

The Rush to Get Elvis Presley Books Into Print

BALLANTINE, From D1

"I didn't know whether the book was legally publishable," Busch said of the Presley book. "But we're owned by Random House, a subsidiary of RCA (which records Presley), which is a very conservative company. Our lawyers determined it was okay." According to the book, which the bodyguards say they will substantiate with lie-detector tests, Presley:

- Was a prodigious consumer of a wide variety of drugs. "He takes pills to go to sleep," bodyguard Red West is quoted as saying. "He takes pills to get up. He takes pills to go to the john, and he takes pills to stop him from going to the john. There have been times where he was so hyper on uppers that he has had trouble breathing, and on one occasion he thought he was going to die. . . . He is a walking pharmaceutical shop."

- Was convinced that he had extraordinary religious powers. Presley, the book alleges, "firmly believes he has the powers of psychic healing by the laying on of hands. He believes he will be reincarnated. He believes he has the strength of will to move clouds in the air. . . . He firmly be-

lieves he is a prophet who was destined to lead, designated by God for a special role in life."

- Had a "pathological obsession with uniforms and badges of authority" and was fascinated with pistols, rocks, rifles and other weapons. "Elvis is never without a gun," Sonny West claims. "Mostly he carries two or even three on him. Even when he is on stage, he carries a tiny four-shot Derringer in the top of his boot."

- Once ordered Red West to kill Mike Stone, the karate instructor who Presley held responsible for the disintegration of his marriage—and frequently would shoot holes in televisions when a program displeased him. "I can't tell you how many television sets went to their death at the hands of Elvis and his shooting," Red West says. "He would shoot out television sets in hotel rooms and in any one of the houses he has."

- Enjoyed regular "fireworks nights" in which he would set off a variety of explosive devices and once deliberately set out to destroy, with a specially-hired construction bulldozer, a home he had bought. "Elvis starts up the bulldozer and yells out to Vernon, 'You better move, Daddy!'"

the book reports. "Vernon asks why and Elvis says, 'Because I am going to knock the goddamn house down.' . . . In less than an hour we (had) just knocked the whole superstructure down to where it drops right into the basement and it's burning up a storm."

- Made a special trip to Washington during the Nixon administration in a campaign to receive a federal drug enforcement officer's badge. At first rebuffed by then-deputy director John Finlator, Presley eventually showed up at "the rear entrance of the White House," where he was allegedly met by presidential aide Egil Krogh and ushered into Nixon's office. "President Nixon assured Presley he would get his federal narcotics badge," the book relates. "Presley smiled triumphantly at (his bodyguards) and said 'Who said something can't be done.'"

Dunleavy said the Ballantine lawyers tamed the tone of the book somewhat. "They put some restrictions on us," he said. "They made us corroborate a lot of the allegations with independent back-up, just as if we were doing a news story. They made us take out about 10 per cent of the book. It was tasteless, but actually

very accurate. A lot of it was crazy drug and sex stuff."

Presley's unexpected death also triggered action at other New York publishing houses. Pocket Books, which several years ago published May Mann's "Elvis and the Colonel," an account of Presley's relationship with his manager of 20 years, honorary Colonel Tom Parker, announced that it was planning to send the book back to press—but in an altered form.

According to Mary Hall of Picket Books, a division of Simon and Schuster, New York Times reporter Molly Ivins, who wrote that paper's Presley obituary, has been contracted to update the Mann book, which will be retitled "The Private Elvis." Pocket Books has already received 250,000 orders for the book. Hall says, and copies should be in bookstores in just a matter of days.

Howard Kaminsky, president of Warner Books, said that his firm yesterday received "the largest one-day order for any title in our history" for Jerry Hopkins' widely-praised biography of Presley, "Elvis." Over 250,000 copies of that book were ordered by wholesalers across the country, and Warner's was rushing to meet the unprecedented demand.

The Lives Of Elvis

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Rush to Get Presley Books In Print Includes a 'Torrid' Chronicle by Ex-Bodyguards

By Tom Zito and Larry Rohter

Last August, National Star reporter Steve Dunleavy heard that Elvis Presley had fired three of his bodyguards. Dunleavy, now with the New York Post and author of its recent "Son of Sam, Please Surrender" letter, sought out the three, questioned them about the torrid side of Elvis' private life and wrote a book, "Elvis: What happened?"

The book—with an initial printing of 400,000 copies—was published with little notices or fanfare on Aug. 1. But within six hours of Presley's death on Tuesday, Ballantine Books had presses on Long Island spinning out an additional 250,000 copies, which the company expects to have in stores by the weekend.

"Frankly, I really don't know how exactly how many we've sold so far," Ballantine president Ron Busch said yesterday. "We've really been swamped with orders."

The three bodyguards held a press conference in Beverly Hills yesterday afternoon to tell the public that they aren't "bloodsuckers trying to capitalize on the death of Elvis Presley." They said their book was written long before his death.

"Elvis was a tormented man," David Hebler told reporters. "He was a victim of himself . . . the image, the legend."

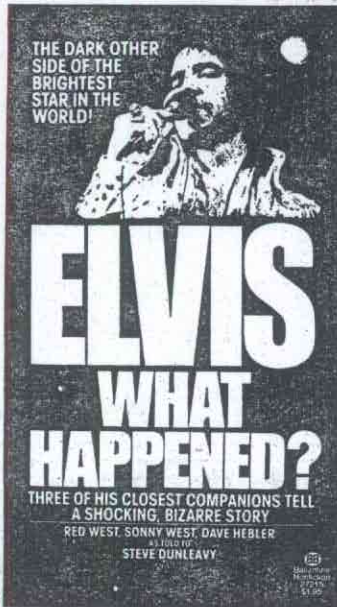
The book, purportedly culled from 300 hours of taped interviews with the bodyguards, alleges that Presley hoarded firearms, thought he was a prophet, was morbidly fascinated with corpses, tried to put a contract out on the man who Presley felt "stole" his wife, Priscilla, led a Howard Hughes-esque life of seclusion and took a wide variety of drugs.

"I can't say he was taking no drugs at all," Dr. Jerry Francisco, the medical examiner who performed the autopsy on the singer, said yesterday. "His own doctor has said he was taking appetite depressants. There was no evidence of any abnormal, illegal drug use."

Asked about allegations in the book that Presley "was on pills all day and would give himself shots in the arm or leg with those little plastic syringes," Francisco said, "It would seem to me, as a professional, that if the use was that frequent, that severe, we would have found some evidence during



Former Presley bodyguards (from left)
Dave Hebler, Red West and Sonny West
in a photo from their book.



our examination. Not finding them, I can't give credibility to those statements."

"I wouldn't want to comment on what the autopsy revealed," Busch said.

Members of the extraordinarily tight-knit Presley inner circle have been in seclusion at his guarded Graceland mansion in Memphis, and were unavailable for comment.

Dunleavy initially considered the trio's tales as fodder for a three-part series on Presley to run in the National Star, the sensationalistic weekly tabloid owned by Australian publishing magnate Rupert Murdoch. After talking with the men briefly, Dunleavy said, "I realized we were dealing with an incredible story about the biggest star since Valentino." Murdoch agreed to pay the trio a flat fee of \$50,000 for their story, and assigned Dunleavy—strictly, he said, on company time at his regular salary—to spend last September in Hollywood taping their tales.

Early in the spring, Murdoch's World News Corp. signed New York literary agent Gloria Loomis to begin offering the book to publishers. Loomis brought the manuscript to 30 companies, but in the end only Ballantine bit—for what Loomis called "a substantial sum."

(Just two months ago, Ballantine scored another coup by publishing George Lucas' novelization of his film "Star Wars"—a paperback that shot to the top of all the major bestseller lists and has already sold about 2 million copies.)

See BALLANTINE, D7, Col. 1