

and Possible Links With the Kennedy Murders

CHASTAIN RAMBLES ALL OVER YET THE
CONTEXT OF HIS DATA BANISHES ITS
CREDABILITY TO ONE OF, IF TRUE, SO WHAT!

— Part 7

Wayne Chastain, Jr.
810 Washington Ave., Apt. 408
Memphis, Tenn. 38105

Was the murder of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the result of a conspiracy? Previous installments* of this series described the "eggs and sausage" man, later given the code name of Jack Armstrong, who appeared on the scene the day of the murder. Also appearing on the scene were Tony Benavides and J. Christ Bonnevecche who claimed to have information and understanding of Dr. King's and John F. Kennedy's assassinations. Are these two men to be believed? Are they one and the same person — possibly aliases for Jack Armstrong?

Is there a relationship between these assassinations? a conspiracy at work by an organization or several individuals? or are these murders more simply vendettas? Mr. Chastain continues to seek the answer to these questions and to the murders of Dr. King and the Kennedys.

The significance of the Benavides-Bonnevecche visits began to wane in the latter part of the summer of 1968 as far as the Memphis police and the FBI were concerned. The incidents were carefully concealed from the press, at least the local press, but apparently not to Frank, who was in the city during this period and stayed as a guest in the homes of Shelby County Sheriff Bill Morris, and Atty. Gen. Phil Canale — two Memphis establishmentarian figures who were anxious to cooperate with the Memphis Area Chamber of Commerce and get this "business of the King murder" over as quick as possible. Of course, conspiracy implications might impede an expeditious handling of the case.

After all, James Earl Ray — the Missouri Prison escapee — had his fingerprints on the bundle including the rifle found outside Jim's Cafe near the stairwell to the rooming house. Ray had been caught in London.

"A bird in the hand is better than two in the bushes," said a disgusted Thompson, when asked by this writer why the Memphis police and FBI decided to forget about Benavides and Bonnevecche. "A bird — such as Ray — is certainly better than two in the bushes, if Benavides and Bonnevecche were two different birds. Besides, neither Bonnevecche nor Benavides are in the bushes any longer because neither the police nor the FBI apparently can find them."

Conspiracy Would Hurt Police Probe

"Implications of conspiracy — and even worse, the evidence of conspiracy that might emerge with

*Parts 1 through 6 were published in the February through July issues of *Computers and People*, and are available from the publisher as back copies at \$2 each.

the location of Benavides and Bonnevecche — might kill what police believe is an open and shut case they now have against Ray," Thompson said.

Why go after those two strange men? They had their man — Ray. Good, hard, solid evidence — the kind that will stand up in court — will link Ray to King's murder.

Oh, there might be some weak links there somewhere — but they can be strengthened and reinforced before the time of trial. Who knows? There might not even be a trial. Ray might even plead guilty.

Some of those weak links, however, were never strengthened. Had James Earl Ray known at the time of the trial that one of these weak links existed, he might never have pleaded guilty.

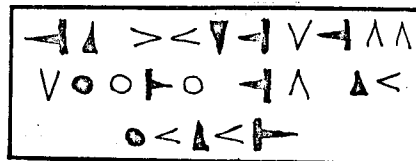
Bessie Brewer a Link to Identification

That weak link was a statement signed by Bessie Brewer — the proprietor of the rooming house — in which she never gets around to identifying Ray as the man called John Willard. Willard was the man Mrs. Brewer rented a room to about 4 p.m. on the day King was killed, about 30 minutes before the "eggs and sausage man" went into Jim's Cafe directly below the rooming house.

The room Willard rented was the one into which the police and the FBI contended that the killer had checked before going into the bathroom and firing the shot that killed King.

Mrs. Brewer described Willard on the night of the slaying as a man in his late 20's. He had a slender face and a slender build. The FBI had an artist produce a sketch on the night of the slaying, and the FBI had it circulated around the world as King's killer.

The sketch, however, did not resemble Ray in the slightest. Ray, a man in his early 40's, bulged in the midriff at the time of King's death, according



photographs he had taken of himself. Despite a baby-like texture to his skin, his face sagged with jowls, a double chin and pockets of fatty tissue. He was not obese, but rather he was a heavy set man, once having a husky physique, but who was then beginning to deteriorate.

When FBI laboratory analysis produced Ray's fingerprints from the bundle left in the doorway near the rooming house, the sketch of John Willard began a slow, strange, but steady metamorphosis. The lean men of John Willard began to sag. A symmetrical nose began to take on contortions that conformed with the photographs of Ray's nose taken from the Missouri Prison and St. Louis police files. This bit of legerdemain may have hampered — rather than accelerated — the formation of a viable visage of Ray in the imagery of law enforcement officers over the world. This was because Ray had undergone plastic surgery on his nose in Los Angeles a few months before King's death. While all other facial features of Ray did not conform with those of John Willard, Ray's nose was not dissimilar with the one described by Mrs. Brewer.

The slender physiognomy of John Willard finally evolved into the rotund configuration of James Earl Ray. When this occurred, the FBI tried to disassociate itself with the first circulated sketch of Willard, saying it was an unofficial sketch drawn by a newspaper artist and published without any official approval of the FBI. What the FBI did not report, however, was the fact that it called in a newspaper artist who worked directly under a newspaper editor, who had once been an employee of the FBI in Washington, D.C., before he turned to journalism. The arrangement went like this: the artist could sit in on the very sensitive interrogation of Mrs. Brewer (less than an hour after King was killed — a procedure which is almost never followed) while FBI agents elicited meticulous details from Mrs. Brewer about the physical features of the man called John Willard.

It would later become embarrassing for State Department officials and their attorneys when they were in the process of extraditing Ray from England. The only sober, credible, reliable witness who might have put James Earl Ray in the rooming house on the afternoon before King's slaying was Mrs. Brewer. And neither the FBI, nor Shelby County prosecutors, could produce a statement to the London Magistrate Court in which Mrs. Brewer could identify James Earl Ray as John Willard.

Police Only Briefly Interested in Benavides

Thompson said Canale, Holloman, FBI agents and police investigators appeared very interested in the man called Benavides for at least two days after he reported the visit. That would have been between the time span of April 9-April 11.

"Would you recognize him if we provided you with a picture?" Canale asked Thompson in a telephone conversation. (Thompson taped the call.)

Thompson said he would. In another conversation, Holloman said the Memphis police department had a picture of a man who was picked up in Memphis the day after King was killed ("eggs and sausage man?"). Holloman wanted Thompson to look at the picture to see if the man was Benavides. Despite two days of questioning by the FBI, Memphis police investigators, and assistant prosecutors to Canale, no one ever got around to presenting Thompson with any pictures.

Then three days after the Benavides-Bonnevecche visits, Eric Starvo Galt was identified to the world as the killer of Dr. King. Of course, later it would be determined that Galt was one of the aliases Ray used after he escaped from the Missouri State Prison.

"They stopped calling and questioning me about Benavides," Thompson said. "They just seemed to lose interest, but they told me to stay in touch. They were going to show me those photographs later."

Then, almost a week after Dr. King was killed, tragedy struck in the Thompson household. His son, Russell X. Thompson Jr., was killed in Vietnam. His wife and he were despondent, and wanted to get away from Memphis.

"I called Atty. Gen. Canale and told him how my wife and I wanted to get away," Thompson said. "Gen. Canale was very gracious and told me to go ahead and take a long rest. 'We can find you if we need you,' he said."

(To be continued)

Footnotes

1. Harold Weisberg, Frame-Up, Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, pp. 464, 465. This author relates a very bizarre incident in connection with this sketch, but it would take too much space to relate here. In short, the sketch produced on the night King was killed bore strong resemblance to the photographs of a man — one of three tramps — arrested near Dealey Plaza less than 30 minutes after President Kennedy was killed in Dallas. The three men mysteriously disappeared under an armed guard assigned to take them to the Dallas police station. The pictures were among some 500 photographs taken by news as well as amateur photographers in the Plaza and collected by The Committee To Investigate Assassinations. They appeared in the May, 1970 issue of Computers and Automation. Several persons close to the case — including Bernard Fensterwald, Ray's attorney — have speculated that the FBI provided the artist a photograph of the particular tramp to flesh in the features described by Mrs. Brewer. Then, the particular photograph happened to pop up again in the possession of Houston Attorney Percy Foreman, Ray's second attorney. Ray said Foreman showed him a picture of that particular tramp, as well as several refugee Cuban patriots while he was in the Shelby County Jail and urged Ray to identify the man as Raoul. Raoul, of course, is the French Canadian whom Ray contends masterminded the assassination of Dr. King and who actually fired the shot. "Identify this man as Raoul, and the FBI will pick him up today. They have been trying to get something on him for a long time," Ray quotes Foreman as saying. Ray said he refused to identify any of the men in the photographs as Raoul. He later pleaded guilty and said Foreman pressured him into it. He now accuses Foreman of improper collaboration with the prosecution and the FBI in getting Ray to plead guilty, as well as suppression of evidence suggesting conspiracy. If Ray's story is true, then Foreman's own statements suggest that there was only one source from which Foreman could have gotten the tramp picture — the FBI. As cited in the second installment, William Bradford Huie quoted Foreman as conceding the existence of a Raoul, whom Foreman said was a Mafia runner, who apparently hired Ray to smuggle contraband from Canada to the U.S. after Ray had escaped from the Missouri prison. Foreman, Huie said, averred that Raoul, however, had nothing to do with King's murder.