

Father Doubts Son's Role In Fatal Quentin Break Try

By DEL LANE

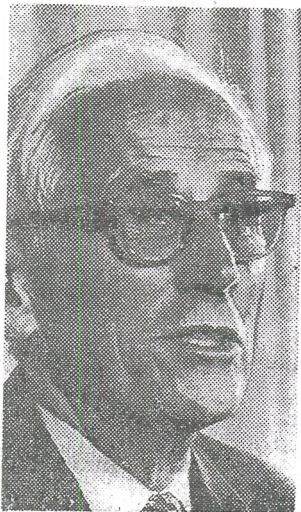
Tribune Staff Writer

BERKELEY — A concerned father last night expressed doubt that attorney Stephen M. Bingham was a "willing, conscious participant" in the events leading up to last Saturday's bloody slaughter of six at San Quentin Prison.

Alfred Bingham of Salem, Conn., said his son was too deeply committed to non-violent—if radical—political action to agree to smuggle a gun to convict George Jackson.

And, Bingham said, his son behaved in too normal a fashion in the hours following his visit with Jackson to have been concealing knowledge of an escape plot.

Young Bingham hasn't been seen since leaving his Oakland home shortly after 6 p.m. that day, and his father feels "he may be a victim of foul play or being held in detention where he is not a free man."



ALFRED BINGHAM
Was Stephen a dupe?

Authorities are anxious to talk to the 28-year-old attorney, the last visitor to see Jackson before violence erupted at the prison, because they feel the gun Jackson produced shortly after Bingham left

may have been smuggled into the prison inside a tape recorder the lawyer carried.

The elder Bingham, however, points out that the briefcase containing the tape recorder was apparently brought to the prison by his son's companion, Mrs. Vanitia W. Anderson, 23, who was denied permission to see Jackson because she had already had her once-weekly visit with him. He said none of his son's associates know who Mrs. Anderson may be.

"There is no question in my mind" that Stephen was unaware the gun was in the recorder, the father said. "There is nothing known to any of us that makes this unlikely."

He said he spoke to Marin County Dist. Atty. Bruce Bales yesterday and that Bales said it was "perfectly possible" that this was the case.

Is this why Bales withdrew

See Back Page, Col. 1

Continued from Page 1

his order that Stephen be picked up?

"Bales said no pickup order was withdrawn because none was ever issued," Bingham said.

With the help of his brother, Woodbridge Bingham, a retired University of California history professor, the father was able to reconstruct his son's activities almost from the time he left the prison until his disappearance.

Stephen had been due at the Berkeley home of his uncle, whom he had not seen for about 18 months, for lunch at 1 p.m. Saturday.

He telephoned shortly before 12:30 p.m. to say he would be late because he was visiting a prisoner at San Quentin. He finally arrived about 4 p.m.

"We had a pleasant, relaxed conversation, none of which related to his visit to San Quentin," his uncle related in a typewritten statement. The

former professor and his wife left this week for a planned visit to relatives in the east.

"He seemed perfectly normal," the uncle's statement said. "He left at about 5:15 p.m., saying that he had an appointment in San Francisco at 6 o'clock. Mrs. Bingham and I think he said that his appointment was to meet with some sort of discussion group, but we did not pay any particular attention at the time."

To which Stephen's father added that it is "incredible" to think such relaxed, normal behavior "could be an act after consciously taking part in such a plot."

Stephen's uncle reported that he had arrived on his motorcycle, although prison authorities last saw him driving away with Mrs. Anderson in a car.

He next went to his home at

407 North St., Oakland, which his father said he shares with some fellow attorneys and friends.

There, his father said, Stephen told his friends he would not be able to stay for dinner, because of the San Francisco discussion group, and left, shortly after 6 p.m.

He has apparently not been seen since.

His motorcycle remains outside his home. His father believes he does not own a car.

If his son is deliberately hiding, his father said it could be because he feels circumstances are "so damning he could not be sure of clearing himself."

Bingham said he would prefer that his son came forward, "but I would respect his judgment if we were in touch and he told me there are reasons he should not come forward."

He described his son as courageous and dedicated, with "some of the best — and worst—features of his missionary ancestors. He has a profound—I would say exaggerated—sense of what's wrong in our society.

"He is a radical of this generation, but he has always been dedicated to non-violence. . . . Thus it is difficult to conceive how he could be a part of such a plot as seems to have brought about the San Quentin tragedy."

Bingham described his son's undergraduate years at Yale, his involvement with the Mississippi civil rights movement beginning in 1963, his two years with the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone before completing his law studies at U.C.'s Boalt Hall.

He also described his own activities as a young radical in the Depression, working in third-party politics and writing books on social justice.

"So I feel some sympathy with my son's growing radicalism over the last few years. . . . My relations with him have always been affectionate and cordial despite sometimes heated arguments," Bingham said.

He felt his son looked down on him as a "liberal," and that "I think he's sometimes romantic in his radicalism."

Bingham said he last talked to his son two or three weeks

ago by telephone, when Stephen was planning to branch out into labor law.

"This was much on his mind during the past week," he said, "which again suggests he was not plotting to help a prison break."

He said his son was an admirer of Jackson, and sent Bingham a copy of Jackson's book of prison letters for Christmas. Stephen probably visited Jackson out of this admiration and because he feels that "racial injustice is most strongly shown in the nation's prisons," Bingham said.

He said the district attorney gave him "some reason to believe" his son left the room where he was visiting Jackson for a short time, giving the convict the opportunity to remove a gun from the tape recorder without Stephen's knowledge.

"There is no reason for anyone to judge he is guilty because he has not come forward," Bingham said.

"To find yourself even unwittingly an instrumentality in the deaths of six persons, including one you so immensely admired, would doubtless be a shattering experience."

Bingham, 66, is a semi-retired probate and real estate attorney. He is a son of Hiram Bingham, former governor of Connecticut and U.S. Senator, and was himself a state senator.

"I am increasingly hopeful of being able to clear my son completely," he said. "I want him to know I am behind him, that he will not be alone if he comes out of hiding."