

Dr. King's Mother Is Slain

Black Gunman Empties Pistols In Ga. Church

By Tim O'Brien and Austin Scott

Washington Post Staff Writers

ATLANTA, June 30 —

Alberta Williams King, mother of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., was shot and killed today in the Atlanta church where her husband is pastor.

A young black gunman, identified by police as Marcus Wayne Chenault of Dayton, Ohio, opened fire during Sunday services at Ebenezer Baptist Church, killing Mrs. King and a church deacon, Edward Boykin. Another church-goer, Mrs. Jimmy Mitchell, was wounded in the chest.

After firing every shot in a pair of handguns inside the church, the assailant was wrestled to the floor by church-goers and held for arrest.

Mrs. King was shot while she was playing the organ in the church where her son once preached nonviolence and where her husband, Martin Luther King Sr., has been pastor for more than four decades.

Screaming and spraying bullets from the two pistols, the young assailant leapt into the choir stall during recitation of the Lord's Prayer. The Rev. Calvin Morris, who was in the pulpit when the shooting erupted, said the gunman jumped from his pew, shouted obscenities, then opened fire.

"The only person he seems to have pointed to was Mrs. King," Morris said. "Whether he did that because he knew who she was or because she was close to him, I'm not sure."

Mrs. King was shot once in the head. She was rushed to nearby Grady Memorial Hospital, where she died about an hour later. She was 69.

A hospital spokesman said Boykin, 69, was dead on arrival. Mrs. Mitchell, 66, was reported in good condition.

Mrs. King's son, Martin Lu-

ther Jr., was assassinated April 4, 1968, while spearheading a drive on behalf of striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tenn. The assassin, James Earl Ray, is serving a 99-year prison term.

King was an internationally recognized civil rights leader and won the Nobel prize for peace.

The Rev. Littleton Price, assistant minister at the church, said the gunfire exploded just 10 minutes into the service, as the congregation sat with heads bowed.

"There was a noise," he said. "I thought the organ had blown up. I looked up and saw Mrs. King holding her head. Price said the gunman apparently shot first at Mrs. King, then swung his fire toward Mrs. Mitchell.

Witnesses said that as the gunman was being subdued he bellowed: "Don't hit me. Don't hit me. The war made me like this. The war made me like this."

See KING, A6, Col. 1

KING, From A1

Others reported that the man screamed: "The war is still on ... I'm going to kill everyone in here."

The 21-year-old suspect, has been charged with two counts of murder, one count of assault and one count of carrying a concealed weapon.

Mrs. King's 73-year-old husband was in his study just before the shooting. Mursel Turner, a member of the congregation, said King entered the church as the gunman opened fire. He was given sedation at Grady Memorial Hospital and released.

State Sen. Leroy Johnson, a friend of the King family, said later that Dr. King went to the police station to talk to the gunman shortly after he was arrested.

"Dr. King said the man told him he came here to get his enemies," Johnson said. "Dr. King said he asked the man why he shot his wife and the man answered, 'Because she was a Christian and all Christians are my enemies.'"

Coretta King, widow of the slain civil rights leader, was out of town when the shooting occurred, but arrived at the King home a few hours later.

Derek King, a grandson of the elder Kings, helped subdue the gunman. "He was delirious," he said, "He appeared to be in a fever. He said over and over: 'The war did this to me. It's the war.'"

Another churchgoer, Cranal Flagg, said the assailant was seated near the front of the church, to the right of the pulpit, and leapt up as the choir began to sing. "He jumped up and made a shot

Everyone was silent. I thought a fuse had exploded," Flagg said. "I'm going to kill every m---f--- in here," (the gunman said). He emptied the gun, then he reached in his coat and got another just like it. That's when somebody shouted, 'Get down.' I crawled out of the church."

At the police station where the suspect was being held, guards were patrolling—some armed with riot guns. An Atlanta Police spokesman said the guard was established "because some persons in the black community and others might want to shoot the guy that shot Mrs. King."

Guards were also stationed at the homes of the elder King and Cosetta King.

James Kemp, an Ebenezer deacon, said the young man was a visitor at the church and earlier Sunday morning had attended a Bible class. When the assailant began firing, Kemp said, "the choir dived down under the seats on the floor. Everybody started screaming. It was pandemonium. He was firing in every direction. He didn't hit any choir member."

Assistant Police Chief J. L. Mullins told newsmen Chenault claimed "he received orders from his god to kill the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr."

"Chenault told investigators the reason he shot Mrs. King was because she was nearest to him," Mullins said. According to members of the congregation, Mrs. King was only three or four feet from the gunman.

Mullins said Chenault, who will be arraigned Monday morning, indicated that he arrived in Atlanta by bus on Saturday. He said the suspect told police that "he checked into a motel near the church yesterday and made plans for today ..."

Mullins described the suspect as "very calm and aware of what was going on." He said Chenault had signed a statement about the shootings.

A Dayton police official told The Post that Chenault had no criminal record with the department there. A spokesman at Ohio State University said Chenault was a first-year graduate student in education. His father, Marcus H. Chenault, is a factory worker for Monsanto Industries in the Dayton suburb of Miamisburg, Associated Press reported.

A spokesman for the FBI said the bureau had joined the investigation.

Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter, who was in Los Angeles for a Democratic Party telethon, said he talked to Dr. King by phone soon after the shooting.

"Dr. King asked me to point

out that there is no hatred in his heart toward the young man," Carter said. "Dr. King told me he visited the young man in the hospital and saw that he was clearly demented. He said he had come to attack his enemies, the Christians. Dr. King said there was nothing racial in the incident, but was a result of the young man's mental afflictions."

Carter said King told him the assailant "apparently did not know it was Mrs. King he had shot."

Deputy White House press spokesman Gerald L. Warren said, "The President was saddened by the tragic and senseless act." President Nixon is in the Soviet Union.

House Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.) commented, "It is a most unfortunate thing that such a fine person, whose family has been struck by tragedy, should be so senselessly slain in church."

Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP declared, "... Regardless of the preachers who say 'vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord,' I believe we ought to have vengeance here, and promptly. I don't mean lynching, but I mean a trial without the dilly-dallying that goes on ..."

In tragic irony, the shooting was announced on television shortly after the Democratic telethon broadcast a taped appeal by Dr. King for party contributions.

It was also a final irony that Mrs. King lost her life in the same red brick church that had been the center of her life since she was born Alberta Williams in 1904. Her father, the Rev. A. D. Williams, founded Ebenezer Baptist Church. When he died in 1931, Alberta's husband, Dr. Martin Luther King Sr., succeeded as pastor, a position he still holds.

And it was in Ebenezer that the memorial service was conducted for her slain son, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who is buried nearby.