

Car Blast Kills 2 Near Trial Of Rap Brown

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By Peter A. Jay
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BEL AIR, Md., March 10—Two Negroes, one a Washingtonian who was close to H. Rap Brown, were killed here last night when a "tremendous blast" blew their car to bits.

The second man was not formally identified but Maryland State police said he definitely was not Brown, who has been missing since Sunday afternoon.

Brown, who was scheduled to appear in court here today, could not be found despite what his friends, family and attorneys said was extensive searching.

William M. Kunstler, chief counsel for the 26-year old black militant on trial on charges stemming from a riot in Cambridge, Md., almost three years ago, said he was extremely worried about his client.

Police and black militants differed sharply in their interpretation of the auto explosion that took the life of Ralph E. Featherstone, 30, the presumed driver of the white 1964 Dodge Dart that he had borrowed in Washington on Monday afternoon.

Maryland state police said an investigation indicated that the explosive was being carried in the car. Although they did not rule out the possibility that it was planted there without the knowledge of the vehicle's occupants, they suggested that it was being carried voluntarily and exploded accidentally.

Baltimore civil rights activist Walter Lively and some Negroes in Washington and New York said they viewed the explosion as a possible attempt to assassinate Brown.

They said police could not



RALPH FEATHERSTONE
... blast victim

determine from their investigation that the explosives were carried inside the car, and that explosives could have been placed under the floorboard.

Kunstler, Lively and others speculated that the car was being chased. Police denied this, but said a patrolling Maryland state trooper saw the explosion in his rear view mirror as he drove 200 yards ahead of Featherstone's car.

Featherstone, who lived at 3525 Tenth St. NW., was a former client of Kunstler's and a close associate of Brown's from the Student National (formerly Nonviolent) Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

His passenger carried identification under five different names, police said. Early today Kunstler and others expressed fear that the second dead man might be Brown, but Lively, an acquaintance of Brown's, saw the body and said flatly, "The body is not Rap Brown's."

Friends of Featherstone said they believed that he had talked with Brown, apparently sometime during the weekend, and had arranged to meet him in Bel Air.

Featherstone and his companion were half a mile from the courthouse where the trial was going on, heading in the direction of Washington, when the explosion, which state police said was of "tremendous" force, occurred.

Harford County Circuit Judge Harry E. Dyer Jr. postponed the trial until Monday, citing both Brown's absence and the explosion, which occurred at 11:42 p.m. last night.

See BROWN, A11, Col. 1



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

Associates of Ralph E. Featherstone view the demolished remains of the car in which he died with one other person. The explosion occurred as the car was traveling south from Bel Air, Md., site of the trial of H. Rap Brown on arson

and riot charges. From left above are Clarence Davis, Walter Lively, William Kunstler (Brown's lawyer) and Lt. Col. Thomas Smith of the Maryland state police. Brown's whereabouts are unknown and his trial is recessed.

BROWN, From A1

The judge said he thought the explosion was "pure accident" and that the incident would not prejudice Brown's trial on charges of incitement to riot and arson.

He said that Kunstler, who also was friendly with Featherstone, was "entitled to take part in the funeral and share in the family grief."

Motions Denied

In the afternoon, after granting the postponement, the judge swiftly denied a series of motions by Kunstler and assistant defense counsel Carl Broege challenging Brown's indictment and the transfer of his trial from

Dorchester County against his will.

Kunstler has maintained ever since the trial was transferred from Cambridge in 1968 that an impartial jury cannot be selected in Harford County, which is 90 per cent white.

The explosion, he said, would make this task even more impossible.

"The happenings of last night, to my observation in both the black and white communities (of Harford County), have shaken many people," he said.

Jury selection for the trial was to have started today, and Dyer had 100 prospective jurors — four of them black — ready for questioning. Because of Brown's continued absence and the death of the two men, he postponed jury selection until at least next Tuesday.

He set next Monday aside for preliminary matters and new motions in the case.



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

Judge Harry E. Dyer talks to newsmen after visiting the state police barracks to see the car in which an associate of H. Rap Brown was killed along with another man. The judge recessed the trial until Tuesday.

Courtroom relations between the judge and the defense remained cordial in marked contrast to the outbursts that punctuated the trial of the Chicago Seven before federal judge Julius Hoffman in which Kunstler was an attorney.

Dorchester County State's attorney William Yates II, who

is trying the case with the aid of assistant Maryland attorney general John P. Garrity, told a reporter this morning that "the state don't want no postponement."

Yates said he has received threatening letters from persons who say they will blow up his house if he presses his case against Brown. The explosion last night, he said, is

"indictive of the violence that follows Brown."

In court later, however, Yates dropped his opposition to a postponement. He said there was "a carnival atmosphere outside" the courthouse that might "have some bearing on our witnesses."

Kunstler responded that Yates referred to "a serious First Amendment (freedom of

speech) demonstration by black people, and I think the word 'carnival' is unfair."

Kunstler and Broege, Brown's attorneys, have been apprehensive about holding the trial in Bel Air since before they arrived, and the events of the past two days have not lessened that apprehension.

Last night, less than an hour

before the demolition of Featherstone's car, Broege said that while he still expected Brown to appear at the trial he was afraid something might have happened to him.

Kunstler said Brown's wife, Lynne, told him her husband left his New York home on Sunday to go to Bel Air, and that she had not heard from him since.

It was suggested to Kunstler that Brown might have decided to forfeit his \$10,000 bond and leave the country, as did Eldridge Cleaver of the Black Panthers, but Kunstler rejected this possibility.

Brown, Kunstler said, always has appeared on time for court appointments in the past.

Some of Brown's friends in Washington ridiculed the idea that he has left the country.

"Where would he go, Algeria?" one friend demanded. "He and Eldridge (Cleaver) don't get along very well, either ideologically or personally."

Idea Ridiculed

Friends of both Brown and Featherstone firmly rejected the proposition that last night's explosion was an accident.

Why, one source wondered, would "such a cool, level-headed cat be doing wandering around in strange country with enough stuff to blast the state in two? That's the kind of thing a simple cat would do; Ralph was not a simple cat."

Kunstler, who has rented a house on Revolution Street in Havre de Grace, about 20 miles away, for the duration of the trial, left for New York today. He said he expects to attend Featherstone's funeral, deliver a speech in Plainfield, N.J., on Friday, and return here Monday.

"We have feelers out all over" for news of Brown, he said, but added there was no news of the defendant.

In Cambridge, where the offenses for which Brown is to be tried occurred and where Kunstler contends his client has a certain constituency in the large Negro community, reaction to the trial was mixed today.

"Far Removed"

Herman Stevens, the general manager of the Cambridge Daily Banner—which is not covering the trial—told Washington Post Staff Writer Jim Mann:

"I just don't hear anything about the trial... to the average person in Cambridge it's as far removed as the Chicago trial. I haven't heard Rap Brown mentioned in a year."

Hobart D. Adams, director of the local antipoverty agency, agreed that the trial had not been discussed but said he didn't "think he would have gotten a fair trial here."

Members of the more outspoken Cambridge Black Action Federation, about 25 of whom traveled to Bel Air Monday for the opening of the trial, said Brown should be tried in Cambridge.

"The whites were involved (in the explosion of Feather-

stone's car) as far as we're concerned," Elaine Adams of the federation, told Mann. "The bomb had to be planted. Everybody should thank their good God it wasn't Rap."

In Bel Air, last night's explosion was a main topic of conversation today.

Mrs. Edward T. Pugh, who lives about 100 yards down Tollgate Road from the place on Rte. 1 where the Featherstone car blew up, said she

thought "the furnace had exploded" when the tremendous blast awakened her.

Mrs. Robert Hicks, her next-door neighbor, heard the sound and went to the scene.

"There wasn't a piece of car left any bigger than a fender," she said. "I wish they had kept it (the Rap Brown trial) in Cambridge where they had it instead of coming up here and disturbing a peaceful town."