

ROWE AGAIN TELLS OF LIUZZO KILLING

F.B.I. Informant Testifies at 2d Trial of Klansman

By ROY REED

Special to The New York Times

HAYNEVILLE, Ala., Oct. 21 — Gary Thomas Rowe Jr. was brought out of hiding for the second time today to tell a jury the story of the killing of Mrs. Viola Gregg Liuzzo.

He repeated his story with the same coolness that he exhibited in May, then withstood 2 hours and 12 minutes of harsh cross-examination without wavering.

Mr. Rowe told of being in a car with three Ku Klux Klansmen on the night of March 25 and of watching Collie Leroy Wilkins Jr. open fire on Mrs. Liuzzo's car as she drove along United States Highway 80 with a young Negro man.

"The first thing I knew," Mr. Rowe testified, "Wilkins stuck his arm out the window—he had a pistol in his hand—almost to elbow length."

Mr. Rowe extended his right arm and indicated the length on his own black coat sleeve.

He continued:

"He [Wilkins] said, 'Baby Brother, give it some gas,' and Gene [Eugene Thomas] sped up."

"The woman turned to look at us, and as she looked, Wilkins fired right into the window where the woman was looking."

'I Don't Miss'

Mr. Rowe, speaking as if he knew the story by heart, said he told Mr. Wilkins as the Klan car sped away, "I don't think you hit them."

"Wilkins slapped me on the right leg and said, 'Baby brother, don't worry about it. That bitch and that bastard are dead and in hell, I don't miss.'"

Mr. Wilkins, 22 years old, is on trial for the second time on a charge of murdering the Detroit housewife and civil rights worker, Eugene Thomas, 42, and William Orville Eaton, 41, also are charged but have not yet come to trial.

Mr. Wilkins's first trial in May ended in a mistrial when an all-white Lowndes County jury deadlocked 10-2 for a manslaughter conviction.

Mr. Rowe was the star witness in that trial, too. He told of joining the United Klans of America, Inc., Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, for the Federal Bureau of Investigation and of working five years as an undercover agent or informant before the Liuzzo murder occurred.

Escorted by F.B.I. Men

The F.B.I. has kept him hidden since the killing. He is said to be guarded at all times by three F.B.I. agents. The three escorted him into the old

Hayneville courtroom this morning.

Joseph Breck Gantt, an assistant to State Attorney General Richmond M. Flowers, who has taken over prosecution of the case, led Mr. Rowe through his story.

Mr. Rowe, red-haired and ruddy-faced, wore a neat black suit with a white handkerchief in his breast pocket.

He told once again of being telephoned early on the morning of March 25 by Mr. Thomas and asked to go to Montgomery. The Selma to Montgomery Freedom March was ending that night and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was to address a throng of Negroes and white sympathizers.

Mr. Rowe said that he spent the day in Montgomery with Mr. Thomas, in whose car they made the trip, Mr. Wilkins and Mr. Eaton.

He said that they drove to Selma late in the afternoon and arrived about 7 P.M. They spent 45 minutes or an hour there, he said, and, as they were ready to return to Montgomery, Mr. Wilkins spotted a blue car with a white woman driving and a Negro man sitting on the seat beside her.

Followed Car Out of Town

Mr. Rowe said that after a short discussion Mr. Thomas said, "Let's get them," and the Klansmen followed the car out of town.

He said the shooting occurred about 20 miles east of Selma as Mr. Thomas pulled around the other car on a dark stretch of road.

Mr. Rowe repeated his account of returning to Bessemer and of going to two places seeking someone to establish an alibi. He said that the first prospect, identified only as Bob at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Club, had been found drunk.

A woman at a cafe called "Lorain's" was approached next and Mr. Thomas, after a private conversation with her, reported, "Everything is taken care of," Mr. Rowe said.

Arthur Hanes, a former F.B.I. agent and one-time Mayor of Birmingham, is Mr. Wilkins's attorney, having replaced Matt H. Murphy Jr., the Imperial Klonsel of the United Klans, who handled the defense in the first trial. Mr. Murphy was killed in an automobile accident.

Mr. Hanes questioned Mr. Rowe closely on every phase of his story.

The informant had testified that he had put his own pistol out the car window beside Mr. Wilkins and pretended to shoot as Mr. Wilkins and Mr. Eaton emptied their pistols at the Liuzzo car.

Mr. Hanes asked him on cross examination, "Did you tell Wilkins not to shoot?"

"No sir," Mr. Rowe replied. "Did you tell Eaton not to shoot?" the lawyer asked.

"No sir." "Did you make any attempt to jostle Wilkins to distort his

aim?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you work for the F.B.I., don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

Credibility Attacked

Mr. Hanes tried several attacks on Mr. Rowe's credibility.

First, he reviewed the witness's marital life. Mr. Rowe testified under questioning that he had been married and divorced twice and was making no financial contribution to a child by his first marriage.

Then Mr. Hanes tried to portray Mr. Rowe as a paid F.B.I. troublemaker, not informant.

He showed him a picture from the Saturday Evening Post depicting an attack on a Freedom Rider in 1963 at Birmingham. The lawyer asked Mr. Rowe if he were the assailant in the picture. He said he was not.

Mr. Hanes asked Mr. Rowe if, on a trip to Montgomery four days before the Liuzzo killing, he had said to some of his Klan companions, "There's two F.B.I. men. Let's bump them." "No, sir," Mr. Rowe replied emphatically. He said the remark had been made by another man.

The lawyer asked Mr. Rowe if he had said to the same group of Klansmen as they drove past the Freedom Marchers near Selma, "Something has got to be done about this. All you guys do is talk. I want some action."

Mr. Rowe denied saying that.

Denied Carrying Gas

He also denied trying to create an incident at an interracial nightclub and he denied that he ever had carried tear gas and submachine guns in his car, as the lawyer suggested.

The lawyer tried to suggest that Mr. Rowe might be part of an F.B.I. plot to frame his client. Mr. Rowe had testified that on his return to Birmingham after the shooting he had telephoned his F.B.I. contact, Agent Neil Shanahan.

Mr. Hanes asked, "And that's when Agent Shanahan told you that Mrs. Liuzzo had been shot, is that right?"

"No, sir," Mr. Rowe replied. "When did he tell you that she'd been shot?" Mr. Hanes asked.

"He didn't tell me," the witness said. "I told him."

Later, Mr. Hanes asked Mr. Rowe about a conversation with Ralph Roton, the head of the Klan Bureau of Investigation.

"You told Roton that the F.B.I. promised you a 500-acre farm in Minnesota and enough money to run it on the rest of your life if you would cooperate, isn't that right?"

Mr. Rowe said, "That, sir, is a bare-faced lie."

Klan Oath Is Read

Mr. Hanes emphasized for the jury the Klan oath never to divulge the organization's secrets on pain of death. He read what he said was the full oath, with the 12 white jurors listening solemnly, and asked Mr. Rowe if he had taken it.

"I took it with reservations,"

Mr. Rowe said.

"With reservations?" the lawyer asked contemptuously.

"Yes, sir," the witness said. Subdued laughter went through the audience. Mr. Rowe is not popular with the people of Hayneville.

Mr. Gantt brought out later that Mr. Hanes had not read all of the Klan oath. The omitted section, never revealed during the first trial in May, provides for a Klansman to break the oath in cases of "treason against the United States of America, rape and malicious murder."

On Gary Thomas Rowe

On Gary Thomas Rowe, see this file

1 Dec 75, "FBI

Ex-Informant Tells Actions of Klan,"

WXPost from LATimes.

Story deals with Rowe's testimony

before Senate Select Committee on

Intelligence Operations, in its

investigation of the FBI. "Rowe said he

decided to tell his story to the Senate

committee because the FBI failed to give

him a lifetime government job and

fulfill other promises he said the bureau

made to him in return for his undercover

work."