

## FBI Used Cash From Mississippi Jews

# \$36,500 Paid to Ambush Klan

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MERIDIAN, Miss., Feb. 12—

The FBI and the Meridian police, bankrolled by an alarmed Jewish community, paid \$36,500 to two Ku Klux Klan informants to arrange a trap to catch two young Klan terrorists in a bombing attempt. The Los Angeles Times has learned.

The trap, sprung in Meridian on June 30, 1968, when the Klan members tried to bomb a Jewish businessman's home, resulted in a gun battle in which a Klanswoman was

killed and a Klansman, a policeman and a bystander were wounded. The wounded Klansman received a 30-year prison sentence.

The trap was sprung by law enforcement officials frustrated over their failure to solve a series of 17 bombings and burnings that had terrorized the Jewish and Negro communities in the Jackson and Meridian areas of Mississippi in 1967 and 1968.

Despite the viciousness of the Klan terror, some observers believe the Meridian incident raises serious questions

as to the proper means to be used by police and the FBI to solve crimes of violence.

Evidence strongly indicates that the Klan members who made the bombing attempt, Thomas Albert Tarrants III, 21 at the time, and his companion, Kathy Ainsworth, 26, a school teacher, were lured into the bombing attempt by two other Klansmen who were paid a total of \$36,500. A former FBI agent who acted as an intermediary was paid \$2,000.

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### KLAN, From A1

Policemen who sprang the trap say they expected a gun battle and never thought either Klan member would be taken alive. They had expected two men to attempt the bombing and did not know a woman would be involved until 45 minutes before it was carried out.

Most of the nightrider attacks in Mississippi were directed against Negro homes and churches, but the Jewish community became a target in the fall of 1967 with the bombings of a synagogue and a rabbi's house in Jackson. Jewish leaders, greatly alarmed by the violence, began raising a reward fund to try to solve the crimes.

Despite the reward money and intensive investigations, lawmen were unable to solve the crimes and the wave of violence continued.

On May 27, 1968, a bomb

shattered a synagogue at Meridian. Reports that the FBI knew of Klan discussions about plans to bomb a synagogue with women and children inside added to an atmosphere of fear and tension.

Finally, the FBI and the Meridian police decided to use the reward money to pay the informants to arrange the trap, rather than for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the terrorists, as originally intended.

#### Terror Is Ended

The reign of terror ended after the shootout. There has been hardly any violence in Mississippi since. And the White Knights of the Ku-Klux Klan has virtually disbanded. At one time in 1968, law enforcement officials in Mississippi said the White Knights were suspected of committing nine murder and 300 other violent acts, including bombings, burning and beatings.

Before the Meridian incident the situation in Mississippi was considered so grave by the Jewish community that A.I. Botnick, director of the Anti-Defamation League's regional office in New Orleans, helped raise funds to pay the informers and participated in the original discussion about the trap with the FBI and the police. The ADL is a highly respected organization whose charter cites an immediate objective of fighting anti-Semitism and an ultimate purpose "to secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike treatment to all citizens alike . . ."

The Times, in checking rumors that the Klan members had been "set up" for the trap, interviewed Botnick in April, 1969. He acknowledged his part in helping execute the trap, but said he could not "morally blow the whistle" on the FBI and the Meridian po-



lice, who had helped curb Klan violence.

### 'It Was A Trap'

Botnick said it was "logical" that someone had paid to set up the two Klan members, but he declined to say how much money was paid and said he would not want to see the ADL "involved" in a story about the Meridian incident. "Four guys know I was in on the original planning," he said. "It was a trap—you know that."

At that time Botnick said he had listened to FBI recordings of a Klansman talking about blowing up synagogues full of people—including women and children. And he quoted one Klansman as saying, "Little Jews grow up to be big Jews and kill them while they are young."

Discussing his own part in raising funds to arrange the trap, Botnick said, "We were dealing with animals and I would do it again." However, he acknowledged that when he learned a woman had been killed (the plan called for two men to be in the car) it made him sick: "I threw up when I heard what happened that night."

Recently, after learning details of how the trap was arranged, the Times interviewed Botnick again. He said that he could not recall much about the earlier interview, but that the reporter's recollection (from typewritten notes) was "incorrect." Told of some of the details uncovered by the Times in a lengthy investigation, Botnick said, "It's fantastic—like something out of Orwell's 1984."

### Policemen's Statements

However, the Times has documented the arrangements for the trap through police records and statements by some of the police officers involved. The arrangements were made in a series of secret meetings

between a Meridian detective and two FBI agents with two Klansmen and an intermediary which began within two weeks after the Meridian synagogue bombings.

The informants were brothers—Raymond and Alton Wayne Roberts, both members of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Since October, 1967, Alton Roberts has been under a 10-year sentence, having been convicted of a federal civil rights violation in connection with the 1967 lynching of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Miss. (His case and those of five other White Knights convicted at the same trial are now on appeal before the U.S. Supreme Court.)

Besides receiving \$36,500, the Roberts brothers demanded and got written assurances that they would be given immunity from prosecution in several cases of the church bombings.

The original deal called for the brothers to share a total of \$69,000 and for the intermediary to receive \$10,000, if Tarrant and Joe Danny Hawkins, who the FBI believed to be the top two "hit men," attempted the bombing. After Mrs. Ainsworth took Hawkins' place, the amount of the payment was reduced.

### Proof Lockins

Although Tarrant and Hawkins were suspected of being responsible for much of the violence that had rocked Mississippi, lawmen had been unable to prove that either man had committed any of the crimes and had been unable to find Tarrant to arrest him on a fugitive warrant involving an illegal gun charge.

(Meridian police contended that even though Hawkins was not at the scene of the bombing attempt, Tarrant's use of a

car registered to Hawkins and other evidence linked him to the crime. Hawkins was indicted on a charge of placing a bomb, but has never been brought to trial.)

The frustration of lawmen was reflected in comments made by Roy Moore, special agent in charge of the FBI office in Jackson, shortly after a synagogue in Jackson was bombed on Sept. 18, 1967.

Kenneth Dean, director of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, recalls Moore saying that money was needed to solve the crimes because "explosions destroy the evidence and the crimes usually are committed in such a way that there are no witnesses."

Dean quoted Moore as saying that "somebody connected with the bombings will be willing to talk for a price," but that some jurists did not think well of testimony from paid informers.

### Comment Declined

Moore declined to comment publicly on the case, but he expressed the belief that a story disclosing the tactics used by the FBI and police would jeopardize their system of informants and hurt the cause of law enforcement.

Meridian detective L. I. Scarborough, a principal figure in the negotiations with the informants, cooperated in helping the Times develop the facts. But after a reporter tried to interview Moore, Scarborough wrote the reporter a registered letter saying that "any release of this case should have come from Mr. Moore or the chief of police, Mr. (Roy) Gunn."

The fact was that in an interview Chief Gunn already had confirmed some of the major facts of the story and had expressed concern about only one thing—the possible disclosure of the informants' names. Gunn had arranged for Scarborough to cooperate with the Times reporter.

Scarborough wrote the reporter: "You are writing about vicious, bloodthirsty Klansmen who are waiting for certain names to be made public and there will be retaliation by them. You told me that you knew who the informants were, but in case of a libel suit there are only three people who actually know and we would have to testify that we never received any information from them."

"There is never a good way to handle a case of this type,

but this one was handled in the only way possible... I sincerely hope you will see and understand my position."

The fact is that other Klansmen have been aware for some time of the role of the Roberts brothers in arranging the trap. Tarrant's father, a Mobile real estate salesman, has investigated the case and almost from the day of the bombing attempt has asserted that his son was illegally trapped and has told several people that the Roberts brothers were the informants. Joe Danny Hawkins also has said he knew the brothers were the informants.

**NEXT:** An ex-FBI agent agrees to be an intermediary for \$10,000 and recruits two Klansmen to inform the authorities about the next bombing attempt.