Preacher Tells Of Klan Plot to Eliminate Trio

MERIDIAN (AP) — A 27-year-old itinerant preacher, who said he'd received $15,000 as an FBI informant on the Ku Klux Klan, testified today that Edgar Ray Killen told a Klan meeting in April 1964 that the "elimination" of civil rights worker Michael Schwerner had been approved "and he would be taken care of."

The Rev. Delmar Dennis, a Meridian resident who said he had preached in both Baptist and Methodist churches in the area, was the first witness put on the stand today —the fourth day of the trial— by the Justice Department.

MEANWHILE, IT was learned that James Edward Jordan, one of the government's key witnesses, had collapsed yesterday in the federal court building here. He was whisked to a Meridian hospital, where, it was

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also learned, government officials instructed attendants not to disclose that he was a patient or discuss his condition. However, it was learned from a reliable source today that Jordan's condition was satisfactory.

JORDAN IS UNDER indictment in the case, but jurisdiction has been transferred to a federal court district in Georgia.

Dennis testified that he attended a Klan meeting on June 16 in Neshoba County at which defendants Bernard Akin, Alton Wayne Roberts, Frank J Herndon, E. G. "Hop" Barnette, Billy Wayne Posey and Killen were present.

Later he was asked if he knew Neshoba County Sheriff Lawrence Rainey, another defendant.

A. I DO.

Q. Do you know if he was a member of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan?

A. I know him to be a member.

DENNIS ALSO testified that he had discussed Klan business with Rainey. Dennis said he became chaplain of the Lauderdale County (Meridian) Klavern and later was promoted to province titan—an administrative officer and assistant to the imperial wizard in charge of activities in six East Mississippi counties including Neshoba County.

Dennis explained that "the state" in Klan discussions meant the state organization. The FBI had identified Sam H. Bowers Jr., of Laurel, one of the defendants, as Mississippi imperial wizard of the White Knights Klan group.

A Meridian police sergeant testified yesterday that the 1964 slayings of the three civil rights workers was part of a Klan "elimination plot."

THE SERGEANT, Carlton Wallace Miller, 43, told the packed courtroom that the slayings were approved by the imperial wizard of the militant White Knights. Miller, an ex-Klan member, testified he received $2,400 over a two-year period from the FBI to provide information on the slayings.

Slain with Schwerner was Andrew Goodman, 20, of New York, and James Chaney, 22, a Meridian Negro. Schwerner, who was 24 at the time of his death, was also from New York.

ASST. U. S. ATTY. John Doar, the Justice Department's chief civil rights trouble-shooter, personally handled the examination of Miller as the stocky policeman calmly told his story.

Miller said he joined the Klan when Edgar Ray "Preacher" Killen, one of the defendants, approached him in late March or early April of 1964.

The target of the Klan group was Schwerner, a bearded civil rights organizer who had been active in the Neshoba County area, Miller said.

HE SAID SOME of the members wanted to "whip" Schwerner.

At one Klan meeting, Miller said, "Mr. Killen said to leave him (Schwerner) alone—that another klavern had been given approval for his elimination."

When asked by Doar who authorized the "elimination," Miller replied, "his elimination had been approved "by the imperial wizard."

MILLER SAID HE understood that at the time, Sam Holloway Bowers Jr. was the imperial wizard of the Klan group. Bowers is among the 18 defendants.

At a meeting with Killen at Miller's home on June 28, a week after the workers were slain, Miller said Killen told him the trio had been shot and had been buried in an earthen dam.

Miller said he was told the civil rights workers, "Were chased down Hwy. 19 about 100 miles per hour" on the night of June 21.

SCHWERNER, GOODMAN and Chaney were arrested on a speeding charge at Philadelphia, Miss., after they returned from a Negro community where they had inspected a burned church.

They were released late that night.

Asked if he was told about the church burning, Miller said Killen told him, "They burned the church to get the civil rights worker up there. At the time, they were referring to Schwerner."

HE SAID BERNARD Akin, another defendant, told him as they were talking in an auto in Meridian in late June that "they burned the church for the purpose of getting Mr. Schwerner up there."

On cross-examination, Miller said that Killen and Akin told him that they played no part in the church burning or slayings.

Miller said he went to the FBI with the information in mid-September of 1964.

"I WENT TO THEM. I asked for nothing in return," he said.

Asked why he didn't report the information to authorities sooner, Miller said, "I didn't believe it."

Miller denied he tipped off the FBI to the location of the bodies. "I had faith and confidence in the Ku Klux Klan," he said. "I didn't think those people had been murdered. I joined in good faith."

ON CROSS-EXAMINATION Miller testified that he had been married three times. Defense counsel produced a copy of a marriage application signed by Miller and it said he had only one previous wife.

Miller acknowledged that information on the application was incorrect. He said he didn't know that an oath was included in the application.

The Justice Department presented 12 witnesses and introduced several exhibits in an attempt to establish the identity of the trio and how the men were killed.

GEORGE BURLEY, an FBI ballistics expert, testified the workers were shot from close range—an inch or closer — with 38-caliber pistols. Four of the five bullets were from the same weapon, he said.

Dr. William Featherstone, a Jackson pathologist, who performed the autopsies, testified the two white men were shot through the heart and the Negro through the head.

Dr. Ruehl May, a Jackson oral surgeon, said he established the identity of Schwerner and Goodman by comparing dental charts made from the bodies with earlier dental charts made by their dentists from New York.

SAM BAILEY, an FBI fingerprint expert, said he identified the body of Chaney by comparing a print from the body with a print he developed on a Selective Service information sheet which Chaney had filled out.

The state has never brought charges in the case.