

Authors Say F.B.I. Agents Misled Federal Officials on Carolina Student Slayings

By DAVID A. ANDELMAN

Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation deliberately misled Justice Department officials during an investigation of the 1968 shooting of 30 black students at Orangeburg, S. C., according to a book by two newsmen who covered the incidents.

In "The Orangeburg Massacre," to be published Friday by the World Publishing Company, the reporters, Jack Nelson of The Los Angeles Times and Jack Bass of The Charlotte Observer, contend that the lack of cooperation shown by the F.B.I. impeded for months the Justice Department's own investigation.

In addition, the authors contend, the F.B.I. agents at the scene told their superiors at the Department of Justice that they had not witnessed the shootings, while in fact three of them had been at the scene.

Mr. Nelson and Mr. Bass also charge that the F.B.I. agents said that they had heard gunfire from the direction of demonstrating students before the police fired, although no evidence of such gunfire was ever uncovered, and that the agents contended that Cleveland Sellers Jr. of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee played a major role as "an outside agitator in the racial confrontation, while in fact Mr. Sellers's only role that night was as a victim of the shooting.

The authors also charge that F.B.I. agents had "disconcertingly close relations" with state law enforcement agents who were themselves subjects of the Federal investigation.

The Justice Department's inquiries to the trial and acquittal of nine state highway patrolmen on charges of violat-

ing the constitutional rights of the three students, and 27 who were wounded by the firing.

The shooting incidents took place Feb. 8, 1968, on the campus of South Carolina State College, an all-black college in Orangeburg. The confrontation that night was the climax of a week of racial conflict touched off by the refusal of the owner of a local segregated bowling alley to admit blacks.

The police on the scene—both highway patrolmen and members of the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division—

contended that the police had been fired on first by the students. However, Mr. Nelson's book that no guns or car-

tridges were found on the campus after the shootings and that all but two of the 30 students had been shot in the side or the back while fleeing or while lying or crawling on the ground.

Subsequently, under orders from Attorney General Ramsey Clark, the Justice Department began a series of investigations that the two writers labeled "increasingly frustrating," in efforts to put together a case showing that the students who were shot were in fact victims of "summary justice" by the police and their constitutional rights were thus violated.

The civil rights division (of the Justice Department) soon found that some of the F.B.I.

agents assigned to investigate the patrol gunfire maintained disconcertingly close relations with state law enforcement officials during the tense period preceding the shooting and even after the F.B.I. had begun its probe," Mr. Nelson and Mr. Bass said.

No Shells Found

Among other evidence the two authors cite for this contention is that F.B.I. agents and state policemen searched the area of the shooting the next day for shotgun shells fired by police weapons and could find none. Subsequently at least a dozen were turned up by Justice Department officials.

Also, the book says, Deputy Assistant Attorney General D. Robert Owen the next day found Charles DeFord, agent in charge of the Columbus, S.C. office of the F.B.I., staying in the same room at the Orangeburg Holiday Inn occupied by J. P. Strom, chief of the state police, himself one of the subjects of the Federal investigation.

"Regardless of the motive, the F.B.I. had, at the very least, hampered an important Justice Department investigation," the book concludes.

A spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, reached by telephone in Washington on Saturday, said the bureau would "have no comment on the incidents."

The incident was one of the first major confrontations between police officials and students on a campus in which death and violence resulted from the use of police firearms—two years before the incidents at Kent State University in Ohio and Jackson State College in Mississippi.