

Chenault—A Model Young Man

By Joe Fenley

Special to The Washington Post

DAYTON, OHIO, July 6.—Marcus Wayne Chenault, the 23-year-old Dayton man accused of murder in the slaying of Mrs. Martin Luther King Sr., is an enigma.

In the past week, a picture has emerged of a bitter, alienated young man who believes that black ministers exploit their congregations and deserve to be punished.

His parents, Marcus H. and Hendalee Chenault regarded him as no different than their

other two children, Nancy, 26, now Nancy White of Winchester, Ky. and Michael, 28, an Air Force sergeant stationed in Thailand.

"It really shocked me terribly," said Mrs. Chenault of her son's arrest during an interview in the family home in the predominantly black middle-class Westwood section of Dayton.

"I know I didn't raise him this way. He was a good boy and we never had any problems with any of the kids."

"To me, Wayne was always a normal boy," said his father, a guard at Monsanto Research Corp. in nearby Miamisburg. "This is something we just can't comprehend."

Neighbors are inclined to agree.

Ernest Johnson, who lives next door to the Chenaults, said the young man "was always courteous and polite."

Close associates, with whom young Chenault discussed religion, know him as a persuasive speaker who believed the original Jews were blacks.

Before Mrs. King's slaying, there were no indications that Chenault would ever resort to violence.

Standing 5-foot-4-inches, Chenault is chubby and wears glasses with lenses so thick he could not obtain a driver's license.

Born and reared in Winchester, he moved to Dayton with his parents in 1967.

While the Chenaults lived in Kentucky they belonged to the First Baptist Church. "Wayne attended Sunday school and church services and went to the Baptist Training Union until we moved to Dayton," said his mother.

After they moved, the Chenaults began attending the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Dayton. It was at this point that Chenault's church attendance stopped. "Wayne attended church with me here only once," his mother said.

"Up until 1967, he seemed to enjoy the church, but later he became a bit confused and started asking questions about different

things in the Bible," she said.

Chenault's father said he was shocked by his son's arrest and at first refused to believe it.

"I don't know what gripes he had," said Chenault's father. "He never made any mention of the King family."

Young Chenault came home from his class at Ohio State University every three or four weeks, said his father, and was in Dayton the Friday and Saturday before Mrs. King's slaying. He "was as normal as ever," the elder Chenault said.

The father said he never had the slightest idea his son might kill.

In college Chenault wanted to go to law school but was seeking a degree in education first, as he told his mother, "to prepare myself just in case something doesn't go right."

He was a junior when he dropped out of school last year without telling his parents. In fact, they were still sending him checks until he went to Atlanta last week.

London Policeman Slain, 2 Wounded

Reuter

LONDON, July 6—A policeman was shot to death here today and two other officers were wounded by a gunman who fired into their patrol car.

Eyewitnesses said the gunman casually walked across a highway south of London after emptying his weapon at the three young policemen, who had stopped his car to question him.

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Changed by Sudden Beliefs

His college friends recall that he frequently bragged about his sexual prowess. He seemed to get along well with women though he had no steady girlfriend. As a student, Chenault liked red wine and occasionally smoked marijuana.

While he lived in a campus dormitory, his parents visited him regularly. Later he moved to a small apartment on 9th Street in Columbus and worked part-time as a busboy.

"We used to visit him up at school, but after he moved over to 9th Street, we didn't check up on him," his mother said. "I didn't approve, but he and his dad raised a little fuss. His father went to bat for him saying, 'Let him be a man.'"

Mrs. Chenault, a deeply

religious woman, speaks as if she cannot reconcile the son she raised with the man charged with murder.

"He loved swimming, and basketball workouts," she said. "He loved physical education. And reading."

"He would go to libraries," she continued, "especially the one on Hoover Avenue. At Ohio State, Wayne would be late on returning books and the school would send the bills to me."

"The authors weren't all black," she recalled. "Just different ones."

Donnie (Shorty) Moore, also of Dayton, who knew Chenault at Ohio State, said the young man was deeply impressed by one black author's book, "The Choice:

The Issue of Black Survival in America," by Samuel F. Yette, formerly a reporter for the Dayton Journal Herald and Newsweek magazine.

By all accounts, Chenault was most impressed by the teachings of Hananiah E. Israel, a 68-year-old black Cincinnati resident, and self-styled religious leader.

Israel, whose legal name is Stephen Holiman, preaches a form of black Judaism, believes that the first Jews were blacks, that blacks are currently the slaves of whites, and that God will one day free the blacks, at which time whites will become the slaves.

Chenault began studying with Israel about eight or nine months ago, just about the time Chenault began ha-

ranging his mother about religion.

"It got so that I wouldn't even discuss it with him," she said. "It was just too deep for me."

Israel contends that he merely gave Chenault the key to understanding the Scriptures and that "once Marcus got the key, he would go on his own."

Chenault's friend, Donnie Moore, is convinced of Chenault's deep religious convictions and predicts that Chenault will use his murder trial as a platform for those beliefs.

"When he goes on trial, if they give him a Bible, he'll make some points that will cause them to think," said Moore. "I think Marcus will raise some historical questions."