

Slayings

Defense Ready to Complete Case in Mississippi Rights

By WALTER RUGABER

Special to The New York Times

MERIDIAN, Miss., Oct. 15—Lawyers for 18 men accused of plotting the "elimination" of three young civil rights workers in 1964 are scheduled to complete their case in Federal District Court by Tuesday.

The attorneys indicated that several defendants may testify in an effort to punch holes in the Government's contention that the 18 participated in a Ku Klux Klan plot to lynch the rights workers near Philadelphia, Miss.

The 18 are charged with conspiracy to deny the three victims "life or liberty without due process of law." The maximum penalty on conviction is 10 years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

Found Buried in Dam

The dead youths were Michael H. Schwerner of New York, 24-year-old field worker for the Congress of Racial Equality, Andrew Goodman of New York, 20, a white college student, and James E. Chaney of Meridian,

a 21-year-old Negro plasterer. They were front-line troops in the civil rights movement's assault on segregation in Mississippi during the summer of 1964. They disappeared on June 21 and their bodies were found buried in an earthen dam on Aug. 4.

The state courts, where any murder charges would have had to be made, took no action. The Federal Government, which had to prosecute the case under a Reconstruction era civil rights law, came to court last week after three years of legal entanglements.

Undercover informants presented—against a background of rural emotion, fear, and prejudice — a bizarre and sometimes poignant picture of death on a lonely dirt road.

Klansmen Testified

Part of the tale came from one of the 18 defendants, Horace Doyle Barnette. The rest came from three members of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan who were paid by the Federal Bureau of

Investigation to become undercover informants.

Beards are uncommon in the hill country, and the one that Mr. Schwerner wore apparently singled him out as particularly offensive.

The Government contends the plot to lynch Mr. Schwerner got under way on June 16 when a mob of Klansmen attacked Negroes outside a Neshoba County church and burned it to the ground to lure Mr. Schwerner into the county.

Mr. Schwerner appeared the next Sunday, June 21, to investigate. But he brought Mr. Goodman, who had just arrived in the state, and Mr. Chaney with him. They were arrested

that afternoon by Cecil R. Price, Chief Deputy Sheriff.

Price, the prosecution contends, held the three in jail until the Klan could assemble a lynch party, then released them, recaptured them after a highway chase, and turned them over to be shot.

The statement signed by Barnette and the testimony of James B. Jordan, a member of the lynch mob who became one of the F.B.I. informants, appeared to disagree only on one major point: the role of Jordan himself.

He said in court that he had stood as a lookout and only heard the shooting, but the Barnette version reported

that Jordan, asking the lynch-ers to "save one for me," came up and shot Mr. Chaney.

On the stand, Jordan placed Price, himself and six others at the death scene.

Jordan, who is under indictment but not on trial, implicated five other defendants as among those who planned the lynching, but said they were not present when the three rights workers were shot.

Wallace Miller, a Meridian police sergeant who was an informant for the F.B.I., named Sam H. Bowers Jr. as Imperial Wizard of the White Knights group and the man who had to "approve" the killings under Klan regulations.