

Memorandum

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TO
FROM
SUBJECT

DIRECTOR, FBI
(ATT: GENERAL INVESTIGATIVE DIVISION)
SUPV. HELTERHOFF (ROOM 5131)
ADIC, NEW YORK

DATE: 3/2/76

TELETYPE

MURKIN

Attached facsimile copy of 2/15/76, "Newsday" article by LES PAYNE.

Helterhoff
Room 5131

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ENCLOSURE

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GOP Was Removed Before King Slayings

By Lou Payne

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Hours before the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in Memphis in 1968, the city's top law-enforcement official, in the presence of men he identified as federal agents, removed one of two detectives assigned to watch the civil rights leader from his post. Another, he said, the removal was part of an emergency plan to protect the detective's life.

Ed Redditt, the detective who was removed from his post, had prepared a contingency plan to enable the police department to apprehend an assassin should an attempt be made on King's life while he was at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. The plan, which was never implemented, involved the sealing off of a four-block area around the motel.

Police did not assign a replacement for Redditt. But they did leave the detective's partner on duty.

From interviews and published stories, Newsday has learned that Redditt and his partner, both members of the Memphis police intelligence unit, watched King and his staffers at the Lorraine through binoculars from the fire station across the street. The two-man unit earlier had provided security for King and his party, and they continued to keep the police department informed of their movements and their work. Redditt and his partner, W. B. Richardson, who are both black, had withdrawn from what would have been their normal position with the King party because their presence, following recent riots in Memphis, had angered young local blacks.

The police were particularly concerned about a white, officer-prime black group called the Invaders, who, though they were friendly with the nonviolent King and his associates, had led an outbreak of violence and looting a week earlier. Newsday recently disclosed that some of the leaders of the Invaders were FBI informants and had touched off the violence that was directly responsible for King's return to Memphis the day before his assassination. The names of the members of the Invaders, who had been providing an

escort for King and his staff in the Lorraine Motel, were seen leaving the motel—in overheard conversations—just before 6 P.M. minutes before King was shot. Although King himself never agreed to have the Invaders stand guard, some of his aides had agreed to their presence. One of the Invaders standing guard was an undercover Memphis police detective who provided information for the police and the FBI.

After Redditt was removed from duty, he was told at a meeting in police headquarters that the U.S. Secret Service had learned of a "contract" on his life. Redditt protested, saying that he wanted to return to his post, but the city's then-public safety director, Frank Holtzman, insisted on the officer's removal. En route home with a police guard, Redditt heard on the car radio that King had been shot by an assassin.

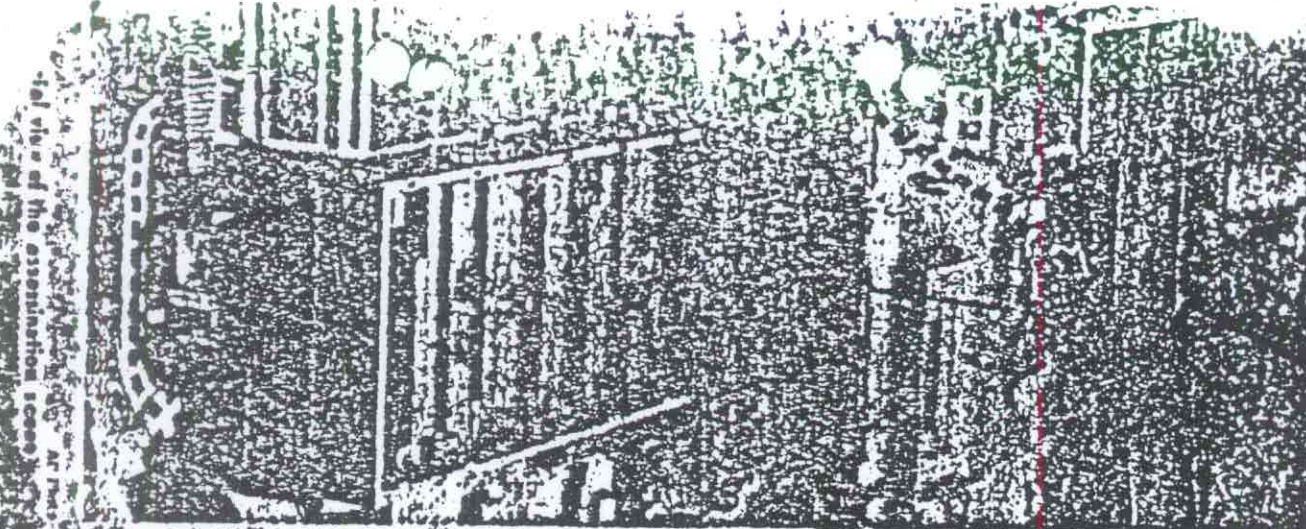
Three days later, the round-the-clock guard watching Redditt was removed and he was allowed to return to work. The police department never offered any further explanation of the "contract" on his life. About a week before King was killed, sources said, FBI informants had told the Memphis Police Department that Redditt had a few in some sympathy for King's cause by "encouraging alighting, garbage workers—who were being supported by King's nonviolent marches—to stay away from work. Redditt's partner on the King surveillance team was considered more loyal to the department, sources said. The partner remained at his post and reportedly was looking at King through binoculars when the civil rights leader was shot.

The entire Redditt affair is another in a chain of curious circumstances surrounding King in the days and hours prior to his assassination. Recent disclosures that the FBI conducted extensive surveillance of King have depicted several governmental inquiries. The Senate Intelligence Committee has said its investigation uncovered no evidence that implicated the FBI in King's murder or a cover-up. However, the committee chairman, Frank Church (D-Idaho), has called for a federal special prosecutor to

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ENCLOSURE

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Job Was Removed Before King Death

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investigate the "many unanswered questions," including "a bureau," "a visit" against King was "noted in the records." The Department of Justice is reporting the FBI's role on King and will soon make recommendations to Attorney General Edward Levi.

Redditt and the office identified by Kennedy's source as having been present at the April 4 meeting at which Redditt was held of the "copy" on his life were refused to discuss the matter.

He "then acknowledged the report of a threat," "I did not see a report that there was a threat on Officer Redditt. Where it came from, I can't say."

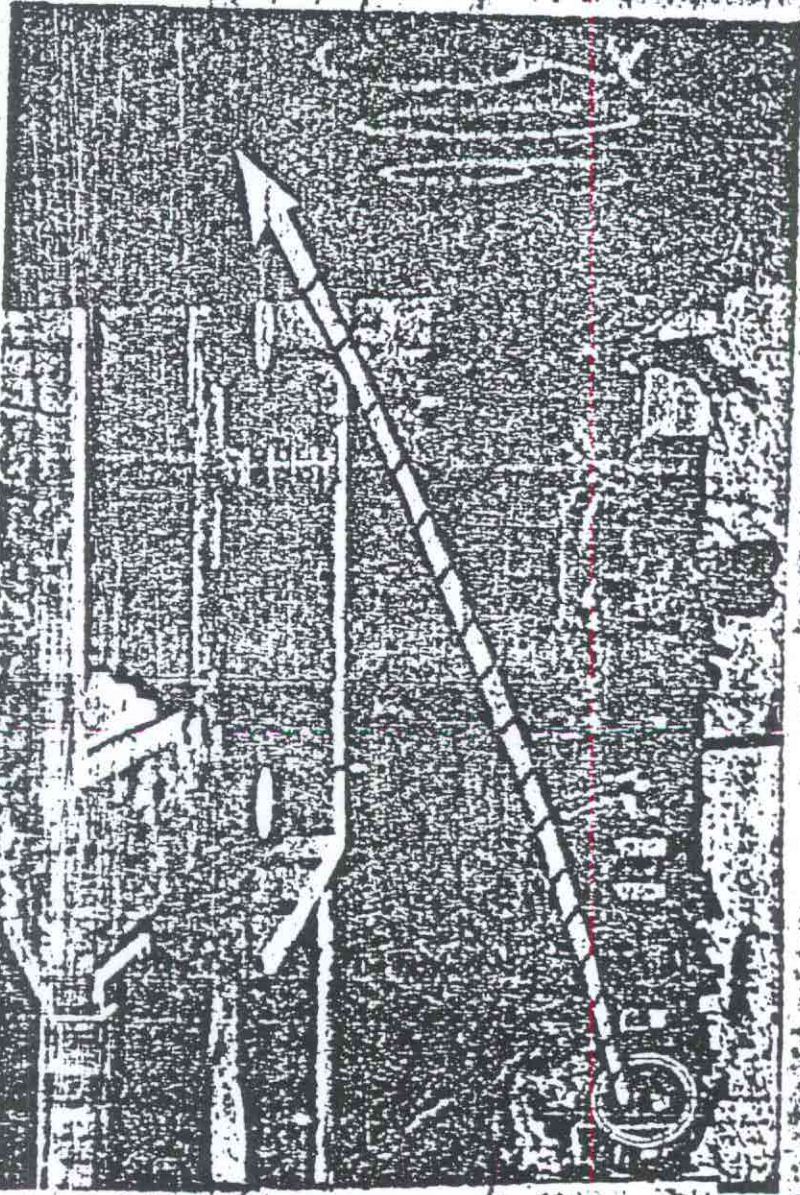
Asked about the April 4 meeting with Redditt in the presence of a man identified by Holloman as a U.S. Secret Service agent and other federal authorities, Holloman said haltingly, "I don't recall."

An official of the U.S. Secret Service said he had the agency's records and found no indication that an agent had been sent to Memphis at that time.

At the police headquarters meeting, Holloman, according to sources, told Redditt to "get a Secret Service agent down from Washington, D.C.," a man in a "red suit" and weighing about 220 pounds. A "highway patrolman, Holloman said, had told someone threatening to go to Memphis to Redditt. The threat allegedly had been relayed to the U.S. Secret Service and the secret had flown down to deliver the message to the Memphis police and Redditt.

A man identified at the Secret Service agent meeting as Holloman's "source" sources said: "Also present, according to sources, were the Memphis post chief, an FBI liaison agent, two military intelligence officers, an official from the sheriff's office, a National Guard official and a representative of the Tennessee state highway patrol."

The Memphis police chief at the time, James C. MacDonald, now the chief administrator of the city's juvenile court, could not be reached by telephone during the numerous attempts. In reply to a letter requesting information about the "threat" attack, MacDonald wrote: "I have been out of law enforcement for seven years. I have no comment to make about your article."



A view from the hotel balcony on which King was standing when he was struck by a shot, apparently fired from circled window.

Redditt protested that he wanted to return to his post, the sources said, but he was ordered not to do so. Holloman told him he would be provided with 24-hour protection at a local hotel under an assumed name.

Redditt refused the hotel offer because his mother-in-law, who was living in his home, was ill and could not be moved. Holloman insisted that a 24-hour police guard be posted at Redditt's home.

For the two days following the assassination, Redditt asked to return to work. Each request was denied.

On the third day, a Sunday, he returned to work without further explanation.

Redditt's assassination contingency plan, according to sources, called for the entire four-block area around King's hotel to be sealed off by patrol cars if someone tried to kill King. All streets were to be closely watched in case of an assassination attempt. Redditt is known to believe that if his plan had been in effect it would have been impossible for a lone assassin, suspected of shooting from the Peoples Temple street, to have escaped.