

King Death Suspect 'Vanishes' Rifle Bought In Birmingham

By The Associated Press
and United Press International

BIRMINGHAM—A gun which the FBI said was purchased in Birmingham has been determined by ballistics tests to be the weapon used in the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King, the Birmingham News said today.

The newspaper said also that the search for Eric Starvo Galt, who is charged with conspiracy in Dr. King's death, has spread outside the United States.

Quoting an unidentified source described only as an investigator, the News said it is believed that Galt has fled to Mexico or Cuba.

"ALLEGED BROTHER"

"There's no positive trace. He just vanished," the News quotes the source.

The mysterious Galt has been charged with both conspiracy and murder in Dr. King's assassination.

The FBI said in a fugitive warrant issued yesterday night in Birmingham that Galt, 36, conspired with a man "whom he alleged to be his brother" to violate King's civil rights. Memphis police later filed a murder charge against Galt.

"ZEROED-IN SIGHT"

But an FBI spokesman in Washington said "the FBI has no one in custody in connection with Dr. King's slaying." The "brother" has not been formally charged with any part in the slaying.

A source in the FBI said that after Galt purchased a gun at a Birmingham sporting goods store about a week before King was killed, he

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took it to the man he said was his brother.

The Birmingham News said that Galt purchased a .243 Remington rifle and the following day exchanged it for a .30-06 rifle. The paper said it was told the .243 rifle was exchanged after Galt and his brother decided the .30-06 was better suited for their hunting purpose.

Galt also requested, the News story said, that the .30-06 be mounted with a Redfield telescopic sight and "zeroed in."

The state charge of first-degree murder was filed against Galt in Memphis where King, 39, civil rights leader, was shot to death on a motel balcony April 4 by a sniper who fled from a nearby rooming house.

PENALTIES

First-degree murder in Tennessee carries the death penalty although the electric chair has not been used in the state since 1960.

The maximum penalty under the federal charge of conspiracy to violate a person's civil rights is a \$5000 fine and 10-year prison sentence.

The FBI statement said a 30.06 rifle equipped with a telescopic sight found near the rooming house shortly after King was slain was purchased March 30 in Birmingham.

The statement did not connect Galt directly with the rifle.

PHOTOGRAPH

The FBI released a photograph of Galt and solicited public aid in finding him. Whether this appeal meant the trail had become cold was unclear, but U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark said he felt this is not the situation.

The picture, which had to have the eyes "opened" by an artist, brought uncertain responses from witnesses who were acquainted with Galt or saw the fleeing sniper.

"Unless he was wearing a wig or had a face lift or something, it's not the man I saw," said Charles Q. Stevens, who lives at the rooming house from which the fatal shot apparently was fired.

"The hair is too full and the face is too young," he said.

A source in Birmingham said the photograph was taken within the past three

months, although the FBI did not specify when it was made. The photo has sharp contrast, making hair and features very dark.

"It's very near, but I'm not sure," was the reaction of Peter Cherpes, owner of a Birmingham boarding house where an Eric Galt stayed from Aug. 26 to Oct. 7 last year.

"I don't really know," Cherpes said. "It's so hard to tell. His hair seemed to be lighter."

The FBI, relying on witnesses, said the fugitive has been described as a white man, 5-8 to 5-11, weighing 160 to 175 pounds, with brown hair in a brush cut, blue eyes, straight nose.

Persons who have met Galt described him as a loner with a "rural" speech and little schooling, fond of vodka, beer and hillbilly music.

The FBI statement also said, "The fugitive is said to have a nervous habit of occasionally pulling at an ear lobe with his left hand. His left ear protrudes further from his head than his right ear."

Galt has used the names of John Willard and Harvey Lowmeyer, the FBI said. The assassin registered at the Memphis rooming house under the name of John Willard.

The statement said Galt claimed to have been a cook on Mississippi riverboats, a merchant seaman and "is said to be an avid dancer."

Galt, the FBI said, is the owner of a 1966 white Mustang with Alabama license plates abandoned in Atlanta the day after King was shot to death.

Galt was said to have taken dancing lessons in Long Beach, Calif., in recent months.