

Sam Bowers: Nearing

By Jack Nelson
Los Angeles Times

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the Day of Judgment?

LAUREL, Miss.—Sam H. Bowers Jr. has been convicted in a case of three killings, charged in a case involving a fourth and suspected of giving orders that resulted in six other murders. But the Imperial Wizard of Mississippi's White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the grandson of a former Congressman, still walks the streets of Laurel.

Bowers is suspected by police and the FBI of masterminding almost 300 other acts of violence—shootings, beatings, bombings and burnings. Convicted last Oct. 20 of a Federal civil rights charge growing out of the 1964 lynching of three men in Neshoba County, he is free on an appeal bond granted by U. S. District Judge W. Harold Cox. A Federal judge has discretionary powers to grant or deny an appeal bond in a felony case like the one involving Bowers and may revoke such a bond in face of evidence that the defendant is dangerous to the community.

Since Bowers' conviction, at least 20 acts of violence have been laid to the White Knights, he has been charged with kidnaping and there has been court testimony that he ordered the 1966 death of Hattiesburg civil rights leader Vernon Dahmer, who was killed in a firebombing attack on his home. According to testimony, the Imperial Wizard must approve any White Knights terrorist action.

The last major violence by the White Knights occurred June 30. Police surprised two Klan members allegedly trying to dynamite a Jewish businessman's home in Meridian, Miss. In an

ensuing gun battle, Kathy Ainsworth, a young schoolteacher turned terrorist, was killed and her Klan colleague, Thomas Albert Tarrants III, was injured. Tarrants, firing a submachine gun, critically wounded a policeman and a bystander.

Letter to Police

THE DAY AFTER the gun battle, the Los Angeles Times has learned, Bowers wrote a letter to a Meridian policeman, complaining that police had killed "a Christian, American patriot . . . doing her best to preserve Christian civilization by helping to destroy the body of an animal of Satan's synagogue . . ."

In the five-page typewritten letter to Officer Tom E. Tucker, Bowers wrote: "The principle of law as it has been twisted and abused by the animals in the synagogue of Satan, one of which you were guarding and protecting on the night when young Kathy was killed and one of your fellow officers was wounded nigh unto death, is not the law of our Father; it is the law of Asiatic, cannibalistic slavery. . ."

"Oh, the horror and sheer absurdity of it all," continued Bowers. "Imagine the children of God, WHITE PEOPLE, cheating each other over the 'rights' of a child of the devil! How can this occur? It happens when men such as J. Edgar Hoover . . . violate the First Commandment of Almighty God and teach innocent men to trust in them and their law instead of first trusting in the Heavenly Father."

Bowers and the Law

THE LAW IS slowly but steadily

weaving a web around the Imperial Wizard. Along with three other White Knights and a Klan attorney, he is charged with kidnaping in an alleged attempt to force a false statement from a witness in the Dahmer arson-murder case.

Bowers was tried on an arson charge in the Dahmer case but a mistrial was declared July 28 after a jury reported it was deadlocked 11-1 in favor of a guilty verdict. He faces another trial on this charge. In the same case, three White Knights already have been sentenced to life imprisonment for murder.

But Bowers, a bachelor, is hardly the stereotyped rednecked racist, though many of his henchmen are.

Bowers lived an obscure life until he

became a Klan chieftain. He was born Aug. 6, 1924, in New Orleans, the son of a salesman from Gulfport whose father, Eaton J. Bowers, was a distinguished attorney who served four terms in Congress (1903-1911).

Bowers himself has boasted of this relationship, although it is little known in Mississippi. In a 1965 letter to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, copies of which he sent to Mississippi members of Congress, Bowers cited his heredity, complaining about FBI "harassment."

"The first president of the first constituted legislative assembly on this continent, the Virginia House of Burgesses, was my direct lineal ancestor," Bowers wrote.

"My grandfather, E. J. Bowers, a former U.S. Congressman . . . at whose knee I received a goodly portion of my education, was freely acknowledged by his contemporaries at the bar to be without peer in his grasp of the basic theory about purpose of our law."

Sam grew up in New Orleans, the Tampa-Fort Myers area of Florida, Gulfport and Jackson. His father, contacted in an Eastern city where he now lives in retirement, said Sam "is not my son any more. I disowned him a long time ago and I'm living as anonymously as possible. I wish you wouldn't say where." Sam's younger brother preserves a similar anonymity.

Bright Student

FORMER HIGH school classmates remember young Sam as a bright student who made fairly good grades, but worked well below his capacity. He seldom socialized and did not associate with girls—traits he has retained as an adult, according to long-time acquaintances.

Records pertaining to a divorce decree in New Orleans, granted July 20, 1943, to Sam Bowers Sr., showed that his wife left him four years earlier, when Sam was 14 and his younger

brother was two years old.

On Dec. 17, 1941, 10 days after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Sam, only 17 years old, left Fortier High School and, with his father's consent but not his mother's, joined the Navy.

"He's fanatically patriotic," his mother says today. "But he thought he was fighting for a pure democracy, not for this lousy government."

Bowers served in the Navy until Dec. 7, 1945, when he was honorably discharged as a machinist mate first class. The following year, having secured his high school diploma through an equivalency test, he entered Tulane University in New Orleans.

He transferred after a year and attended the spring and summer sessions at the University of Southern California School of Engineering, in Los Angeles, working toward a bachelor's degree in engineering. While there, he became friends with a classmate, Robert Harry Larson of Chicago, who later offered to provide the managerial talents for a vending machine company if Bowers would do the mechanical work.

Larson, taller and heavier than Bowers and three years older, and Bowers moved to Laurel, where Bowers' father was living, and set up the Sambo Amusement Co.

Strange Habits

PEOPLE WHO knew Bowers well say he had some rather strange habits, like wearing swastika emblems on his arm or clicking his heels in front of his old dog, stiffly throwing a Nazi salute and exclaiming, "Heil Hitler!" "And he's always been a fanatic on guns and explosives," says a former friend.

When President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, according to this source, Bowers "just thought it was wonderful—he went into happy, crazy acting."

Wherever Bowers could corner a listener he would talk incessantly of "Communist niggers" taking over the country. And later he once called on

fellow Klansmen to prepare for a Communist invasion from Mexico.

Bowers became interested in the Klan in 1963 and joined the Original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Louisiana after it spread across the Mississippi River and established a "Klavern" in Natchez. A persuasive talker ("He can get these people to do damn near anything," says one investigator), he convinced a number of the Original Knights in early 1964 that they should join a highly secret Klan he was forming which would use "physical force"

against the civil rights movement.

Working God's Will

"AS CHRISTIANS," he wrote in a lengthy "executive lecture" on March 1, 1964, "we are disposed to kindness, generosity, affection and humility in our dealings with others. As militants, we are disposed to the use of physical force against our enemies. How can we reconcile these two apparently contradictory philosophies, and at the same time, make sure that we do not violate the Divine Law by our actions, which may be held against us when we face that last court on the Day of Judgment?"

"The answer, of course, is to purge malice, bitterness and vengeance from our hearts. To pray each day for Divine guidance, that our feet shall remain on the correct path, and that all of our acts be God's will working through our humble selves here upon this earth."

Laurel was the logical place for a Klan headquarters—and not just because Bowers lived there. Its population (27,000) is 35 per cent Negro and many of its whites became incensed when the city's largest industry, the Masonite Corp., began trying to implement equal employment practices as required by Government contracts.

The general public here knows little about Bowers and the White Knights, beyond what appears in news accounts of arrests and trials. The organization has been highly secretive and almost invariably has carried out its terrorism at night.

"Ours is a nocturnal organization," reads one of Bowers' Klan documents. "We work best at night . . . We must harass the enemy at night and, in general, have little or nothing to do with him in the daytime . . . We must remember that the Communists who are directing the agitators want us to engage in pitched battles in the streets so that they can declare martial law."

On the night of Feb. 29, 1964, the White Knights claimed their first victim—Clifton Walker, 37, Negro, of Woodville, who was shot to death at close range with a shotgun because of an alleged sexual involvement with a white woman.

On May 2, two more Negroes were killed. Their bodies were not found until July 12, 1964, Henry Hezekiah Dee, 19, and Charley Eddie Moore, 20, an Alcorn A&M College student, were tied to a tree and whipped by hooded White Knights.

Part of one body, tied to a railroad tie, and part of another, tied to a motor block, were found in a river south of Tallulah.

Two members of the White Knights were arrested in the case on a warrant sworn out by the local district attorney, but the case has never been prosecuted, apparently because of insufficient evidence.

The most highly publicized killings occurred June 21, 1964—when three civil rights workers—Michael Schwerner, 23, and Andrew Goodman, 20, both of New York, and James Chaney, 21, a Meridian Negro—were shot to death



Associated Press

Sam Holloway Bowers Jr.

by a group of White Knights in a conspiracy aided by several members who were law enforcement officers. The bodies of the victims, buried in an earthen dam, were recovered 44 days later after an exhaustive FBI investigation.

The next murder victim was Earl Hodges, 47, a white mechanic at Eddiston, who was stripped, tied to a sawhorse and beaten from head to toe with a leather strap with tacks in it. He was dumped out of a car near his father's house and died shortly afterwards.

Hodges himself had associated with members of the White Knights, who reportedly beat him because he refused to go with them on a mission to beat a white man the Klan believed was having an affair with a Negro maid. No arrests have been made.

Other cases of murder include:

Jan. 10, 1966—Vernon Dahmer, 58, Hattiesburg NAACP leader, killed when two carloads of White Knights made a shooting, fire-bombing attack on his house, destroying it and sending his wife and three children fleeing into the night. A 10-year-old daughter suffered burns. Five Klansmen were charged with murder and arson.

June 12, 1966—Ben Chester White, 65, Negro, shot many times with a rifle and a shotgun. Three White Knights were charged with murder in the case and one of them confessed and turned state's evidence. An all-white jury acquitted one of them and the other two, including the one who confessed, have not been tried.

Feb. 27, 1967—Wharlist Jackson, Negro NAACP leader at Natchez, killed by a bomb that shattered his car. Eighteen months earlier, Natchez' NAACP president George Metoalfe was critically injured in a similar case but he has recovered. There have been no arrests in either case.

At its peak in 1964-65, Bowers' hooded order numbered between 5000 and 6000 members but Federal sources say that today there are fewer than 500, including about 50 hard-core members. Continuing FBI investigations and an increasing number of state and local investigations have resulted in mounting criminal charges against White Knights and have frightened many members into resigning. In all, 36 White Knights have been arrested in cases of terrorism. White Knights are accused, for instance, of burning 75 churches.

After Bowers' arrest on the Dahmer arson charge, FBI agents raided his coin machine firm here and confiscated eight weapons, including at least one submachine gun and several revolvers, six canisters of .30-caliber ammunition and a case and several bandoliers of other ammunition.

Klan Barbecues

THE WHITE Knights raise some of their funds through front organizations, such as the Americans for the Preservation of the White Race.

Many Mississippians who cannot swallow the policies of the White Knights do not mind attending barbecues or fish fries to build support for segregation if it's not in the name of the White Knights.

More powerful organizations which

have a respectable community image, such as the Citizens Council, continue to promote segregation. Some political leaders and some newspapers also still give a strident voice to never-say-die segregation policies. All this perpetuates a climate in which Klansmen feel they have many allies.

But the picture is changing. Already some leading Mississippians have dissociated themselves from the Citizens Council.

Bowers has expressed concern in several of his secret Klan documents that the White Knights "must always keep the public on our side."

"As long as they are on our side," one document reads, "we can just about do anything to our enemies with impunity."



This was once the home of Vernon Dahmer.

United Press International

Wizard's Mother Speaks

Los Angeles Times

JACKSON, Miss.—“I know a psychiatrist . . . would say Sam is a product of a broken home, but he's not,” said Evangeline Bowers. “He was reared very carefully.”

Mrs. Bowers, a retired state employe, left Sam Bowers Sr. on June 15, 1939, when Sam Jr. was 14 and his younger brother was two years old. Mr. Bowers won a divorce decree in New Orleans in 1943.

Living alone in a tastefully furnished apartment here, Mrs. Bowers reads a lot and shares her son's anxiety about an internal Communist menace: “The Communists have infiltrated the FBI—I know that—I can read—Sam didn't have to tell me that.”

Unlike her former husband and her younger son, who have disowned Sam, Mrs. Bowers declared she was convinced of Sam's innocence, “otherwise I couldn't bear this.” She said: “He's fanatically interested in fighting communism, but isn't everybody?”

Mrs. Bowers reminisced about the old days when there was no civil rights movement. “All I want

is if it could be just like it was. Our niggers had all they wanted. They were happy. We took care of 'em. Now the common people and white trash from the North have come down here and got our niggers all dissatisfied. The Yankees have just brainwashed 'em.”

Mrs. Bowers said she and her son both love Negroes “who know their place.”

Always fiercely protective of her son, Mrs. Bowers lamented: “When I think of the way people are persecuting Sam, why, I think of the Blessed Mother and how she stood everything—understand now. I'm not likening Sam to Jesus Christ—But I think of how a mother stands such things and I know it's just with God's grace.” She then wept, dabbing at her eyes with a tissue.

Mrs. Bowers was disturbed to learn that her son had written a letter criticizing police for killing an alleged Klan terrorist: “I don't know what good he thinks bombing a poor Jew's home will do, but I don't know what's in his mind.”

—J. N.

Army Riot Unit Marks Time

By John Maffre

Washington Post Staff Writer

THE ARMY'S NEW, high priority agency to monitor riots is still hardly more than a gaping hole the size of a drydock in the Pentagon basement. The Directorate for Civil Disturbance Operations and Planning (DCDOP) has as many designers as it has initials and they have not by any means agreed on how to fill the hole. Besides, DCDOP might cost \$10 million or more and the Pentagon has been having a traumatic time with the parsimony imposed by Congress.

The Army insists that DCDOP is ready to function in its cubbyhole in the crowded Army Operations Center, arranging for the airlift of troops throughout the Nation wherever riots got out of hand. It was prepared to do just that after Sen. Robert Kennedy's assassination, for example, and it keeps half a dozen officers and enlisted men on 24-hour duty. But it is far from happy with the box it finds itself in.

Even if a floorplan for DCDOP were agreed on today, it would take a year to build adequate headquarters. Last April 26, the Pentagon announced the formation of the agency and said confidently that its command post would be fully operational on the first of July. Today, it has a rabbit warren of administrative offices, a few pieces of command post equipment, nothing more.

In addition to its non-growing pains, DCDOP has a more subtle problem: its own image. This is one of the main reasons why it barricades itself against inquiries. Its passion for anonymity reached heroic proportions during the six weeks that Washington was the uneasy host to Resurrection City.

Permanent Super-Cop

THERE ARE people in the Pentagon who wonder aloud why Defense should array itself permanently in a role that smacks of the super-cop. They question the need for yet another command post—each service has its own and the Joint Chiefs of Staff have

theirs, too—with an elaborate communications center, a clutch of computers with memory banks, an outfit of only 190 men run by a three-star Army general with a two-star Air Force deputy.

"I just can't see the military in this kind of posture," one civilian official said. His administrative post gives him a view of the operations area. "It makes them look too damned eager. Can't you just see the placards about the Pentagon Gestapo?"

The Army can see them, but it also recalls how the military and civilian machinery creaked last summer when the Federal Government had to cope with Newark and then with Detroit. Things were in better order last April after the shooting of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., but the rapid movement of troops to Washington and Baltimore and Chicago—all at the same time—pointed up the size of the operation that the Pentagon might have to mount.

It was that triple experience in April that firmed up the idea of setting up DCDOP. Defense Secretary Clark M. Clifford's careful announcement began: "While the basic responsibility for preventing violence and disorders belongs to state and local civilian law enforcement officials, prudence dictates that..."

DCDOP keeps an eye on potential trouble spots around the country, getting its up-to-date reports mainly from the FBI, supplemented by some direct contacts with state and local officials and the rather limited input of the armed services' security agencies. If trouble in one or more areas hits a higher peak of intensity, units of regular troops earmarked for duty in those areas are quietly informed to "stay loose" and senior generals who would be called on to take charge—they are all well briefed for multiple contingencies—stay within quick reach of a telephone.

Touching All Bases

FOR WEEKS Lt. Gen. George R. Mather, who was moved from command of the 111th Armored Corps at

Ft. Hood, Tex., to head the Directorate, has been touching bases with state governors, adjutants general of state Guard formations, state and local police chiefs. If there is anything Washington wants to avoid, it is another hassle, like that between President Johnson and Gov. George Romney of Michigan during last year's Detroit riot, over when and how Federal troops should enter the picture.

DCDOP will not command troops. Its function is to alert them, to arrange with the Air Force Military Airlift Command to get them from one place to another, and generally to supervise all Federal military activity connected with the disturbances those troops face.

By midsummer, the regular forces in the U.S. include more than 300,000 who have completed the special riot-control course put together on a crash basis last August, after Detroit and Newark. Almost as many National Guardsmen and reservists have gone through the same 32-hour course.

If any of them have to be moved around the country in the months to come, the Directorate will handle that chore from its makeshift offices down in the Pentagon basement and up in the Operations Center. It isn't a happy arrangement.

It's possible that the DCDOP will never set up a separate shop of its own after all. Although the Army has the biggest and the most elaborate of all the service command posts, it has grown until there is little room for it to expand near the Mall entrance to the Pentagon. There have been suggestions that the Army Operations Center itself take over that vast empty hole in the Pentagon basement; that would give it room to expand and also to accommodate a scaled-down DCDOP as a subordinate unit.

Such an arrangement might save some money in the long run. It might also ease the minds of those who felt the Army was over-reacting to a threat that has, so far, been a sometime thing.



United Press International

ON JULY 18, The Washington Post published the United Press International photograph at left above. The caption, drawn from material furnished by UPI, read: "ARMED RIDER—Unidentified motorcyclist drives through heart of York, Pa., Negro district, which was quiet for the first time in six days of sporadic disorders." Then Dennis D. Sandage, a reporter for the York Gazette and Daily, identified the mysterious rider. He was Taka Nii



York Gazette and Daily

Sweeney, 16, son of Dorothy Sweeney and the late Arthur Sweeney, whose overseas service during the Korean war inspired his son's name. Taka Nii Sweeney likes to go groundhog hunting, Sandage reported, and on those occasions he straps his 30-30 across his back, puts on an ammunition belt and mounts his Honda. "He even lets his hunting license hang from the rifle strap to let people know he's hunting animals, not people," Sandage wrote.