

Friends Tell Story of King Suspect

By David Larsen
Times-Post Service

Hollywood

Eric Starvo Galt, prime suspect in the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, emerged yesterday as:

- A fervent supporter of the presidential bid of former Alabama Governor George C. Wallace.

- An anti-Negro who once got into a wild argument at a Hollywood cocktail lounge with a girl who defended Negroes.

- A man who made at least one mysterious trip in recent months to New Orleans, a fact which appears to be of great interest to the FBI.

- A steady drinker, alternately moody and contentious in public.

This picture came into focus as the result of a series of exclusive interviews conducted by the Los Angeles Times with persons who knew Galt when he lived here.

NAME

A songwriter whom Galt drove to New Orleans and back in a white Mustang in December said he had a strong impression that the suspect was not using his right name.

The statement was made by Charles Stein, 38, who was offered the free ride after he agreed to add his signature to the drive by Wallace to qualify for a place on the California June primary ballots.

Stein said his sister, Rita, had made the arrangements. While at the Sultan Room, a lounge on Hollywood Boulevard, she had let it be known that her two children had to return soon from her sister's place in New Orleans. Galt let it be known that he would be going there.

Stein appeared at the Sultan Room that same night and Galt agreed to take him along to fetch the children if

Stein would sign up for Wallace.

The next day, Stein said, Galt picked him up at the sister's home and drove him to the Wallace headquarters.

"I thought he was some kind of politician," Stein re-

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called. "I got the impression they all knew him."

Robert Walters, campaign coordinator for Wallace in California, disputed this. "We checked all of our name files here — particularly those from the North Hollywood office — and found nothing under the name of Galt or the other names he reportedly used," Walters said.

Stein said that after he had registered for Wallace's American Independent party, he and Galt departed that afternoon on the two-day trip to New Orleans.

Galt did not disclose why he was making the drive. He told his passenger he "knew some people there." He said he had been there before.

While passing through Texas, according to the songwriter, Galt made several long-distance calls from phone booths, but declined to discuss any of them.

Stein said Galt went to uncommon pains to impress upon him his name, emphasizing it in unnecessary ways, such as when they checked in at motels.

"I think he was establishing a fictitious identity," Stein said. "I got these vibrations. I don't think it was his real name."

Galt told his passenger he had just sold a bar in Mexico. "I didn't believe it," Stein said. "His Spanish was too touristy."

During the drive the suspect also remarked that he liked to hunt, Stein said.

Stein said that at one point he brought up the subject of race with his companion, commencing that the same creator made everybody and that color is just incidental. He said Galt was noncommittal.

VIBRATIONS

The bearded songwriter said he "kept getting strange vibrations" about Galt. "I felt something was wrong," Stein said.

Stein said he believes the suspect made a subsequent trip to New Orleans. "I heard he was asking people if they wanted him to drop

anything off while he was down there," Stein said.

Stein said FBI agents have been visiting him almost every day, showing great interest in the suspect's activities in New Orleans.

He said, however, that he and Galt went their separate ways while in that city, and he had no idea what his companion was up to.

At the time of the trip, Galt was staying in a Los Angeles apartment. Residents there either did not know or remained tight-lipped about him.

However, Galt subsequently moved to a hotel, the St. Francis, on Hollywood Boulevard. One block away is a cocktail lounge known as the Rabbits Foot Club.

The crowd there remembers Eric Starvo Galt very well.

Until three or four weeks ago, according to bartender Bo Del Monte, Galt was a nightly patron.

He would come in at around 9 p.m., sit on a stool near the door, and order the first of several screwdrivers.

The thing everybody at the Rabbits Foot Club remembers most about Galt is the big dispute he got into.

Jim Morrison, who was the bartender that night, recalled that Galt had begun talking with a young woman named Pattie. Somehow the conversation turned to Negroes, and she declared them to be "good people."

Suddenly, Galt began dragging her by the arm toward the door.

"I'll drop you off in Watts and we'll see how you like it there!" Galt shouted.

CUSTOMER

Del Monte said another customer who had been dating the girl followed the pair outside, and Galt fled.

A short time later, according to Del Monte, a Negro was struck in the head by a rock while in a nearby parking lot.

Morrison remembered that as Galt would sit at the bar, sipping his screwdrivers, he often preached his support of Wallace.

"He's the man we want," the bartender quoted Galt as saying.

Nobody interviewed at the Rabbits Foot Club remembered Galt furnishing his name. In fact, nobody realized who he was until his picture appeared in newspapers yesterday.

Del Monte said the photo of Galt with his eyes closed caused an immediate recollection. "That's the way he sat here," the bartender said. "When he wasn't talking, he would sit sort of dozing."

Galt apparently was not one to get names straight. In his application to attend a Los Angeles bartending school, the suspect listed as a former employer a "Mr. Willer" of 751 South Figueroa street.

Presumably he was referring to R. J. Weiler, who runs an office building at that address. Weiler was unavailable for comment.

As character references, Galt listed three persons:

"Marie Deninno," a cocktail waitress at the Sultan Room. She said her name is Marie Martin.

"Rita Steen," of the Hollywood address, who is presumed to be Rita Stein, sister of the passenger on the trip to New Orleans and cousin of Marie Martin.

"Charley Deninno," also of the Hollywood address, presumed to be Charles Stein.