Jury Selection Continues in Sessum Trial

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (AP) The defendant chews gum, the judge whittles a chunk of cedar and the tedious choosing of jurors enters a second day today at the trial of a white man accused of murdering Negro leader Vernon Dahmer.

The first day was a dull one in the trial of Cecil Victor Sessum, 31, of Ellisville, a wiry, hollow-cheeked man the state of Mississippi charged with having taken part in a Ku Klux Klan firebomb attacked which killed the 58-year-old Dahmer.

AFTER ALMOST eight hours of questioning prospective jurors, the state for a second time had agreed on a full panel, but the defense had accepted only four of them.

With four challenges remaining to Sessum's lawyers and seven left for the state, the selection of a jury promised to occupy much of today's proceedings.

Throughout the day the racial question was asked by Dist. Atty. James Finch. Not one prospective juror admitted to having any prejudice which would affect his decision.

The state accepted a panel before noon yesterday, but the defense challenged eight prospective jurors and they were excused. That panel included one Negro but he was one of those dismissed.

The second panel accepted by the state also included a Negro, but the defense had four challenges remaining.

DAHMER was fatally wounded Jan. 10, 1966 defending his family after a group of men went to his home, throwing firebombs and shooting guns. He returned the fire while his family fled through a rear window.

The state contends that Dahmer, former president of the Forrest County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, was the victim of a klan unit angry because he had been collecting poll taxes at his store for Negroes too frightened to pay the taxes themselves at the sheriff's office.

Sessum is the first defendant to go on trial. He and seven others were charged with murder and arson. Five were charged only with arson. All but one were identified by the FBI as klansmen.