

SAMS TAKES STAND IN PANTHER TRIAL

Prosecution's Star Witness
Tells of Murder Orders

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George Sams Jr., the prosecution's star witness against Bobby G. Seale, testified today that he was authorized by the Black Panther party to "pop"—that is, shoot—the two men who accompanied him the night Alex Rackley was slain.

He said he was also to shoot Fred Hampton, the Panther leader in Chicago who was killed in a police raid at the end of last year.

Taking the stand in Superior Court in the trial of Lonnie McClucas, Sams said that he was told to kill Mr. McClucas and Warren Kimbro if they showed any "nervous tendencies" after helping him dispose of Rackley.

Later, he declared, he was told that Hampton was going to be "popped off" for forming a "counter-revolutionary" coalition with black policemen in Chicago and that he himself would be the one to do it. Hampton has been revered by the Panthers as a martyr since his death last Dec. 4 in the raid by the Chicago police on the party's headquarters

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there. But Sams said he was saved from death at his and the party's hands six months earlier only by a timely arrest.

Repeatedly he referred to his intended victim as "Fred Hamilton." His testimony, which came in a breathless rush and a thick Southern accent, provoked incredulous gasps and snickers from the Panthers and their sympathizers in the small spectators' gallery. The Panthers contended that the Rackley slaying was the product of twisted personality traits they attribute to Sams rather than any orders from party leaders.

Source of Orders Cited

But Sams, who has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder, repeated his testimony that Mr. Seale, the party's national chairman, confronted Rackley here and ordered his execution. The orders to "pop" Mr. McClucas, Kimbro and Hampton came, he alleged, from Landon Williams, who has been identified in the trial as a member of the party's central committee.

Mr. Seale and Mr. Williams are among seven Panthers due to stand trial here in the Rackley slaying after Mr. McClucas.

Sams capped his testimony by mentioning William M. Kunstler, the lawyer who defended the Chicago 7. He said that when he, Mr. Williams and another Panther, Rory Hithe, fled New Haven after the Rackley slaying they headed for the lawyer's office and were "put into one of Kunstler's lady friends' houses."

It was the first time Mr. Kunstler's name had come up in this trial.

In Chicago, Mr. Kunstler termed the testimony in the New Haven Black Panther trial "bizarre."

Mr. Kunstler denied meeting with Sams. He added: "Testimony that bizarre has the

effect of seriously increasing Lonnie McClucas's chances of escaping conviction."

Mr. Kunstler said he remembered that Hampton, the slain Panther, had told him that Sams was at a Panther fund-raising party in New York that both had attended at the Diplomat Hotel. Other than that, he said, he had "no recollection" of Sams.

Mr. Kunstler added that he feared that the testimony was an attempt to "tarnish" him and impede his effectiveness as a lawyer for radical causes.

In the first three weeks of testimony in the trial the jury had heard Sams described by other state witnesses as an intimidating, even sadistic figure. Sams was said to have beaten a pregnant woman in the stomach, to have threatened to kill his own mother and to have been the one who both conceived and carried out the torture of Rackley with scalding water.

Sams, who was wearing a seersucker jacket, is a solid, stocky figure with a thick neck and broad shoulders.

Entering and leaving the court, he sauntered slowly past the table where Lonnie McClucas was seated then glared back at the defendant.

Only occasionally did Mr. McClucas raise his eyes to engage the witness in a staring contest.

When he did, he lost.

In the spring of last year, Sams said, he was informed that Mr. Seale had ordered him "to go to New York City and straighten out the so-called Negroes and revolutionaries on the East Coast and not to return till everything that was necessary was done. I was under Brother Landon's custody and I was under his orders."

It was in New York that he saw Rackley first at one of the party's "political education classes," he said.

"It was that time that I had

orders to move on him and what I mean by 'move on him' was discipline him," Sams said.

It was Mr. Williams, he continued, who decided to ask Rackley to come to New Haven, explaining to party members there that he was "suspected of being some kind of informer or pig in the party."

Specifically, Sams said, Rackley was thought to have informed on the Panther 21 in New York.

In New Haven, Sams said, Mr. Williams ordered that "a sister" seduce Rackley in an effort to gain information. (Kimbro's testimony attributed this order to Sams himself.) "The sister seduced him but she got no information," Sams testified.

Three mornings before Rackley was murdered, he continued, he offered his prospective victim \$3 to return to New York, but Rackley stayed on. Sams then retold the story of the interrogation, adding a detail not heard before in three weeks of testimony—an allegation that Mr. McClucas helped pour some of the boiling water on Rackley.

He said also that Mr. Williams asked him in front of Rackley, "Who gave you the orders to discipline this brother?" Sams said he replied, "It was your order."

Later, he said, Mr. Williams said the question had been a ruse intended to allay the victim's fears.

He said Mr. Seale came and said, "Do away with him," and called the local Panthers "field Negroes," which Sams interpreted as a form of congratulation for "carrying out revolutionary tactics that was necessary and that made you a very nice brother that did a revolutionary job against an agent."

But he himself, he said, was put under house arrest by Mr. Williams for being "lenient on Rackley" and other suspected informers in the Panther chapter here.

Sams then told of the drive to the swamps near Middlefield, of assuring Rackley on the way he was to be freed, then of handing Kimbro a .45-caliber pistol belonging to Mr. Hithe, and of giving the order "ice him" and seeing Rackley's body "spin around and hit the ground."

It was, he testified, "Brother Landon" who had said earlier, "Do him in."

and Mr. Hithe eventually took them to Chicago where, he said, they found Fred "Hamilton"—prosecution sources later confirmed that the name Hampton was intended—promoting his coalition with "some black police who was doing relevant work in the black community."

According to Sams, Mr. Williams said, "Fred Hamilton was going crazy," forgetting the basic doctrine that "a pig is a pig." One day Hampton had to go to court and was arrested there, Sams said, and thus was spared for the time being.

The witness then told of going back and forth between Detroit and Chicago and of eventually being disciplined himself by the party for "male chauvinism," which meant in his case, he said, being beaten with a carbine and put in "people's arrest."

He was turned loose, he said, one morning only moments before agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation raided the party's Chicago headquarters.

On June 4, 1969, F.B.I. agents broke into the headquarters, wearing bullet-proof vests and carrying submachine guns and a warrant for Sams, who managed, nonetheless, to elude arrest for two months more.

Cross-examination of Sams will start tomorrow.