

1965

According to the NY Herald Tribune, Monday, Feb. 22 (hit newstands few hours after murder on evening of Feb. 21)--headline on first (city) edition:

"Malcolm X Slain by Gunmen as 400 in Ballroom Watch." subhead over lead article by Jimmy Breslin: "Police Rescue Two Suspects." This article stated that Talmadge Hayer was "taken to Bellevue Prison Ward and was sealed off by a dozen policemen. The other suspect was taken to the Wadsworth Avenue precinct, where the city's top policemen immediately converged and began one of the heaviest homicide investigations this city has ever had!" But the late city edition had the same headline but a different subhead: "Police rescue One Suspect." The material on the second suspect disappeared from the story.

First city edition of the NY Times had a subhead: "Police Hold Two For Questioning." The article under it gave a story similar to that in the Herald and added the name of the cop who caught the second man--patrolman Thomas Hoy. He is quoted in there as saying he had "grabbed a suspect" who was being chased by the people there. The late city edition had the subhead: "One is held in killing," but, incredible though it may seem, there is even more info on the second man: quoting Hoy--"As I brought him to the front of the ballroom, the crowd began beating me and the suspect," Patrolman Hoy said. He said he put this man--not otherwise identified later for newsmen--into a police car to be taken to the Wadsworth Avenue station." In the next edition, this story, as with the Herald, disappears forever. All three morning papers carried the story of the second man and his arrest with detail--could they have all been that far off? Talmadge Hayer was eventually one of three men convicted of the crime, but neither of the other two had been apprehended at the scene.

NY Journal American, Feb. 22: "According to police spokesman, the department knew in mid-January that an attempt was to be made on Malcolm's life..." Shades of Hosty.

Although the police commissioner claimed that there were 20 cops, or a special detail of 20 cops in the area, according to the eyewitness account by Mrs. Patricia M. Russell, a psychiatric social worker (Baltimore Afro-American, Feb. 27): "When we drove past the Audubon Ballroom...there were two police cars and eight policemen--two in front and six standing across the street at various corners. We had to look for a parking space and did not get back to the ballroom for 10 minutes. The area in front of the ballroom was clear of policemen. There was not one officer in sight." (10-15 min. before murder) Shades of King according to Matt and Beval.

Hayer was grabbed from the crowd by Sgt. Alvin Aronoff and Patrolman Louis Angelos who happened to be cruising in that area.

Details of the crime: Shortly after 3 PM, Sunday, Feb. 21, 1965--Audubon Ballroom at 166th Street and Broadway--400 in audience, estimated (all blacks except 6 or so whites)--end of introduction of Malcolm by an officer of his organization read: "And now, brothers and sisters, here is a man willing to lay down his life for you!" Malcolm came out on the stage and greeted the audience--suddenly, from the middle of the auditorium, a man shouted "Nigger, get your hands out of my pocket!" Everyone looked away from the stage and Malcolm's bodyguards came down off the stage, and Malcolm stepped from behind the podium. In the back, there was a noise as a small incendiary bomb was triggered, and smoke went up. A man in the 4th row on the left side of the ballroom stood up and blasted Malcolm with a sawed off shotgun from point blank range in the chest. Two men stood up together in the first row like a firing squad (term actually used by witness in 3rd row) and fired, and then kept firing into his prone body after he fell. Panic broke loose. A couple of Malcolm's guards rushed to a phone and called the hospital directly across the street (Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center) and asked for an ambulance--15 minutes later it still had not arrived. Shades of LEO's death. Malcolm was taken to the hospital by several of his bodyguards who went on foot to get a stretcher.

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Police protection--shades of King, LHO, etc.

According to Eric Norden (Realist, n73, p14, Feb. 1967), an eyewitness, journalist Herman Porter, told him in an interview: "I arrived at 2:15 and it struck me as strange that there was such an absence of police. I had attended every one of Malcolm's Harlem rallies in the year since he broke with the Muslims, and at all of them there were at least half a dozen policemen standing outside of the downstairs entrance, or just inside the door. On this occasion I didn't see anyone."

The one uniformed policeman inside the building testified at the trial--Patrolman Gilbert Henry. According to the media accounts of the trial, he was assigned, not to the doorway or lobby, but to the Rose Room (which Harry Edwards told me was separated from the main ballroom where Malcolm spoke by a foyer). He testified that he had been told to stay out of sight and communicate by radio with a police detail stationed across the street in the hospital--the same hospital where Malcolm's body was taken! Shades of King with the cops across the street in the firehouse. The patrolman said that his orders were to notify the men in the hospital "if anything happened," such as shots or other signs of trouble. The direct examination ended here before more details were given.

Malcolm's wife and comrades challenged the NY police version that Malcolm had refused protection and on Feb. 22, on ABC TV, Malcolm's widow called Deputy Police Commissioner Walter Arm a liar on this account to his face. Needless to say, it is the job of the police to protect someone like Malcolm whether he wants it or not. His house had been burned to the ground a week earlier, at 2:45 AM on Feb. 13--only 10 hours after his return to the US. 4 fire bombs had been thrown at the windows, placed so as to seal off all exits. One glanced off a window pane and that was the only reason any one got out alive. Either a cop or a fireman apparently planted a small gasoline can on Malcolm's child's dresser and the NY police tried to say that he did it himself, but the crime investigation showed that Molotov cocktails had been thrown. On a piece of one of these were Harry's fingerprints. At a press conference on Feb. 17th, Malcolm named a Fire Marshall who he claimed had admitted to him that the gasoline can had been planted. He then said: "We are demanding an immediate investigation by the FBI of the bombing. We feel a conspiracy has been entered into at the local level, with some local police, firemen, and press. Neither I, nor my wife and child (he had four), have insurance, and we stand in no way to gain from the bombing...my attorney has instructed me and my wife to submit to a lie detector test and will ask that the same test be given to police and firemen at the scene." (NY Times, Feb. 18, 1965) He also said: "It was no accident that I was barred from France, and ten hours after I arrived back home my home was bombed." This was unlikely a Muslim job, since they owned the house which was destroyed, and it cost them dearly. In addition, it would be very unlikely that they would kill the entire family--their MO would have been to kill Malcolm. In any event, Malcolm's life was clearly in danger on the day he was killed, even if the Muslims had done it. Ironically, when Malcolm went to court to appeal for a state of eviction from the house which was bombed, he was accompanied by 20 policemen. And also according to the NY Times, when George Lincoln Rockwell, who claims never to ask for police protection, came to town: (Feb. 10, 1966--cited by Norden on p14) "a small army of police and plainclothesmen, including 18 mounted policemen, turned out to keep order." The news reports on his going to court there were supposedly not only 20 cops in uniform, but 12 plainclothesmen on one occasion.

But a story by Milton Lewis in the Herald Tribune, on Feb. 23, indicated that a "high police official" said that several undercover cops were in the ballroom. Shades of FBI agent Nat Pinkston who got onto the USBD fast, of the unnamed CIA man in Parkland, "FBI man" who tried to get into trauma room one, James Powell of Army Intelligence caught inside the TSBD "when the Depository doors were sealed."

Norden, pp14-15: "The day after Malcolm's murder the Chicago police force revealed that when Malcolm had visited Chicago in December, 1964 the Los Angeles police intelligence unit relayed a warning that plans were afoot to have Malcolm "killed publicly. At the press conference in Chicago police headquarters, Captain William Duffy, head of the city's police intelligence division, and Sgt. Edward McClellan of the Division's subversion unit, revealed that they had warned New York of a possible murder attempt on Malcolm.

According to the NY Times of Feb. 22, "Sgt. McClellan said today at the police

headquarters news conference that Malcolm said December 31 that he feared he was being stalked for death here, and the New York Police were alerted (emphasis added). The Journal-American reported on February 22nd that "According to the police spokesmen, the department knew in mid-January that an attempt was to be made on Malcolm's life." Shades of the Miami tape and of Bevel's claim that the FBI and cops knew in King's case. By the way, speaking of parallels, the eyewitnesses who saw the second man, said that he was olive skinned and looked Cuban and Puerto Rican. This is similar to the man who Malcolm claimed followed him continuously around the world, and who he actually confronted and accused of being a government agent.

According to George Earner in the Amsterdam News (Feb. 12, 1966), the hearing of secret witnesses at the trial "marked the first remembered time when such a step had been taken in a homicide in the 26-year-old Criminal Courts building at 100 Center Street. And only one other such exclusion could be recalled there for any other type of trial: the Mickey Jelke-Dat Ward vice hearing several years ago." (press and public were excluded because the name of a high govt. official was to be brought in) What is interesting here is that Norden (p20) claims that the two witnesses heard in secret were Ronald Timberlake who told the court that he was a Transit Authority employee, but who is not listed as one of their employees in the personnel office, thereby adding some substance to the speculation that he was a police agent. The other witness had the last name Sullivan and was FBI. The testimony is not public, but is allegedly hurt the defendant Butler.

The Trial: I can go into this in more detail if you like. Basically, the defense was impudent, the witnesses incredible or confused, and the story continually changed. Hayer, the only one of the defendants who can definitely be placed at the scene of the crime, had a fingerprint (thumb, actually) on the smoke-bomb used as a diversion. There had been no Jack Ruby, but police surgeons did leave the bullet in his leg for several weeks, although when he began getting stronger they did remove it. (By the way, talking about Photographic Whitewash, Peter Kniss in the Times of Feb. 25, 1965, reported "The police were in possession of motion pictures that had been taken at the Audubon ballroom") The witnesses testimony suggested much coaching and manipulation by the DA, and the prosecution witnesses gave testimony riddled with incredible distortions and probably much perjury. Star witness Cary Thomas, for instance, makes even Markham look good. He was hospitalized in Bellevue in 1963 after running around streets screaming repeatedly "I did not kill Jesus Christ." He was also a heroin addict and alcoholic. At the time of the trial he had been in jail since March 1965 under \$50,000 bond! In March 1965, before the Grand Jury, he swore under oath that Johnson and Butler caused the diversion while Hayer fired the shotgun, which fitted the early police version. But, in January 1966, to fit the new version by the DA, he said under oath that Johnson fired the shotgun while the other two caused the diversion. By the way, in June 1965 he applied for release from jail (he was in the relaxed quarters of an alimony jail) but the police immediately accused him of arson while in jail, and he ended up in a regular prison. The other star witness, the only other man to identify all three defendants, Charles Blackwell, told the grand jury under oath that he had never seen anyone shoot at anyone. For the trial, however, he gave a dramatic (and detailed) account of the murder according to the DA. Other witnesses (chosen from 400 potential ones) included Edward DiFina, a 70 year old floor waker. Under cross he identified ~~the~~ Charles Beausers, one of the defense counsel, as the detective who drove him to Bellevue, and continued to do so even after his mistake had been pointed out (shades of Helen Markham). Later, when asked about the fact that he had knifed a woman in upper NY state, and asked what kind of a knife he had used, he pulled the knife out of his pocket to show the court! There are countless examples like this one. On Feb. 28, 1966, Hayer confessed, but said that his co-defendants were not involved. The NY Times, on March 1, 1966, reported that Hayer "said he had had three accomplices, but he declined to name them." He said that he had been paid to do it, and that the Muslims were not involved. In the cross the asst. DA asked why he did not reveal the name of his paymaster, he said: "If Mr. Chance [defense counsel] had kept asking me on one point he would have found out." Like with Ruby, no one wanted to know any more about that, and it was dropped completely.

Besides the fact that Malcolm had a tail and that the State Dept. had attempted to prevent a number of appearances, there may have been an attempt to kill earlier. On July 23, 1964, the day before a major address he was to give to the African Summit Conference in Cairo, he collapsed after dinner in the Cairo Hilton with severe stomach cramps, although no one who dined with him suffered the same fate. Norden quotes Milton Henry: "He would have died if he hadn't been able to get to the hospital in a hurry. His stomach was pumped out, cleaned out thoroughly, and that saved him. But as Malcolm said afterwards he would have died if he had not got immediate treatment." According to Norden, a toxic substance was found in the stuff pumped out of his stomach.

On Feb. 9th he was not allowed to disembark in Paris and he blamed the State Dept. But few observers felt that the State Dept could have brought about such a reaction from the French, and rumor had it that the French were afraid that he would be killed by the CIA on their soil. According to Norden (p12): "This assumption is more than idle speculation. In April 1965 my interest in Malcolm's death was first aroused by a highly-placed North African diplomat. This official, who insists on anonymity, said that his country's intelligence apparatus had been quietly informed by the French Department of Alien Documentation and Counter-Espionage that the CIA planned Malcolm's murder, and France feared he might be liquidated on its soil. The diplomat's country, which enjoyed close relations with France, was so informed because Malcolm had visited it on prior occasions, and possibly might have flown there after his expulsion from France. "Your CIA is beginning to murder its own citizens now," he commented in elegantly modulated French." Then came the bombing.

Odds and ends:

According to Norden: "Malcolm had likened the assassination [of JFK] to the murder of Medgar Evers and Patrice Lumumba and pointed out that 'hate in white men had not stopped with the killing of defenseless black people; hate, allowed to spread unchecked, finally had struck down this country's chief of state.' It was, Malcolm claimed, a case of 'the chickens coming home to roost.'"

From the Epilogue to Malcolm's Autobiography, written by Alex Haley:

"In Washington, DC and New York City, powerful civic, private, and governmental agencies and individuals were keenly interested in what Malcolm X was saying abroad, and were speculating upon what he would say, and possibly do, when he returned to America. In upstate New York, I received a telephone call from a close friend who said he had been asked to ask me if I would come to New York City on an appointed day to meet with (a very high government official) who was interested in Malcolm X. I did fly down to the city. My friend accompanied me to the offices of a large private foundation well known for its activities and donations in the civil rights area. I met the foundation's president and he introduced me to the Justice Department Civil Rights Section head, Burke Marshall. Marshall was chiefly interested in Malcolm X's finances, particularly how his extensive traveling since his Black Muslim ouster had been paid for." Well, Burke Marshall--what next?

Aftermath:

According to Norden, immediately after the assassination, Leon Amer, Malcolm's New England representative traveled from Boston to NY and charged that Malcolm had been killed by the "power structure." On March 13, 1965 (Norden, p16) Amer told the Boston Militant Labor Forum: "I have facts in my possession as to who really killed Malcolm. The killers aren't from Chicago, they're from Washington." He promised a press conference with evidence including documents and tapes given him by Malcolm prior to the assassination which he said would prove "the power structure" killed Malcolm. The next morning his dead body was discovered by the morning maid in his hotel. Death by strangulation. ~~Off~~ Shades of Keothé! Official explanation: Epileptic fit. Problems: 1. his tongue protruded through his lips--in epilepsy, strangulation is usually due to swallowing the tongue. 2. His wife claimed that he had had a checkup a month before and found to be in good health 3. His wife, to whom he was married for 11 years, claimed he had never had a seizure. Result: As with JFK, people began to run. James Shabazz, the #2 man, went into hiding. Earl Grant, who had much of Malcolm's tapes and files, took them with him to Ghana. Reuben Francis, Malcolm's secretary who was under indictment for shooting Hayer, jumped bail and dropped out of sight. In 8 months he was arrested by the FBI (during the trial), and he was never called as a witness, despite the fact that he was a key witness to the event. I know of no newspaper accounts about what has happened to him, but my researchers are still looking. At present we do not know of the disposition of the charges or his whereabouts.