

# Officials Doubt a Plot by Blacks to Kill White Policemen

**But Some See Plan  
In Sniping Despite  
Lack of Evidence**

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The sniper fire that left six dead and 15 wounded in New Orleans early this month has again raised the question whether a national conspiracy exists among blacks to kill white policemen.

Talk of conspiracy has become virtually a reflex response to such incidents in the last few years, and yet in no single case has it ever been substantiated.

It was first suggested that the death of a police officer in Brooklyn last Friday was part of a plot to kill policemen. But the belief of the authorities now is that the intent of the four men involved was to rob a gun store of weapons in a feud between rival Muslim groups.

Are there really organized cells of blacks dedicated to the ambush of urban patrolmen? Or if nothing that extensive, are there a handful of "guerrilla" assassins moving from city to city and getting help from friends along the way?

A check in more than a dozen cities with police officials, leaders of the black community and the uniformed men who would actually face the danger if such a plot were under way found almost no agreement on an answer. The reaction of the cop on



A plainclothes policeman running for cover during the siege in New Orleans earlier this month in which Mark Essex was killed after sniping from the top of a motel. The incident renewed fears of a conspiracy.

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the beat—and of some of his superiors—is that there definitely is a national conspiracy.

But many officials, Federal as well as local, insist that no evidence has been offered to support the idea. And civil rights leaders scoff at it as preposterous.

#### Number of Deaths Declines

Meanwhile, the annual number of policemen killed has apparently declined.

According to Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics, 112 policemen lost their lives in the line of duty in 1972. That compares with 125 in 1971, 100 in 1970 and 86 in 1969.

In New York City, for example, officials say police deaths dropped to four last year from 10 in 1971 and eight in 1970.

Two of last year's victims were slain by snipers and the deaths were linked at first to a "national plot" by the Black Liberation Army. But such reports were never substantiated and references to it have since been toned down.

Indeed, the Black Liberation Army turned out to be a disorganized band of about 100 persons expelled by the Black Panther Party for "adventurism," according to Assistant Chief Inspector Arthur C. Grubert, head of New York Police Intelligence. He said that all had criminal records and engaged in criminal activity.

Nevertheless, the belief in an organized national conspiracy persists.

"There are just too damn many policemen being shot by snipers all over the country for it not to be a conspiracy," said Lieut. Breck Porter, a Houston homicide squad officer.

He added that he had received intelligence reports from

other cities, including Philadelphia and Detroit, indicating that there is a black militant conspiracy.

#### Rizzo Certain of Plot

Philadelphia's Mayor Frank L. Rizzo, who is the city's former Police Commissioner, called the New Orleans incident "an organized plot to cause bodily harm and kill policemen."

But Joseph F. O'Neill, the present Police Commissioner, said: "We know of no conspiracy to kill policemen at this time."

Capt. Earl Halveland, chief of the intelligence unit of the St. Louis police department, said: "We have had knowledge of the existence of traveling groups of what I would call 'urban guerrillas' who have traversed the country, moving city to city, engaging in illegal activity for their subsistence."

But most of the officials interviewed rejected the conspiracy theory. As Boston Police Commissioner Robert di Grazia put it:

"One concern I have is that when such an unfortunate incident as this [the New Orleans killings] happens, it is immediately attributed to a conspiracy."

"We have no information that such a conspiracy does indeed exist. I am aware that the Louisiana Attorney General made a statement to that effect, but he gave no basis for that statement."

"If a conspiracy is a situation in which two, or three, or four or more or so go off half-cocked and shoot a policeman, that is one thing. But can it be said that it is really part of a nationwide conspiracy? It is difficult to really make an affirmative statement that this is the case."

Civil rights leaders said they too were disturbed by recurring references to a national plot among blacks.

Vernon E. Jordan, executive director of the National Urban League, said:

"One of the many unfor-

tunate aspects of the New Orleans incident is the unsupported charge made by officials there that a nationwide conspiracy exists among blacks to kill policemen."

"Authorities who shoot from the hip with undocumented assertions of black conspiracies mislead the public, defame all black citizens and abuse their authority. Such statements are to be condemned because they pour fuel on already troubled waters, and because they incite anti-black feelings by providing them with a cover of respectability."

#### Statement by Wilkins

Roy Wilkins, executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said in a statement:

"Practically every black-white confrontation in recent years has been attributed to a black inspired anti-white conspiracy. Despite the failure to turn up any confirming evidence of the existence of such a conspiracy, the charge is repeated after each interracial conflict, whether in civilian life or in the military."

"What brought young Mark Essex [the New Orleans sniper] to his tragic end atop a New Orleans hotel is not clear. But it now seems clear that he was not involved in any national anti-white conspiracy."

"The persistence of these unfounded charges is revelatory of the fear and the paranoia which now enthralls many white people in this country."

The conspiracy theory is a product of the riots of the nineteen-sixties, one civil rights leader said.

"As the riots spread from city to city, many white officials were convinced that there had to be a connection, if you recall. They could not conceive of impromptu eruptions that were the result of the same serious social conditions that result from lack of jobs, poor schooling and discrimination that are found wherever blacks live."

"Then two other things hap-

pened: A deep fear on the part of policemen of being hit by sniper fire developed during the riots, and there was increased militant rhetoric afterwards. The fear was much more illusion than real, and the rhetoric was much stronger than the capacity to deliver, but in the heat of battle who stops to weigh such things?

"As social conditions worsened, indeed there were sniper and all kinds of other attacks on police officers.

"But there is no evidence whatsoever of a national conspiracy, unless you mean the conspiracy by all blacks to fight racism."

In a New Orleans gun store in the French Quarter where policemen gather and where they buy their personal weapons and ammunition, one officer said he was convinced of a conspiracy.

"Oh, they are well organized all right. That's why it's been hard to catch them. They are smart, and they are very well organized. You'll see."

One New Orleans militant's reaction to the idea of a conspiracy was: "Hell, I wish we were as organized as whites think we are."

The evidence shows that just about all the deaths of policemen result not from sniper attacks but from the performance of their normal duties of catching criminals.

Two Los Angeles county sheriff deputies were machine-gunned recently, for example, while trying to arrest a man who had just killed two other persons. Washington police officials reported that since 1967, 13 officers had been killed, none by snipers.

One of the two policemen killed in St. Louis last year was shot by a cab driver during a dispute over the patrolman's order to the driver to move his cab, and the other officer was killed attempting to break up a burglary.