

Flynt Links Shooting to His ^{of Assassinations}

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LAWRENCEVILLE, Ga. — Sara Hutchins, a part-time secretary in the Gwinnett County Surveyor's Office, took a phone call at 12:20 p.m. the day a sniper gunned down Hustler magazine owner Larry Flynt and his lawyer on a downtown sidewalk.

"Tell (Solicitor) Gary Davis he doesn't have to worry about Larry Flynt anymore," a male voice said. "Jesus has taken a hand in it."

It was lunch time, there had been a shooting down the street, and Hutchins was alone in the office. No one was in the office of the solicitor (county attorney), either, and she had run to answer the phone.

"The call upset her," said Gwinnett County Sheriff's Deputy Ralph McGee. He said Hutchins put the caller on "hold" and tried to find Davis' secretary. "By the time she found someone, the caller had hung up," McGee said.

Police have not been able to trace the call, but it is one of several leads on which they are working.

JUST A FEW BLOCKS AWAY from the county surveyor's office, an ambulance from Couch's Gwinnett County Ambulance Service was speeding Flynt, 35, and attorney Gene Reeves, 47, to the Button Gwinnett Hospital, both with massive stomach wounds. The sniper's bullets struck Flynt and Reeves as they walked back to the state court building, where the millionaire sex magazine owner was being tried on obscenity charges.

At least two shots rang out just before noon on Perry Street in downtown Lawrenceville, a city of about 7,000, 30 miles northeast of Atlanta.

Flynt, who had feared for his life for

months but did not take his bodyguards with him to Lawrenceville because he felt safe there, fell to the sidewalk.

FLYNT, NOW PARALYZED from the thighs down, has undergone three operations and now faces the possibility of a fourth, doctors at Emory Hospital in Atlanta reported yesterday. He is still listed in serious condition.

Dr. Tom Brock said Flynt's vital signs have remained stable, but that "because of the intra-abdominal infection and the threat of severe sepsis (blood infection), and the possible need for further surgery, his condition remains the same — serious."

Reeves remains at Button Gwinnett Hospital. He had been reported in satisfactory condition from his wounds, but it worsened Friday and doctors now list him in "guarded" condition.

Despite the time of day of the shooting, the location in the heart of a small city and the large number of people close at hand (there were an estimated 150 diners in the nearby V & J Cafeteria where Flynt and Reeves had just eaten), police have had a difficult time finding anyone who heard the shots or saw where they came from.

Suspicion has centered on an abandoned two-story apartment building about 25 yards across the street from the spot where Flynt and Reeves fell.

THE LACK OF WITNESSES when it would appear there should be many was just one of several puzzling aspects of the attack on the curly-haired Flynt, a one-time Kentucky farm boy who has amassed a fortune through sales of Hustler.

Investigators have yet to reveal the type of weapon used in the shootings or the hiding place they believe the shots were fired from. They have not said what they believe to be the motive.

But Flynt and his aides have made it clear they are convinced the attempt on his life was an effort to stop Flynt's investigation of the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.

Flynt, who recently found religion with the help of President Carter's evangelist sister, Ruth Carter Stapleton, has offered a \$1 million reward for conclusive information about Kennedy's murder. The reward offer has been published in Flynt's Los Angeles Free Press, and major newspapers across the nation.

The official Soviet news agency Tass, in reporting the shooting of Flynt, implied that it was somehow connected with the assassination of Kennedy.

Al Goldstein, publisher of Screw, a New York-based sex magazine and a friend of Flynt, visited Flynt at the Lawrenceville hospital wearing a bullet-proof vest. He said he believed Flynt's assailant was a person who felt the sex magazine owner was ridiculing "born again" Christians.

FLYNT REFERS TO HIMSELF as a "born again" convert but has continued with his sex publications.

The day following the ambush, Flynt's wife, Althea, 24, revealed that 25 percent of the employees of Flynt's magazines — Hustler, Chic and Ohio magazine — had been fired about a week prior to the attempt on her husband's life. But Andrew Jaffe, a spokesman for Flynt, played down the possibility of any connection between the two events.

From the beginning, the attempt to find the sniper has been hampered by false starts. Police at first believed the shots were fired from a car and issued an alert for a 1974-75 silver Camaro. Hours later this lead was discarded.

Probe of Assassinations

About 36 hours after the shootings, Gwinnett County authorities, believing they had at last tracked down a prime suspect, had a Norfolk, Va., man arrested on a fugitive warrant. But that lead fizzled, too, when it was determined that the man — Teddy Morris, 20 — had concocted a hoax in a reward attempt. He was in Norfolk last Monday and was released from custody.

The lack of any suspects or productive clues brought public pleas from authorities for help in finding the sniper. Two of Flynt's seven-man team investigating the Kennedy and King assassinations began their own probe of the shooting. They called it "a very well-planned effort."

THAT THE SHOOTINGS were planned for Monday appeared to be borne out by the fact that it was not known until Friday, March 3, that Flynt would still be in Lawrenceville on the following Monday.

The judge in Flynt's obscenity trial, Hugel Harrison, had indicated the trial would end Friday afternoon and closing arguments had been scheduled for that time. Not until that afternoon was it known that the session would run over into Monday.

The weapon used in the attempt has not been found. Two bullets, one removed from Flynt and another from Reeves, were turned over to the State Crime Laboratory. One shell casing reportedly was found in the vacant apartment building. Police will neither confirm nor deny reports that the weapon used was a magnum .44 caliber Marlin deer rifle.

FLYNT EXPRESSED an interest in the kind of weapon that maimed him. "They shot me twice. Do you know what

they used to do it with?" he was quoted as saying after arriving at the hospital.

In an apparent effort to find other clues, possibly fingerprints, police removed a door and a window from the abandoned building, which for several days was kept under guard.

Police released two composite drawings of a man and a woman believed to have witnessed the shootings and appealed to them to contact authorities.

Flynt's fear of attempts on his life had been growing for more than a year since an obscenity conviction Feb. 8, 1977, in Cincinnati brought him national attention. Twice he had talked publicly about two alleged attempts to kill him. One of those attempts, he claimed, was an effort engineered by the CIA to poison him in Washington, D.C.

HE HIRED HIS OWN security force and bodyguards went with him on his trips around the country to his various publications and for court appearances. But when he flew to Atlanta on his private plane, christened "God Force One," his security men were left behind. Mrs. Flynt quoted her husband as saying he felt safe in Georgia.

Flynt believes the CIA and other governmental agencies are out to get him, according to Mrs. Flynt. "He really feels it is because of the Kennedy special," said Mrs. Flynt. The "Kennedy special" was the first of three \$1.50-cent editions of the Los Angeles Free Press about the Kennedy and King assassinations.

It accuses the FBI and the CIA of complicity in the assassinations and in one article charges that former President Gerald Ford was an FBI spy on the Warren Commission that investigated the Kennedy murder.