

The King Murder

'HIRED KILLER' THEORY

Probe's New Tack

Theory of A 'Pro' Assassin

Memphis

There is growing speculation among Memphis detectives that Dr. Martin Luther King's assassin was a disinterested professional killer—not a racist ideologue—who left an elaborate trail of phony clues to confuse his pursuers.

They won't say who they think hired the killer or why, but the evidence, they say, points to a well-paid professional job.

Frank C. Holloman, director of fire and police, as maintained silence on progress of the April 4 murder investigation, as has his chief of detectives, William Huston. But sources in the department indicate that the "hired killer" theory is gaining momentum.

One notion is that the killer began his preparations six or eight months ago by dissolving his real identity and manufacturing a new person-

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AP Wirephoto

A sketch of the suspect based on descriptions of a man who saw him.

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ality known as "eric Starvo Galt, 36, unemployed merchant sailor."

Surrounding himself with phony credentials, he waited patiently in various cities for the right opportunity to fulfill his assignment.

In Birmingham, where Galt once lived, Jefferson county Sheriff Mel Bailey said he believes the assassin originally may have planned to kill Dr. King in the Alabama city.

THEORY

Bailey, who threw a protective net around Dr. King

when he was in Birmingham last October to serve five days in jail, said he thinks a conspiracy existed to murder the civil rights leader. The sheriff said his theory is only conjecture, but that "it is based on the evidence uncovered so far in the case."

Galt, who has been identified by fellow boarders in a rooming house in Birmingham as being the same man shown in FBI sketches of the suspected assassin, loved in the city when Dr. King was serving his jail term, Bailey said.

The right opportunity came April 4 in Memphis. Dr. King had arrived the day before, and both television and local newspapers had announced the motel and room number where he was staying.

The assassin rented a room in an adjacent building under the name "John Willard," fired the fatal shot and fled, leaving an enormous trail of finger prints, clothing, binoc-

ulars, a rifle and an expended shell in his wake.

Federal authorities said here yesterday they are satisfied John Willard and Eric Starvo Galt are the same person.

Memphis detectives say evidence that the killer was hired at a substantial price is reflected by his ability to purchase a white Mustang

automobile and follow Dr. King around the country for several months without apparently holding a job.

The detectives are leery of the physical evidence left behind by the killer.

"He was supposed to have shot King with a pump rifle," one said. "Well, there was a spent shell found on the bathroom floor of the rooming house, and a pump rifle won't eject a shell automatically. It won't come out unless you pull back on the pump mechanism."

He noted that the discarded Remington 30.06 pump rifle found on the street near the rooming house was inside a Browning automatic rifle packing box. He suggested that the assassin actually had two rifles, using the Browning automatic to kill Dr. King and planting the Remington as a red herring. Even if the expended shell found in the bathroom matches the Remington, he said, the killer could have fired it at an earlier date and planted the shell to match the Remington.

EVIDENCE

The FBI has the Remington and other physical evidence at its laboratories in Washington and has not revealed its findings.

Memphis detectives look at the assassin as an incredibly cool character who didn't seem to mind being obvious.

Dressed neatly in a business suit and necktie, he rented an \$8.50 - a - week room in a flop house, paying in advance with a new \$20 bill. He then proceeded to leave finger and hand prints around the bathroom and dump a bag full of clothing, a rifle with telescopic sight and a pair of binoculars on the street as he fled.

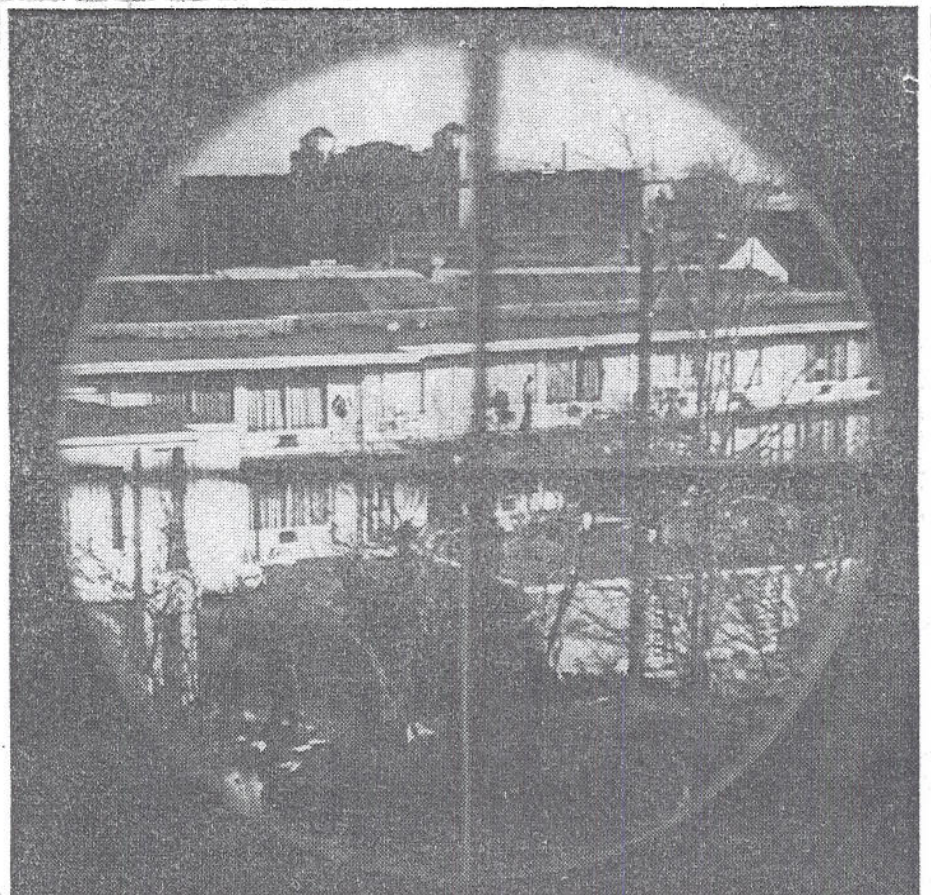
"It was better than a television show, the way he did it," said one officer.

PRINTS

Most of the items dumped in the street, police speculate, will lead up blind alleys. The killer was casual about his finger and hand prints either because he is an alien or because he thinks he is one of the few American adults who has not been fingerprinted at one time or another, they say.

Officers discount the possibility of a Ku Klux Klan conspiracy in the assassination. "Shucks," said one, "with all this reward money (\$100,000) being offered here, if it was the Klan, they would have turned each other in a long time ago."

In Atlanta, meanwhile two cab drivers said they gave rides to the man identified as Galt immediately after the assassination. They made the claims after identifying Galt from sketches circulated by the FBI.



UPI Telephotos

The location of Dr. King's murder as seen through a simulated gunsight