

Approached In Plot To

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LOUISVILLE — An ex-policeman claims that local and federal law officers tried to blackmail him into assassinating the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr in 1965.

Clifton E. Baird, 50, a former member of the Louisville Police Department, has told the House Assassination Committee that fellow Louisville police officers and FBI agents stationed here offered him \$500,000 to kill Dr. King.

Sources close to the assassination committee said Baird claims at the time of the alleged conspiracy his police superiors thought he was involved

in a dynamite ring operation in Western Kentucky and therefore would have to take part in the plot to kill Dr. King or face implication in the bombing case.

Baird, the sources said, has written the committee that he was at the time under "intense investigation" by the FBI and police officials in his home town of Owensboro, Ky., about 100 miles southwest of here.

He was not, however, implicated in the bombing conspiracy despite his claimed refusal to take part in the alleged plot against Dr. King.

At this point there is no apparent connection between the alleged 1965 plot and the 1968 Memphis murder —

except for past claims that the FBI somehow was involved in Dr. King's death, or in covering up details of the 1968 slaying.

But backers of the House investigation into the murders of Dr. King and President Kennedy have used Baird's allegations — contained in a secret letter to Rep. M. Gene Snyder, R-Ky. — to win support for continuation of the committee.

The committee, mired in staff and personality conflicts, had accomplished little until Baird approached it with his charges several weeks ago.

Stunned at a request for a \$13-million budget for a two-year probe, House leaders were preparing to kill the committee at the end of this month.

Kill King, Ex-Cop Says

But assassination committee leaders secretly briefed House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, D-Mass., on Baird's allegations, and O'Neill has called for continuing the investigation for one year on a \$2.7 million budget.

The House is scheduled to vote on that Wednesday.

Veteran Louisville policemen say they are "stunned and puzzled" by Baird's charges and categorically deny them. Similar denials have been made by FBI agents assigned to Louisville in the mid-1960s.

Federal and local lawmen have checked Baird's background and privately describe him as "stable" and "credible." "He was a solid cop," said a federal source.

Meanwhile, Scripps-Howard News Service has learned that a tape recording Baird contends was made during a discussion of the offer with one of the lawmen has been authenticated by House assassination investigators as being made about the time — in 1965 — that Baird claims he received the offers.

It has also been learned that:

✓ Baird has identified by name and rank six present and former Louisville policemen — not three or four as previously reported — as being involved in the alleged conspiracy to kill Dr. King.

He also has given the assassination committee the last names of three

agents then working out of Louisville FBI headquarters allegedly involved in the plan.

✓ Baird has told investigators that he overheard a discussion about killing Dr. King among local police and FBI agents at police offices here and subsequently taped an assassination offer with a recorder hidden beneath the front seat of his personal car.

That is the tape he has turned over to the assassination committee.

✓ Scripps-Howard also has learned that Baird tried to make his story public previously. He once approached a reporter with the allegations he later turned over to the congressional committee, but got nowhere.