Klan Leader Called Planner of '66 Rights Slaying

By JAMES T. WOOTEN
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HATTIESBURG, Miss., Jan. 23—A former member of the Ku Klux Klan testified today that Samuel H. Bowers Jr., the leader of the Klan in Mississippi, had planned and directed the firebomb murder of a Negro civil right leader in 1966.

Billy Roy Pitts, a witness for the state in the first-degree murder trial of Bowers, said that the slaying of Vernon Dahmer had been planned in a meeting at which Bowers "beat on a table" and insisted that "the nigger Dahmer" be dealt with by the Klan for his role in a voter education project.

Mr. Dahmer, who owned a rural grocery store near this southern Mississippi city, died Jan. 10, 1966, about 15 hours after his house and store were attacked with shotguns and gasoline firebombs.

Life Term Given

Pitts, 25 years old, has already received a life sentence after pleading guilty to the state's charges that he had participated i nthe raid. A high school dropout who joined the Klan at 19, Pitts has also pleaded guilty to Federal charges of kidnapping and conspiring to violate the civil rights of another.

Pitts, Bowers and nine others, all alleged members of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, have been charged by the Federal and state authorities in the death of Mr. Dahmer.

Bowers, who listened impassively to Mr. Pitts's testimony, was the Imperial Wizard of the White Knights.

United Press International

Samuel H. Bowers Jr. on way to court in Hattiesburg, Miss.

"That means he was the No. 1 man in the Mississippi Klan," Mr. Pitts said.

The 12-member jury includes two Negroes—a woman beautician and a retired railroad section hand.

Pitts said that Bowers had "wanted a Project Three, and if possible, a Project Four on Dahmer."

He had explained earlier that in the parlance of the Klan, a Project Three is the burning of a house or other buildings, and a Project Four is "annihilation, or death, or, you know, murder."

Under cross-examination, Pitts admitted he has received $5,600 in the last 15 months from the Federal Government. He has been the state's chief witness in the trials of the other men allegedly involved in the murder. Four were convicted and there have been two mistrials. The others are still awaiting trial.

Bower's attorney attempted to discredit Pitts's testimony by calling him "a paid employe of the F.B.I."

The testimony came on the third day of the trial, which some local observers believe will have a substantial negative impact on the future of the Klan in Mississippi.

Bowers, Pitts said, was not among the eight men who drove in two cars to Mr. Dahmer's house and store.

"Bowers was to serve as one of the backup men if anything went wrong," he testified.

At the alleged planning session, Pitts said, about 30 Klan members heard Bowers speak as Imperial Wizard, urging them to "clean up a lot of back projects, some of them over a year old, and especially to get rid of the nigger Dahmer."

Bowers was anxious to "clean up the old projects," Pitts said, "because he [Bowers] was going to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee."

"He said if he could get these projects done, it would give him more prestige in Washington," Pitts said.

At one point in the meeting, according to Pitts, Bowers said "emotionally" that the "South is going to rise again."

Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the local authorities, in three years of investigating Mr. Dahmer's murder, have said that Bowers is suspected of ordering the deaths of 10 persons in Mississippin as Imperial Wizard.