

SEP 3 1973 WXPPost
**Nixon Visit
Hit Alarm in
New Orleans**

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NEW ORLEANS—For a city that seems to thrive on conspiracies, real or imagined, New Orleans may have outdone itself during the three weeks before President Nixon's visit here on Aug. 20.

Federal and local law enforcement officials were kept busy investigating no less than five separate and unrelated incidents that at various times were thought to be parts of one or more plots against the life of the President.

As it has turned out, all but one of the investigations have led into dead ends or have proved to have had nothing to do with an assassination plot. However, in total, the incidents caused a disruption in Mr. Nixon's plans and gave the Secret Service its most serious publicly revealed assassination scare since John F. Kennedy was shot to death in Dallas.

One of the feared "plots" here was a case of mistaken identity that led to a shoot-out in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in New Mexico and the arrest there of a hapless ex-policeman who, by his own account, didn't know Mr. Nixon planned to visit New Orleans.

Two other incidents were found to involve nothing more than simple theft, and another resulted in a windfall of arrests for detectives of the bank robbery detail.

The police, the FBI and the Secret Service are left with what they regard as one serious plot to shoot the

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PLOT, From A1

President as he was to travel on a motorcade along bustling Canal Street on the way to speak to a Veterans of Foreign Wars convention.

The plot purportedly was hatched by members of the Black Panther Party, and although the police admit they don't have enough evidence to make arrests, federal agents are still keeping five suspected conspirators under constant surveillance in hopes of breaking the case.

They also fear for the life of an informant who said he

listened to one discussion about assassinating Mr. Nixon and learned of another, more serious, planning session in which a high-powered rifle was said to have changed hands.

However, the informant, believing that the police have not held his information as confidentially as they should have, is no longer cooperating with the authorities, sources close to the investigation said.

The five separate facets of the assassination scare here began to surface fully three weeks before Secret Service advance men arrived and started security preparations.

In another city at another time, the incidents might not have caused as much cumulative alarm among the protectors of the President, and might not have resulted in the cancellation of an event Mr. Nixon is known to have been looking forward to.

But New Orleans is a conspiracy-conscious city. It was here in 1964 that District Attorney James Garrison unsuccessfully attempted to link the Kennedy assassination to a plot involving Clay Shaw.

New Orleans' long history of political corruption — in which chicanery is not always frowned upon if it is done with charm and cleverness and involves enough people in high places — has given rise to an awareness of the conspiratorial nature that is said to be as much a part of this city as jazz.

In a trial in U.S. District Court here — in which Garrison and two pinball operators are accused of a bribery conspiracy that allegedly involved paid police protection — nobody looked surprised when one witness last Wednesday offered a commentary about the city.

After listening to tapes of a wiretap on his telephone, Louis Boasberg, the owner of a novelty firm, said he thought all along that his phone was tapped. When asked by the prosecutor why he thought that, Boasberg said:

"Everybody in New Orleans thinks their phones are tapped all the time."

The U.S. attorney's office here uses federal conspiracy statutes more than any other jurisdiction in the Fifth U.S. Judicial Circuit and possibly more than any other similarly sized jurisdiction in the country, according to one federal prosecutor.

It is against this background that the police and federal authorities began

facing some startling developments early in August.

The first occurred when police learned that a group of about a dozen blacks, believed to have been linked to the underground Black Liberation Army, moved into the Parkchester Apartments, a complex of drab, four-family, low-income housing units in the central city.

Believing the occupants to be suspected bank robbers, a heavily armed contingent of undercover policemen raided the apartment, but found no one there. However, police learned that the suspects were members of the BLA—which has claimed responsibility for the murder of policemen in several cities—and that they were heavily armed.

About a week ago metropolitan police arrested 15 members of the BLA group here. Some of them were charged with bank robbery and attempted murder in connection with holdups here and in neighboring Jefferson Parish (county). Some were held for the FBI as fugitives in bank robbery cases in California.

Police sources said the group was holding up banks here to finance the opening of a New Orleans BLA chapter. San Francisco detectives, who came here hoping to establish a link between the BLA group and the 1971 bombing of a police station in which an officer died, reported that guns seized here have been traced to California.

While the BLA group has not been linked to any threat against the President, police sources said that the presence of the suspects and the knowledge of their background alone was cause enough for concern at a time of presidential visit.

"How would you feel with a bunch like that in town and the President of the United States coming?"

asked one law enforcement official.

An informant told police he had attended a meeting of six Black Panthers at the group's headquarters on South Rocheblave Street and that the participants discussed "wasting the President," according to a police source. A few days later, the informant called the police contact again and said that he had heard from another person that a second meeting was held and that a high-powered rifle changed hands during a discussion of assassination. The informant did not attend the second meeting.

When it learned about the alleged Black Panther plot, the Secret Service asked Police Supt. Clarence Giarusso

to arrest the six men until Mr. Nixon's visit was over. Giarusso refused, claiming he did not have enough evidence, and instead the suspects were put under watch.

When sketchy accounts of the Panther plot began to emerge after the President's visit, a police source said, another meeting of the conspirators—attended by the informant—was held. One of the men pointed a gun at each participant, the informant told police, and asked if he had revealed the plot.

As a result, the informant is refusing to talk with investigators about the plot. Lacking any additional information, the Police Intelligence Division plans to keep the suspects under surveillance and simply "ride out" the case until they re-establish communication with the informant, a police official said.

The third alarm for the police and the Secret Service attracted the most public attention, but turned out to be the least menacing aspect of Mr. Nixon's visit. It involved Edwin M. Gaudet, an eccentric former New Orleans policeman known variously as "Puncy," "Popcorn" and "the Cat."

Through interviews with his friends, his family, his attorney, acquaintances and federal and local law enforcement officials, this composite account of what is now becoming known here as "the Gaudet fiasco" emerged:

Four days before the President's Aug. 20 arrival, Secret Service agents conducted a routine security "sweep" of the Canal Street motorcade route, interview-

ing shopkeepers and looking for possible trouble spots.

One agent entered Waterbury's drugstore, a cluttered all-night pharmacy at Canal and Camp streets on the fringe of the French Quarters, and spoke to a soda fountain clerk named Romona Burkhardt.

Mrs. Burkhardt said that at 6:30 a.m. on the Previous Sunday, she heard a breakfast customer say, "Nixon ought to be shot, and if no one else is big enough to do it, I will." She said she had heard the same man complain before about the President and the Economy. The Secret Service showed Mrs. Burkhardt several photographs of people who were believed to have been involved in incidents concerning the President. Mrs. Burkhardt picked Gaudet's photograph and made a positive identification.

In 1970, Gaudet had received a suspended sentence for igniting an American

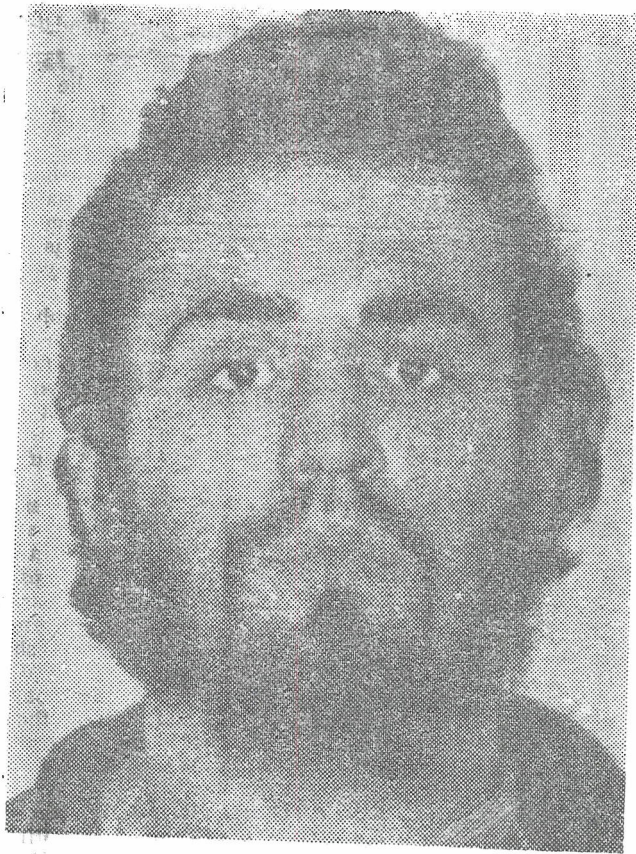
flag during a presidential visit and throwing it at Mr. Nixon's car. Last month, he was arrested on a marijuana charge and, federal officials said, police found a high-powered rifle in the trunk of his car.

The police said the Secret Service appeared to have overlooked the fact that the woman identified Gaudet from a photograph in which he had a light partial beard. Gaudet, who is 29, now has a full black beard, part of which falls nearly to the middle of his chest.

By the time Mrs. Burkhardt's "positive" identification was made, it was late Sunday afternoon on the eve of the President's visit. A Secret Service agent went to the U.S. attorneys office, hurriedly obtained authorization for a warrant, and then had a U.S. magistrate issue the warrant charging Gaudet with threatening the life of the President, an offense that carries a prison term of up to five years.

"We decided we had probable cause," said a federal official who asked not to be identified. "We had his (Gaudet's) track record, we had a positive identification and we had a previous arrest with a high-powered rifle. We also had a President coming to New Orleans in a few hours."

The Secret Service and the FBI immediately began searching for Gaudet in New Orleans, and were told



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SUB PLOT 'X'—With Story—Late City—N-2 Col 22.4— against Edwin M. Gaudet Jr. was dropped

by his father, Edwin J. Gaudet Jr., that he was in New Mexico at a commune called the Morningstar.

The next day police in Taos went to the Morningstar to arrest Gaudet.

Taos County Sheriff Arthur E. Trujillo said in a telephone interview that as a federal agent began examining Gaudet's identification

Gaudet suddenly broke away, ran through a row of pinion trees and fled on foot into the rugged hills of the Arroyo Hondo, grabbing a 30-30 rifle from one of the shanties on the nearly abandoned commune.

The next day, according to Trujillo, Gaudet shot three times at the pursuing officers from a hilltop about 400

yards away and then disappeared again into the rugged mountains. Gaudet has denied firing at the officers.

Finally, on Aug. 22, Gaudet's wife, Judy, and a cousin, Stanley Gaudet, went into the hills and persuaded the fugitive to surrender on the charge of threatening the President and three new charges of assaulting an officer. While being transferred to the Albuquerque jail, Gaudet said to newsmen, "The government is organized crime. The pope is the head of the Mafia and I support Angela Davis for President."

The next day, Mrs. Burkhardt called the Secret Service and retracted her identification of Gaudet as the man who threatened Mr. Nixon in the drugstore.

Mrs. Burkhardt said, "I was certain this was the man. Since, I have had time to think about this . . . Now, I cannot make a positive identification. My conscience would not let me get up in court and say for sure that Gaudet was the man . . ."

That afternoon, the threatening charge against Gaudet was withdrawn, although he was still being held in \$100,000 bond in New Mexico on the assault charge.

Gaudet's lawyer, Lillian Cohen, said that it would have been a simple matter for the Secret Service to ascertain that Gaudet, his family and another young New Orleans couple drove out to the commune late in

July and had not returned here.

"They (the police) went out there to arrest him for a crime that was committed here at a time he was out there," said Gaudet's father, vice president and manager of a New Orleans hotel. "He left the city before the 15th (the day of the threat in the drugstore) and hadn't returned."

Gaudet told his lawyer that when the agents came after him, he didn't understand who they were or what they wanted, and he ran. Gaudet had not even heard about the warrant, his lawyer said. Mrs. Cohen called the episode a "comedy of errors" and, in a letter to the Secret Service, said, "Since you started this, it is incumbent upon your group to clear up this matter."

Stanley Gaudet said his cousin's behavior when the officers went to Morningstar stemmed from a fear of police.

"He used to tell me all the stuff they used to do. They used to roll drunks and that kind of stuff. He was afraid of police. He was one of them," Gaudet said. Edwin Gaudet quit the New Orleans police department in 1967, after being reprimanded for a fight in a bar.

Of Gaudet, Michael Duncan, owner of the commune, said "He wouldn't shoot anybody. We went deer hunting and he had the deer in his sights, but didn't have the heart to shoot it even to feed his family."

Gaudet will have a prelim-

inary hearing Tuesday on the assault charges, which could result in maximum prison sentence of 165 years. In defense of the way the Gaudet case was handled, a high New Orleans law enforcement official said, "They (the Secret Service) saw a real threat. They didn't know for sure, but there wasn't any more time, so they went after him with a warrant."

Coupled with Black Liberation Army worries, the alleged Panther plot and the Gaudet incident were two other 11th-hour incidents that contributed to the decision by the Secret Service to cancel the motorcade.

Late the night before Mr. Nixon's arrival, a police uniform, a badge and nameplate were stolen from a parked car, and officials began to theorize that an assassination plot could include a gunman impersonating an officer. Then a few hours later, Police Chief Giarusso's own car—equipped with a two-way radio—was stolen from the driveway of the chief's home in nearby Algiers. The key had been left in the ignition.

While police have now ruled out any connection between those two incidents and the alleged Panther plot, no such confidence was being expressed the night before the presidential visit, sources said.

Taken together, all of the incidents convinced the Secret Service to cancel the motorcade.