

New Haven Panther Trial Told About Murder Night

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NEW HAVEN, July 15—A young woman who wanted to qualify for membership in the Black Panther party testified today that she saw Alex Rackley led from the party's headquarters here with a wire hanger wound around his neck on the night he was murdered.

The hanger was still there when Rackley's body was discovered the next afternoon, May 21, 1969, partly submerged at the edge of a river near the town of Middlefield.

The witness, Mrs. Loretta Luckes of Bridgeport, who pleaded guilty last Dec. 1 to a charge of conspiracy to kidnap. She said the victim was accompanied that night by Lonnie McClucas, Warren Kimbro and George Sams — the three men charged with having committed the crime.

Kimbro and Sams have pleaded guilty to second-degree murder. Mr. McClucas is on trial now in Superior Court here, the first of eight Panthers accused in connection with the killing.

According to Mrs. Luckes, who testified in a barely audible voice, Sams was carrying a .45 pistol and another Panther had a rifle when the group left the headquarters, which was actually Kimbro's residence.

Tells of Bloodstain

She said that she then had been staying in the house for three days. The day she arrived, she said, she sat in the kitchen and watched as four young Panther women boiled pots of water on the stove.

The witness said the water was carried to the basement and at one point Mr. McClucas appeared in the kitchen with a bloodstain on his white trousers. She said that Rackley was later led upstairs and that she saw his right shoulder had been badly burned and he had a scar on his temple.

Comparable injuries were visible on color slides of Rackley's body shown to the jury yesterday.

Mrs. Luckes testified that she later helped to dress his wounds and sat with him in an upstairs bedroom where he was eventually bound to the bed with hangers, clothesline and adhesive tape.

The witness said she left the house twice: first to go to Hartford to pass out leaflets attacking Representative Adam Clay-

ton Powell of New York; and second to go to New York to deliver a message at an airport to Bobby Seale, chairman of the Black Panther party, who is one of those awaiting trial here in connection with the Rackley murder.

Tape Recorder Ready

When she returned from Hartford, she said, she noticed that a tape recorder had been set up in the living room of the Kimbro residence. She testified that she went upstairs to sit with Rackley but fell asleep. This provoked Sams, she said, and he "threatened to cut my throat if I fell asleep again."

The trip to New York took place on a Tuesday morning, presumably that of May 20. Mr. McClucas, she said, was driving the car and wearing "a green revolutionary jacket." On the way, Mrs. Luckes said, she was shown the note they were to deliver to Mr. Seale.

It was a message written in ink on a sheet of yellow paper. The prosecution presented it as evidence yesterday after a state trooper, George J. Heg,

testified he had discovered it in the pocket of a green jacket found under Rackley's head at the scene of the murder.

On one side the note said "Chairman Bobby." On the other side it said: "Someone called from Oregon. There have been bombings at the Univ. of Oregon (called to your mother's house). They said it would be best if you did not come to Oregon at all. There have been threats to murder you. The brother in Oregon who is head of the party there says there have been bombings — but they have calmed down — no danger."

The message concluded with a telephone number and the notation that it had been taken down by Ericka Huggins, one of the Panthers awaiting trial here.

According to Mrs. Luckes, Rackley had on pink-striped trousers and "a green revolutionary jacket" after he had been helped to get dressed so he could leave the house on May 20.

The witness was not asked whether this was the same jacket Mr. McClucas had been wearing earlier that day.

At two points during her testimony, which is to continue

tomorrow, the prosecutor, State's Attorney Arnold Markle, had to show her earlier statements she had made, to "refresh" her recollections.

This morning Mr. McClucas's lawyer, Theodore I. Koskoff, asked the jury to pay particular attention to two features of the jacket, after it has been presented in evidence by the prosecutor.

First he asked them to smell it. The jacket was passed from juror to juror and each sniffed it. It has a vaguely vinegary odor. Then he asked them to notice that it had no bloodstains, although it had been found partly beneath the right side of Rackley's head, where he had been bleeding heavily from the exit wound of a bullet.

Trooper Heg said yesterday that the jacket was soaked with water when he arrived at the scene.

Mr. Koskoff also asked the jurors to notice that there was no detectable bloodstains near the two bullet holes in a violet-colored Nehru shirt on Rackley's body.

Most of the day was taken up with the presentation of physical evidence and testimony of a state police detective, Richard K. Spencer, who told of finding two bullet shells and one bullet near the body.

The first discovery was not made until a week after the crime, though investigators had searched the scene during that week, the detective said.

The second shell was found with the aid of what he called "a military mine detector" 23 days after discovery of the body. Under cross-examination the detective acknowledged it had been lying only about two feet from the spot where the first shell was found.