

Witness Says Panther Leaders Listened to Tapes of Rackley

1123/10 By JOSEPH LELYVELD

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NEW HAVEN, July 22—The man who is said to have fired the first shot into Alex Rackley the night he was murdered testified for the prosecution here today that members of the Black Panther party listened to a tape recording made after the victim had been tortured with hot water.

Warren Kimbro, who pleaded guilty in February to a charge of second-degree murder, was testifying in open court for the first time when he took the stand in the trial of Lonnie McLucas in Superior Court.

There has been a widespread expectation that Kimbro's testimony will be of great significance, particularly in regard to Bobby G. Seale, the national chairman of the Black Panthers, who is one of seven party members scheduled to go on trial after Mr. McLucas.

At this stage, the case against Mr. Seale appears to hinge on the uncorroborated testimony of George Sams Jr., the man portrayed in most testimony so far as the instigator of the party's "disciplining" of Rackley.

Mentions Tapes

Kimbro did not say today whether Mr. Seale was told about Rackley. But he said tapes made during an interrogation of Rackley about informers in the party's New York chapter were played for Landon Williams, whom he identified as a member of the national committee, and June Hilliard, an assistant chief of staff. Both were said to have accompanied Mr. Seale when he came to New Haven for a speaking engagement the day after the interrogation.

Those tapes are due to be played for the jury tomorrow morning.

Mr. Williams is now in Denver fighting extradition to

Connecticut. He was the one, according to the witness, who gave the order that Rackley be kept at Kimbro's residence, which doubled as party headquarters here.

"He wanted one of the girls to sleep with Rackley to get some information out of him," Kimbro said.

However, he testified, the next day Sams almost turned Rackley loose. "George told Alex he was an informer and had to leave," Kimbro continued, "so he had me call the Trailways Bus Company to find out how much it cost to go back to New York.

Tells of Interrogation

He said that Rackley did not leave on the excuse that he could not find a jacket and that Sams then ordered him to the basement, where the interrogation began.

After he was scalded with the water, Kimbro said, Rackley "appeared to be making up stories on everyone in New York just to be talking."

Kimbro said that Mr. Williams was not present at the headquarters at the time of the interrogation but that later he was shown Rackley tied to a bed upstairs. According to the witness, Mr. Williams then complained that the victim was "not tied security enough" and suggested that wire clothes hangers be used.

Mr. Williams, then wound a hanger around Rackley's neck, Kimbro said.

The 36-year-old witness, a rangy man, gestured nervously with his fingers but testified in a firm, resonant voice. Before his arrest he served as the director of a youth center run by a local antipoverty agency, Community Progress, Inc., and is said to have been well-known in New Haven's black community.