

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : SAC, JACKSON (62-5)

DATE: 8/20/65

FROM : SA WILLIAM F. DUKES

SUBJECT: JAMES SEALE, etal;
MOORE & DEE - VICTIMS
CR - KIDNAPING

Remymemo 8/20/65.

The following investigation was conducted by SAS WILLIAM F. DUKES and EDGAR C. FORTENBERRY on 8/20/65 at McComb, Mississippi:

Investigator DONALD BUTLER, Mississippi Highway Safety Patrol, advised that at about 9:00PM Sunday, 8/15/65, he was telephonically contacted by MHSF Patrolman MASON SEALE of Natchez, Mississippi, who advised that the body of EARL HODGES had been found near his home at Eddiston, Mississippi. BUTLER later determined that HODGES' body had been found about ten or twelve feet from his residence at Eddiston, about one block south of Highway 84. The body was found by a Negro Male neighbor, name believed to be BILL CAMERON. HODGES' had been brutally beaten, but a pathologist report as a result of an autopsy revealed that HODGES, known to be a heavy drinker, had actually died of heart failure, and would probably have survived the beating. Also, the autopsy revealed that HODGES had severe sclerosis of the liver, directly attributable to drinking.

BUTLER advised his investigation to date, developed primarily through confidential sources, determined that HODGES is a heavy drinker and prone to chase married women. Further, that HODGES was a member of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (WKKKKON) in the Meadville, Mississippi area. HODGES reportedly was one of two or three men responsible for a recent split of this Klan group, due to HODGES' dislike of CLYDE SEALE and ARCHIE PRATHER. BUTLER advised one source told him that the SEALE-PRATHER group had a meeting Saturday night, 8/14/65, in a corn field at CLYDE SEALE's place, the meeting consisting of about seven carloads of Klansmen. Afterward, CLYDE SEALE was observed to leave in his Volkswagen, Franklin County, Mississippi License 19A101.

BUTLER stated he had determined that EARL HODGES' has been

4 - (2:62-5)(2:157-EARL HODGES, RM)

WFD:

Jennings SW
Graves
Kelly
Webb
Arvid

157-3838-2

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recently dating one JOHNNIE LEE COTHERN, a married woman who lives at Bude, Mississippi. BUTLER stated he interviewed this woman 8/19/65, and she told him she was out with HODGES on Friday night, 8/13/65. HODGES was drinking, and in the course of the evening, HODGES stated several times that regardless of what she might hear, he had positively not been going out with a Negro woman. BUTLER stated Mrs. COTHERN had nothing to indicate that HODGES had been dating a Negro woman, and she was at a loss to understand his statement. BUTLER surmised the possibility that HODGES may have been anticipating a beating by the Klan, and that this is the usual pretext used by the Klan in administering a beating.

BUTLER advised he has no definite evidence as to suspects, although he feels strongly that the beating was by the PRATHER-SEALE group, probably because they were afraid that HODGES was an informer. BUTLER stated HODGES was definitely not an Informant of the MHSP, to his knowledge.

BUTLER advised he had been contacted by Patrolman D. E. VERNON, MHSP, brother-in-law of the deceased EARL HODGES. He advised VERNON related to him substantially the same information furnished by VERNON to SA DUKES at Wiggins on 8/19/65. BUTLER exhibited at this time the following tags or labels, given him by VERNON, as coming from the wooded scene where VERNON claimed he went with CARL SCHUTES (PH):

- (1). Garment label with the following printing thereon:
"Wash-N-Wear, 100% Cotton, RN 14951".
- (2). Garment label from a shirt with printing as follows:
"it's tapered, contoured and proportioned for
a slimmer, trimmer figure; RN 14951";
- (3). Garment label, apparently from trousers:
"Lee Leens, 85% Cotton - 15% nylon, H. D.
Lee Co., Lot 7080, Size 30-32, \$4.99;"
- (4). Garment label, apparently for slacks:
"Lee-Prest, Permanent Crease Slacks,
Lee Leens, H. D. Lee Co., Inc."

BUTLER advised he and MHSP Investigator J. Y. THOMAS (NA), intended to interview CARL SCHUTES 8/20/65.

[redacted] that District Attorney FORMAN, Meadville, Mississippi, expressed indignation on 8/19/65 over MHSP investigations recently, and requested that MHSP investigators GWIN COLE, REX ARMISTEAD, and FORD NEAL not be sent back into his territory to conduct investigations. FORMAN further stated that he did not want any MHSP Investigators to sign any affidavits in his district without first consulting him, FORMAN.

BUTLER was advised that the facilities of the FBI Laboratory and Identification Division were at disposal of the MHSP, and it was suggested that the four labels above be sent in for processing.

SAS REESIE TIMMONS and DARYL R. HARRELL, McComb RA, were contacted concerning this matter at McComb 8/20/65, and furnished with available information as set forth in referenced memo, and re the discussion with Investigator BUTLER. SA HARRELL advised he was maintaining contact with Investigator BUTLER in the event that the MHSP elects to send in the garment labels, or in the event additional information re suspects is developed.

RECOMMENDATION: For info and file.

WFD:

HODGES admitted that EARL HODGES had been in the Klan, and that he had observed EARL leave on numerous occasions from his home, to attend Klan meetings. VERNON advised he did not question ZEB HODGES in details, adding that he considers ZEB HODGES to be a fine old Christian man who has vehemently denied any Klan affiliation.

VERNON continued that while at Meadville, Mississippi on 8/15/65, he was contacted at about 10:00PM by CARL SCHUTES (Ph), an employee of the U. S. Soil Conservation Service and resident of Meadville, Mississippi. He advised that SCHUTES, a very close friend of EARL HODGES, appeared to be literally "scared to death", and told VERNON he could take him to the spot where EARL was beaten. VERNON advised that same night, he rode with SCHUTES to an isolated wooded area between Bude and Eddiston, near the old Barlow Settlement, where SCHUTES pointed out a place in the woods where he claimed the beating had taken place. VERNON advised that at this spot, he and SCHUTES located three price tags, apparently removed from new trousers, possibly size 32 or larger. He surmised that the person or persons who beat HODGES had probably changed clothes after the beating, adding that he had give the above information and tags on 8/16/65 to Mississippi Highway Safety Patrol Investigator DONALD BUTIER at the MHSP Sub-Station in Brookhaven, Mississippi.

VERNON advised he had no idea how SCHUTES knew about this place, and stated he had not interrogated SCHUTES in this regard.

VERNON advised that he attended the HODGES funeral at Meadville on 8/16/65. In the course of the service, "Brother" DAVIS, an elderly minister well known in the Eddiston community, got up and stated that he was a close friend of EARL HODGES. He said EARL had come to him Friday night, 8/13/65, and told him he had a number of matters troubling him, and that he wanted to confide in DAVIS. VERNON stated DAVIS did not elaborate and that he, VERNON, had not questioned DAVIS to determine whether EARL HODGES had told him anything.

VERNON advised that in the course of "ea/sing around" the Meadville, Mississippi area for a day or so following HODGES' death, a number of people in town told him that the SEALE group has gone crazy, and that there have been four or five brutal beatings within the past several months in the area, concerning which Sheriff HUTTO and District Attorney LENOX FORMAN have taken no action whatever. VERNON could not advise the names of any beating victims, or circumstances thereof. He expressed the opinion that HUTTO and FORMAN are either in the Klan, or sympathetic with it, or are afraid for their own well being to take any action against it.

VERNON was questioned closely in an effort to pinpoint the locale where he stated he went with SCHUTES, but he stated that he doubted if he could find it again. He stated there was no doubt in his mind but that SCHUTES could find it, he felt sure.

AT GULF PORT, MISSISSIPPI

JOE PRICE (NA), MHSP, advised on 8/19/65 that he had received a telephone call earlier that date from CHARLES SNODGRASS, Administrative Assistant to Chief A. D. MORGAN, MHSP, Jackson, Mississippi. PRICE advised that SNODGRASS instructed him to report to Meadville, Mississippi on the morning of 8/20/65, along with MHSP Investigators J. Y. THOMAS (NA), and DONALD BUTLER, to institute an intensive investigation in an effort to solve the murder of EARL HODGES. SNODGRASS said that Chief MORGAN and Governor PAUL JOHNSON were very much concerned over the fact that this murder had not been solved. [REDACTED] FOIA(b)7 - (D)

that SNODGRASS said Governor JOHN SON wanted somebody in jail right away in connection not only with this murder, but with the numerous burnings and other acts of violence throughout Mississippi. PRICE stated he understood that Investigator BUTLER may have received some information of possible value in the case through MHSP Patrolman DAN VERNON, Wiggins, Mississippi, brother-in-law of the deceased EARL HODGES, and that he, PRICE, intended to stop off in Wiggins and talk with VERNON on the morning of 8/20/65, while enroute to Meadville.

The foregoing information was discussed telephonically on 8/19/65 with SAC ROY K. MOORE, who instructed that SAS DARYL R. HARRELL and CLARENCE G. PROSPERE be contacted for any info they may have in the HODGES matter, particularly from the standpoint that it may represent a possible entree into the Klan group in the Meadville area.

SA DARYL R. HARRELL, telephonically contacted at McComb, Mississippi 8/19/65, advised he had been contacted 8/18/65 by Investigator DONALD BUTLER, MHSP, re the HODGES killing. BUTLER said that HODGES had been moderately well off financially several years ago, and was a friend of Lieutenant Governor CARROLL GARTIN of Mississippi, which he said may account for the personal interest exhibited by Governor JOHNSON in an immediate solution to the case. SA HARRELL advised he knew nothing about any CARL SCHUTES (PH), and that BUTLER had failed to mention, apparently inadvertently, about any price tags or beating location. BUTLER did say that he was getting no cooperation whatever from local authorities in the Meadville area in the killing, and that he had determined that HODGES had been in ARCHIE PRATHER's Klan group, but allegedly had broken off from this group recently. BUTLER felt that HODGES, an alcoholic and chaser of women, had been killed by the Klan after he broke off, to keep him from talking. *copy*

SA HARRELL advised that Investigator BUTLER, a completely reliable officer, expressed concern over a recent revival of acts of violence by the Klan in the Amite and Franklin county areas, and expressed the opinion that the brutal beating administered to HODGES had all the earmarks of a JAMES SEAE - ARCHIE PRATHER job.

As indicative of the above violence, SA HARRELL advised he had just received information approximately thirty minutes prior to this conversation from a reliable source to the effect that on the night of 8/18/65, a woman whose father was a Klansman had been stopped in her automobile by a group of twelve robed Klansmen, on the McCall Creek Road at the edge of Amite and Franklin counties. These Klansmen told her to get off the road, and that she should not drive on the roads in the area after dark. HARRELL advised that this woman allegedly had received information, or rumors, concerning the HODGES murder. SA HARRELL advised he had also received information that the Klan in the Meadville area is "going wild", and that recently a white woman was painted black all over one night by a group of Klansmen, as a result of which she was thereafter committed to the Mississippi State Hospital at Whitfield. HARRELL advised that Sheriff HUTTO and District Attorney FORMAN reportedly were taking no action concerning these acts.

SA CLARENCE PROSPERE, Natchez, Mississippi, telephonically advised on 8/19/65 that he was at the Franklin County Sheriff's Office at Meadville on the morning of 8/16/65, and had discussion with officials there concerning the HODGES killing. He said he was introduced at that time to MSP Patrolman VERNON, but had no opportunity to talk with VERNON concerning the matter. He stated it was his understanding that HODGES' clothing had been virtually ripped off him incidental to this brutal beating, adding that reportedly HODGES had been out with MAXIE PRATHER, relative of ARCHIE PRATHER, on the night of 8/14/65, the night he was killed.

FOIA(b)7 - (D)

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SA PROSPERE had no information concerning the alleged location of the beating, or of any price tags being located. He did recall some previous references to CARL SCHUTES (PH), possibly a soil conservation service employee at Meadville, and seemed to recall that SCHUTES was believed to be a reliable person. SA PROSPERE advised that recent contact with [redacted] developed that this Informant had no knowledge of HODGES or his killing. It was apparently initially surmised that HODGES may have been killed by an irate husband, in view of HODGES' reputation for being a woman chaser; however, the extent of the beating would tend to indicate it may have been done by a sadistic person or persons, possibly by the Klan. SA PROSPERE advised he was maintaining contact with Sheriff HUTTO and District Attorney FORMAN.

RECOMMENDATION: For info SAC per instructions. It is suggested that if active investigation is being conducted still in this matter, the following possibilities be considered:

- (1). Interview ZEB HODGES, father of the deceased;
- (2). Interview CARL SCHUTES (PH), allegedly employee of U. S. Soil Conservation Service, re circumstances his knowledge of location of the alleged beating of HODGES, and conduct crime scene search, bearing in mind this may be the same location where Victims MOORE and DEE were allegedly tied and beaten with bean sticks;
- (3). Interview "Brother" DAVIS, Eddiston Community, for any info he may have re Klan, and for any info furnished him by Victim HODGES on 8/13/65.

Date 10/28/65

Check, when submitting semiannual inventory, if no previous correspondence with Bureau.

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| Bufile | Status of Case | Submitting Office | File # |
| | | JN | 157-3830 |
| | | Office of Origin | File # |
| | | JN | 157-3830 |

Title and Character of Case
EARL HODGES
RM

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|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Date Property Acquired | Source From Which Property Acquired |
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| Location of Property or Bulky Exhibit | Reason for Retention of Property and Efforts Made to Dispose of Same |
| BULKY CABINET | |

Description of Property or Exhibit and Identity of Agent Submitting Same

- 1- ELEVEN 8x10 PHOTOS OF KLAN MEETING HOUSE WITH NEG.
- 2- FOUR COLOR PHOTOS, 8x10, OF KLAN MEETING HOUSE .
- 3- THREE ENLARGED PHOTOS OF KLAN MEETING HOUSE.

*Destroyed 4/9/70
Re #4, kpk*

SEMIANNUAL INVENTORY CERTIFICATION TO JUSTIFY RETENTION OF

157-3830-1A1

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