

BC-The King Mystery, Adv14, 1st Ld, b0531 ,1530
\$Adv14

For release Sunday, Jan. 14, and thereafter
Disputed Claims of New Evidence in MLK Death Keep Case
Alive

Eds: SUBS 2nd graf to CORRECT typo in lawyer; PICKS UP
3rd graf, ``They came ...''; the 1st add, sent Jan. 9
as b0532, will not be retransmitted
AP Photos NY325-327 of Jan. 9

By CHRISTOPHER SULLIVAN
AP National Writer

The latest chapter in the mystery that still clings to
the 28-year-old murder case unfolds like this:

``I was here one day and a man called me,'' says lawyer
Lewis Garrison. ``He said, `My wife has some
information you'd probably be interested in. I've been
trying to get her to come forward for 25 years. But
she's scared.'

``They came in the next day or two. They never asked
for any money. She said she had known `Raul' down in
Texas. ... She had a photograph of this Raul's cousin.
She gave the investigators names of people who knew
him.''

Garrison pauses, recalling his apprehensiveness when he
first heard all of this -- especially that name, Raul.
Then, he says: ``Everything has checked, just like the
sun rising and setting.''

But his quiet voice carries a
kind of weariness.

Many considered the case solved decades ago, and yet it
has never seemed to rest. Perhaps because of all the
sleuths and diehards drawn to its heroic victim.
Perhaps because of its taciturn villain. Or perhaps
because of the tragic irony of a single lead slug
stopping history.

The murder victim those 28 years ago: Martin Luther
King Jr.

As the nation marks a day of remembrance Monday for
King, the spellbinding preacher whose nonviolent
crusade for civil rights won him the Nobel Peace Prize,
there will be many speeches about his life.

But King's death on a motel balcony in Memphis on April
4, 1968, will loom in the background, along with an
extraordinary new round of claims about who caused it.
There's the claim of Glenda Grabow, who told Garrison
about ``Raul,''

leading some to believe they finally
had found the shadowy, Latin-accented gunrunner long
suggested as a conspirator but dismissed as imaginary
by prosecutors.

And then there's the Memphis restaurant owner who
sought immunity from prosecution if he detailed the
assassination plot in which his former waitress

implicated him. And the man identified as an ex-Special Forces soldier who tied military intelligence to the murder, a charge the Pentagon dismisses as laughable. These purported leads and many others are detailed in a new book by William F. Pepper, a lawyer who marched with King but today represents James Earl Ray, now serving a 99-year sentence as King's killer.

In "Orders to Kill: The Truth About the Murder of Martin Luther King," Pepper quotes several people -- some by name and others with pseudonyms -- who say they were personally involved in or privy to a complex plot to kill King.

The Associated Press contacted many of Pepper's sources and investigators who worked with him on the case and, with minor exceptions, they say he wrote accurately about them. Some even tried to show they had more to lose than to gain by coming forward.

Still, it is difficult to determine just who is telling the truth; there are too many sealed documents and fictitious names, and 28 years have passed.

Pepper asserts: "The body of new evidence, if formally considered, would compel any independent grand jury ... to issue indictments against perpetrators who are still alive."

But prosecutors in Memphis continue to reject any notion of reopening the case, and discount Pepper's leads.

"He wrote 500 pages of suppositions -- and extrapolations on suppositions," District Attorney General John Pierotti said.

Pierotti said some witnesses Pepper quotes have given conflicting statements to prosecution investigators. In other cases, he said, those cited as witnesses are impossible to find.

"They're either dead, or people who wish to remain anonymous," Pierotti scoffed. "That's pretty difficult to take to court."

Pepper's book, released at the end of 1995, was preceded by a televised mock trial for Ray on HBO in 1993, in which Pepper was joined by television producers who continue to press for a review of the case.

"The whole thing was gone into as a commercial venture," Pierotti charged. "It has not succeeded, and now it just drags on."

The mystery might have ended in a Memphis courtroom about a year after King's assassination when Ray pleaded guilty. He was then a hapless thief who had been on the run following a prison escape. His fingerprint was found on a rifle dropped near the shooting scene; officials called it an open-and-shut case.

Many, including then-FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, insisted Ray had acted alone, that there were no other plotters. Yet even as he pleaded guilty, Ray dissented. "I don't agree," he told the judge, "... about the conspiracy."

Ray's cryptic comment planted a seed of doubt, and many others followed.

Historians later revealed that Hoover's FBI had directed a years-long campaign of bugging and harassment against King. In 1978, a special congressional investigation concluded that indeed a conspiracy had been behind King's death, but that the government was not involved. Then came reports of Army intelligence units shadowing King all the way to Memphis. Some members of the House probe said it should be reopened.

For years, Ray has sought to retract his guilty plea, saying it was coerced.

Still pending in court are a bid for a new hearing and, separately, a civil lawsuit seeking damages against alleged conspirators, both named and unnamed.

After fleeing prison, Ray has always said, he made his way to Montreal, where he met a mysterious man named Raul, a gunrunner who engaged Ray in his contraband smuggling and then set him up as a patsy, directing his movements up to the day of King's killing.

Investigators working for Pepper and Garrison have learned much about the man they identify as Raul, who lives in the Northeast. An intelligence agency document, they say, shows he learned gun-exporting while working for a large weapons manufacturing company in his native Portugal.

Portugal was one of the first places Ray headed after the assassination.

Said private investigator Kenneth Herman, who has worked for Pepper and the TV producers: "I don't believe in coincidences."

"It's him," Glenda Grabow said, sitting with her husband, Roy, in their rural home a couple hours from Memphis. She told the AP she had identified the man she knew as Raul from a photograph shown to her by Pepper and by talking with him twice on the telephone at investigators' request.

She said she first met the man in the early 1960s when she lived in Houston; she was about 14 then, and the man was in his 30s.

A few years later, Mrs. Grabow said, she became involved with a group that conducted various illegal activities, including producing false ID cards and pornography. They also received shipments of weapons from ships that docked at the huge Houston port, she said. Sometimes, Raul himself joined members of the

group, including Mrs. Grabow, as they off-loaded weapon parts and later assembled them, she said.

Jack Saltman, a British television producer also investigating the King case, said an independent source he declined to name recalled that Raul was considered a major gunrunner there at the time.

At Raul's direction, Ray has said, he ferried contraband across the Canadian and Mexican borders. Raul, he said, sent him to a gun shop to purchase a hunting rifle, purportedly to show a client, and later took it from him after directing Ray to meet him in Memphis. That rifle, bearing Ray's fingerprint, was dropped near the scene of the shooting, Ray has said. What else ties Raul to the King assassination?

Two men in the Houston criminal group told Mrs. Grabow he was involved, she said. Mrs. Grabow also told of a time in the early 1970s when Raul himself claimed a role in the assassination. She happened to be carrying a souvenir-type key ring that bore a small picture of King. When Raul saw it, she said, he exploded in anger. "I killed that black SOB once and it looks like I'll have to do it again," she quoted him as saying in Pepper's account, which she repeated to the AP. Raul then stomped the plastic key rings to bits, dragged her into another room and raped her, she said.

She denied that she made up the story for revenge. In fact, she expressed mixed feelings about her identification of Raul, which he angrily denied in a phone call.

"He's got family. I've got family. But there's somebody sitting in prison. I feel like I've been in prison all these years, too," Mrs. Grabow said.

"I wish it was somebody else and not me. ... It's brought up a lot of my past. It's just made me miserable," she added. "That's all I want, is the truth."

MORE