

Sams Key Panther Witness

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NEW HAVEN—A year ago this summer, FBI agents in cities across the country embarked on an extraordinary series of raids in search of an obscure figure named George Sams Jr., a muscular young man who had fled the scene of an alleged Black Panther kidnap-murder here.

Panther headquarters were smashed open in Chicago by agents wearing bullet proof vests. An apartment was raided in Southwest Washington. Finally, Sams, then 23, was tracked down and arrested in Toronto, Canada, and one possible reason for the extended search became clear:

Black Panther Party National Chairman Bobby Seale, Sams informed police in a statement, had ordered the killing in New Haven of Alex Rackley, a suspected Panther informer.

Seale has been imprisoned for nearly a year on the basis of Sams' statement and subsequent testimony at a hearing where bail was denied him. When Seale is brought to trial, possibly months from now, Sams is expected to be the key—if not the only—eyewitness against him.

Seale's imprisonment on this charge has been a cause among many segments of black communities, with "Free Bobby" rallies and signs visible in black and academic communities throughout the country.

It is an unusually prominent spot for Sams, who never has occupied a place in the Panthers' pantheon. He has a history of mental disorder, was reportedly once expelled from the party, and has been accused by former associates of brutality and "sadistic" behavior.

According to court records, Sams was born in Alabama in 1946 and abandoned at birth. He was raised by foster parents, spent most of his school years in Missis-

sippi and then moved to New York. He became a regular truant from school, where he was doing poorly, and wound up in the Wassaic State School. He was certified as a "mental defective" with an IQ of 64, became a behavior problem, and was transferred to another correctional institution in 1963.

He was classified by psychiatric evaluation as being in a "borderline intelligence group with an IQ of 75" at the new institution. Al-

though boisterous and rebellious, Sams was not regarded as being particularly aggressive physically. He was released, after showing improvement, in 1964.

During Seale's bail hearing, the court ordered a new psychiatric examination which turned up a strikingly different picture of the man. "His general attitude was one of warmth and cooperation and there was no evidence of guardedness, evasion or hostility," said the court-appointed psychiatrist, Dr. Robert B. Miller, superintendent of Connecticut's Fairfield Hills Hospital.

"Explosive Disorder"

"It was my clinical impression both from the questions put to him and from the general interview that his IQ had increased beyond the 75 level and should be categorized as within the dull normal range," Dr. Miller reported. "I would discard the label of mental defective since I believe this individual is no longer mentally defective and would categorize him as personality disorder, explosive disorder."

Sams' record as a Black Panther is obscure. Several sources have said he came into the party as a protege of Stokeley Carmichael, whom he had served as bodyguard, and then stayed on after Carmichael

dropped out. They claim he was once expelled after a fight but finally reinstated.

He showed up in New York City and New Haven in the spring of 1969 with instructions, he has said, to help "straighten out" the East Coast chapters. He told police he had been sent from San Francisco with another Panther, Landon Williams. Twenty-one New York City Panthers had been arrested in a bomb plot and he said a search was underway for informers. One suspect, he told police, was Alex Rackley, the man scalded with boiling water in a New Haven apartment and later killed.

The first trial for that kidnap-murder has been underway for two weeks in New Haven and has disclosed some of the evidence against Seale and seven other defendants. Sams, meanwhile, is awaiting sentencing for second-degree murder, to which he pleaded after agreeing to testify for the prosecution.

The pattern of evidence discloses a strong prosecu-



BOBBY SEALE

... in jail nearly year

tion case against the first defendant, Lonnie McLucas. Witnesses and his own admissions to police have placed McLucas in the basement of the apartment where Rackley was tortured. He helped beat Rackley and tied him to the torture chair, although most of his actions seem to have been ordered by Sams. A statement by Sams, testimony by another Panther, Warren Kimbro, and McLucas's own confession all agree that McLucas fired the second shot into Rackley's body, found in a swamp 25 miles from here.

The testimony to date also has revealed the overpowering role played by Sams in the torture. It was Sams who ordered Rackley taken to the basement and bound, who ordered the boiling water brought, who gave many other commands to a loosely-organized group of Panthers on or near the scene.

Some of his behavior was brutal, according to the testimony. Loretta Luckes, another prosecution witness, testified everyone was terrified by Sams. She said she was slapped by him for paying phonograph records he did not like. Another witness said Sams punched a pregnant woman in the stomach. Mrs. Luckes quoted Sams as saying he had "a thing about women" because he always had hated his mother, whom he had known only briefly in childhood.

No one has suggested that Seale was on the scene for any part of the torturing and the evidence implicating him in the case is considerably slimmer than that against McLucas. At this

point, the case rests entirely on Sams' accusations.

After being arrested in Toronto last summer, Sams gave a statement to New Haven Police, extensively detailing the crime. He, McLucas, and Kimbro took the victim out for the slaying the day after Seale had paid a visit to the Panther headquarters apartment, he said.

During that visit, he said, Rackley was tied spread-eagle to a bed. Seale entered and asked Rackley if he were the "pig," or informer, Sams stated, and Rackley said he was not. This interrogation of Sams followed:

"Q. Was Chairman Seale informed that Rackley was tortured in the basement?"

"A. Yes, Landon (Williams) told Chairman (Seale) that he was disciplined, Seale said that we were all field niggers and that we were doing a good job.

"Q. Did Chairman Seale approve of the discipline given Rackley?"

"A. Yes.

"Q. Did anyone ask Chairman Seale what was to be done with Rackley?"

"A. Landon was asking what we thought about the pig and he asked Chairman Bobby Seale what did he think, and Chairman Bobby said what we do with pigs, a pig is a pig, he said do away with him and left.

"Q. What did you take this to mean?"

"A. To kill him."

Not Corroborated

The prosecution's problem with Sams' statement is that it apparently cannot be corroborated by any other witness to the alleged scene. Four other Panthers were in the room, Sams said. One has not been charged in the case; two others who have been charged are still fighting extradition and are not expected to turn state's evidence.

The fourth was Warren Kimbro, who also has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder, has testified for the prosecution, and had been expected to solidify the case against Seale by corroborating Sams' assertions.

Kimbro, who has been imprisoned with Sams for several months since he confessed, unexpectedly shot down that speculation last week. He was, he said, asleep at the time of Seale's visit and not in the room, nodding his head at Seale's order, as Sams has said he was.