington," Murtagh said, "washed out leads suggesting a right-wing conspiracy."

"Had a more thorough investigation been conducted by the FBI, I believe links would have been established between the King assassination and the Kennedy murders — both those of JFK and RFK."

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Memphis. Lane has reported that police and FBI agents were present at the meeting in the vicinity.

The Invaders had organized the disruption of a Memphis march led by King a week earlier, turning off a riot that killed one, injured 500 and led to 228 arrests. After the violence apparently attended by the militant group to discredit King, King refused to return to prove that he could still lead a successful demonstration.

Mr. King would never have returned to Memphis if the evidence had not been so strong, says Rev. Jesse Jackson, a key King aide. "We never intended to be bogged down in Memphis."

According to a former leader of the Invaders, a Memphis policeman who had infiltrated the group "was one of the most provocative members of the Invaders," very active in planning confrontations.

That undercover agent, according to both Newsday and Redditt, was one of the four Invaders in the informal security force for King, created by an agreement between King's staff and the Invaders in the summer of 1968.

"He left the police department shortly after that," Redditt said. "I had the feeling that he was in the Invaders. He was a member of the Invaders. He was a member of the Invaders. He was a member of the Invaders."

Redditt says he had a conversation with a man who worked for the Memphis police and was heavily infiltrated by the Invaders. Redditt says he never heard anything about the Invaders.

"He said he was a member of the Invaders," Redditt said. "He was a member of the Invaders. He was a member of the Invaders. He was a member of the Invaders."