

Panther Witness Recounts Orders to Kill

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By William Chapman
Washington Post Staff Writer

NEW HAVEN, Aug. 6 —

The state's chief witness in the Black Panther torture-murder case today told a bizarre story of being ordered to kill the one-time leader of the party's Illinois chapter, the late Fred Hampton.

George Sams Jr. testified that a national party leader said Hampton had to be killed because he was working with police in Chicago's black community.

But before he could carry out the order, he said, police arrested Hampton and thus saved him from death at Sams' hands.

Sams, who has been in police custody for a year, also recounted an alleged visit to the law office of William Kunstler shortly after the murder of a suspected Panther infiltrator near New Haven. Sams has admitted his role in that killing.

He said someone in Kunstler's office advised him to move on because he "might be suspect." Kunstler denied it later today and said Sams' story was so preposterous that he ought to be withdrawn as a prosecution witness.

It was Sam's first day of testimony in the trial of Lonnie McClucas, accused of kidnaping Alex Rackley. Police claim Rackley was killed as a suspected police informer.

Sams has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and has agreed to testify for the prosecution. He has said he was with McClucas and another Panther on the murder mission in May, 1969.

His credibility has been strongly attacked by the de-

fense because he once was classified as a mental defective. The court has ruled him competent to testify.

A stocky, muscular 25-year-old, Sams testified with his eyes closed most of the time and spoke rapidly in a Deep South accent which even the court reporter had difficulty in following.

It was after the killing of Rackley on May 21, 1969, Sams said, that he went to Chicago with a national Panther leader, Landon Williams, and became embroiled in a dispute with Fred Hampton, at that time chairman of the Panther party in Illinois.

"Fred Hamilton (Sams repeatedly called Hampton 'Hamilton') had a little coalition with some black police officers who was doing relevant work in the community," Sams testified.

"That's against party policy. Party members isn't to deal with police in any fashion. They say a pig is a pig and always will be a pig . . .

"Brother Landon told him it wasn't up to him to question these facts and Landon called national headquarters and said Brother Fred Hamilton is going crazy and dealing with the pigs and he needed to be sent to national.

"Then he (Landon Williams) informed me later on that Fred Hamilton was going to be popped off and I was to carry out the order later myself, and at that time Fred Hamilton went to court and police picked him up and sent him away and that saved him."

Hampton himself was killed by police Dec. 4, 1969, in a pre-dawn raid in his apartment on Chicago's West Side.

Speaking in the same rapid-fire manner, Sams de-

scribed an alleged visit, shortly after the Connecticut murder, to the office of Kunstler, a prominent lawyer in radical causes who defended some of the "Chicago Seven" and later Rap Brown.

Without specifying the time or city, Sams said he went to Kunstler's office and was told by some unidentified person that he "might be suspect" and should move on. Sams said he was allowed to stay overnight in the home of "Kunstler's lady friend."

Reached by telephone in Chicago today, Kunstler denied that he ever had been visited by Sams.

"He never came to my office and I don't know what he looks like," Kunstler said.

"It's so bizarre that if there were any justice in this country the prosecution ought to withdraw the witness."

Kunstler said it would have been impossible for Sams to have visited his office and talked there with someone else without him being told of it. "It's a preposterous story," he declared.

Sams also told of being in Chicago at the time when police and the FBI raided Panther headquarters with a fugitive warrant for his arrest in connection with the Connecticut slaying.

Sams claimed that he was at the Panther headquarters, gun in hand, during the raid, but said the FBI had not recognized him. In that raid on June 4, 1969, authorities arrested six men and two women for harboring a fugitive but later released them.

Just before that raid, Sams said, he had been in Detroit on orders to

be nervous. They were McClucas, the current defendant, and Warren Kimbro, another state's witness who has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder.

Landon Williams instructed all three of them they were to kill Rackley, Sams said.

Williams, he testified, "informed Brother Lonnie and Warren Kimbro of the fact that I was going on a mission with them and not to return until the mission was complete.

"After that, I was supposed to—if they showed nervousness—I was supposed to pop Lonnie and Warren Kimbro altogether."

"What do you mean, 'pop'?" asked State's Attor-

ney Arnold Markle. "You were to shoot?"

"Yes," said Sams.

Sam's version of the torture and murder of Rackley added little to the story he has given in other statements. He suck by a previous account of a scene in which Black Panther National Chairman Bobby G Seale allegedly ordered Rackley killed.

Seale visited the bedroom where Rackley was tied and was asked what should be done with the prisoner.

"Bobby said, 'What do you do with a pig, a pig is a pig, you kill him, do away with him, off the m—f—,'" Sams said.

No other witness has corroborated Sams' account of such a scene. Kimbro, who Sams has claimed was in the room nodding his head at Seale's instructions, has testified he was asleep at the time.

After giving the order, Sams said today, Seale used the bathroom at the Panther apartment and ordered that his fingerprints be wiped off of the fixtures. A few moments later, Sams said Seale commended him as a "field Negro"—meaning one who was doing a good job.

"straighten out" the Panther chapter there, but had had an altercation with the members over "one of the sisters."

"They said my ideology was slipping," Sams testified. He said he was not sure of their objection to him, but added, "I think it was male chauvinism."

In another startling bit of testimony, Sams said he had orders to kill the two Panthers who accompanied him on the Connecticut murder mission if they appeared to