KLAN LEADER AMONG THREE JAILED IN KIDNAP

PASCAGOULA, Miss. (AP)—State officers arrested three Ku Klux Klan figures today, charging them with kidnaping in a plot to manufacture evidence to defend 12 white men indicted in the firebomb slaying of a Hattiesburg Negro leader.

The three were headed by Sam Holloway Bowers Jr., 42-year-old imperial wizard of the militant White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and one of seven convicted recently in the 1964 death of three civil rights workers in Neshoba County.

The others were Cecil Victor Sessums, 31, and Deavours Nix, 44, both identified by the FBI as subordinate officials in the Mississippi-born Klan group.

All three are among the dozen Laurel-area men under federal court indictment charging conspiracy in the firebomb attack on the home and store of Vernon Dahmer by nightriders in January last year.

THEIR ARRESTS ON THE NEW CHARGES came after dramatic developments.

Billy Roy Pitts, 23, another man charged in the Dahmer case, conferred with Jackson County officials and pleaded guilty yesterday to charges of kidnaping Jack Watkins. He said he helped others abduct the 45-year-old ex-convict and chemical plant worker.

Pitts and former Jasper County Atty. Travis Buckley, attorney for Bowers in the Neshoba County slaying case, were charged earlier with kidnaping Watkins.

Four hours after Pitts appeared in court, the Jackson County grand jury returned indictments against Bowers, Sessums and Nix, and county officers went to the Laurel area early today to make the arrests.

County officers said they planned to arraign the three later.

See KIDNAP—Page 4-B

The three were held in the Jackson County jail pending an arraignment later today.

Dist. Atty. Donald Cumbest gave this explanation of the complicated case:

After the arrests in the Dahmer case, word got out the prosecution would base part of its case on testimony from Lawrence Byrd of Laurel. Pitts and Buckley picked up Watkins, who had no connection with any of the cases, took him for a ride and tried to get a tape-recorded statement that he had helped the FBI beat a confession from Byrd.

Byrd was among the group first arrested in the Dahmer case, but was not named in the current indictments. The FBI identified him as a member of the klan.

BUCKLEY, WHO has since resigned as Jasper County prosecutor, was a defense attorney for 11 of those under indictment in the Dahmer case.

Watkins, Cumbest said, was "absolutely innocent . . . The FBI finds he has nothing to do with the klan or the Dahmer murder. They just picked him at random."

In his affidavit in the earlier arrests of Pitts and Buckley, Cumbest said Watkins had denied any knowledge of the Dahmer matter but they "kept insisting that he dictate into a tape recorder a statement that, as FBI agents watched, he had beaten a confession out of a key witness in the Dahmer case . . .

"**ANOTHER CAR** carrying three men in black robes and white hoods pulled up. Watkins said Pitts put the muzzle of a pistol to his head and clicked the hammer . . . He was handed a shovel and told to "dig your grave."

"When he refused to make a statement, he was taken home and warned to keep silent about the affair."

The three kidnap arrests came amid reports that new indictments would be sought in the Dahmer case by the federal government, and that new information might permit a state grand jury to return murder indictments.

The New Orleans Times-Picayune said it had learned the FBI had made "a major breakthrough" while preparing evidence for the Dahmer trial, which had been scheduled to start Monday. It was postponed last week without a stated reason.