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Mississippi's Unknown Murder

by

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The country well knows of the slaying of Mississippi Negro James Chaney. He was killed with two white New Yorkers, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, and thus his death could not be ignored.

The previous year, the nation could not ignore the slaying of Medgar Evers outside his Jackson, Mississippi, home. Evers, as state head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, was automatically a public figure.

But the shotgun slaying of another Mississippi Negro, one who never "sat-in" or led a protest march or even tried to register to vote, has remained unknown.

The quiet man was Louis Allen, 44, of Liberty, in the southwest corner of the state. He was a logger and father of four children and had lived and worked near his home all of his life. That life came to an end on January 31, 1964.

In southwest Mississippi a Negro doesn't have to "sit-in" to irritate white folks. Just the fact of his blackness is enough of an irritant, for this section of the state is Mississippi's most violent and repressive. Beatings and killings of Negroes occur regularly as do bombings and cross burning. The area is the active home of Americans for the Preservation of the White Race, the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, an independent branch of the Klu Klux Klan, and chapters of the White Citizens' Council. When in October three white men in a car were arrested in connection with bombings membership cards in the APWR and Klan, as well as an arsenal of explosives, were found in their possession. Klan members even belonged to the state highway patrol and two such persons were eventually fired. Others are being asked to renounce their membership. Last April, the Klan held a mass rally at the Pike County Fairgrounds in McComb. Secrecy isn't required for hate groups here.

All of these groups work to see that Negroes, and whites too, "stay in line." Plain citizens and local officials help them. Liberty is certainly a misnomer for the southwest Mississippi town in which Louis Allen was killed, as is the name of the county, Amite, derived from the French word for friendship. So terror ridden is the area that Negroes are even afraid to leave.

That last night in January, twelve hours before he was to leave Mississippi to join his brother in Milwaukee, Louis Allen was found dead in a pool of blood under the truck he used to haul logs. His head had been torn through by two shot gun blasts.

"Louis had been crying all day," Mrs. Allen said later. "He had worked for Mr. Jerry Spillman for seven years and couldn't

get a recommendation for a job. Mr. Spillman said he might be helping a communist or anything so he couldn't recommend him."

That night Allen went to see Lloyd King. Tommy Allen, a son, explained, "He went up there to get a recommendation for driving a bulldozer for use in Milwaukee construction work."

About 8:10 that night, Allen left Lloyd King's house. Two cars, a creamy-tan 1961 Ford with two men in it and a black 1960 Ford with one man in it, followed him. After an hour after the killing, the same two cars were spotted coming from the road above Allen's home. They drove into Liberty and parked in front of the court house.

Some 20-25 minutes after Allen left King's home, he pulled his truck into his driveway, put on the emergency brake, and got out with the engine still running. In the bright light from the truck's headlights, he began lifting the top loop of a barbed wire fence gap so he could drive his truck into the gravel driveway. Suddenly some person or persons either rose from the deep ditch south of the highway or came over the crest of a hill a few yards east. Allen saw him and knew he didn't have time to flee.

A shot was fired at him but it went wild and Allen hurled himself under the front end of the truck, landing with his head under the driver's seat and his feet under the front bumper. Then a load of buckshot hit him.

"It hit him at the hairline at the left top corner of the forehead and tore a widening hole to come out through his right cheekbone," the McComb, Miss., Enterprise-Journal reported.

"The second load of deer shot struck slightly lower on the left side of his face and emerged through the right side of the

neck, some of the shot entering his chest.

"One or the other of the strong shotgun loads ripped through and blew out the left front tire of the log truck."

Allen's wife was watching television when she heard the three shots. Her favorite program had just come on and she fixed the time at about 8:35. Mrs. Allen went to the front window. She saw the headlights burning some 125 yards away but thought nothing of it and went back to watch television. Several times she returned to the window, each time the lights were dimmer. Finally she went to bed.

Shortly after midnight Allen's son, Henry, 18, and a nephew, John Westley Horton, also 18, returned home. They discovered the truck in the thirty foot driveway from highway 24. The lights were out and the engine off--the battery and gas had given out. As the two moved the truck, they found Louis Allen's shot-torn body underneath.

Henry Allen and Horton went to the home of Amite County Sheriff Daniel Jones, woke him up, and told him "something was wrong." Jones went to the Allen home, then with Coroner E. D. (Genie) Bellue empaneled an inquest jury at the scene. This jury ruled that Allen died at the hands of an unknown assailant.

Sheriff Jones is an important figure in what Louis Allen faced since September 30, 1961. On that day Herbert Lee, a Liberty Negro who had given the voter registration drive his full support, had attended meetings, and had tried to register to vote, was killed.

Herbert Lee had driven into Liberty. At a cotton gin near the edge of town he met a neighbor, a white man, Eugene Hurst, a member of the White Citizens' Council and of the state legislature.

Louis Allen had set out for Liberty that morning also, but his truck had broken down, and he trudged into Liberty to get help in repairing it. When Lee and Hurst met, Louis Allen was walking past the Liberty cotton gin.

"I saw Hurst and this colored man arguing," Allen told Julian Bond in February, 1963. "Hurst saw me and quieted down, and I moved on past the truck where I could still hear them and see them. Hurst ran around the front of the truck and pulled out a gun. Lee hopped out on the driver's side. Hurst pointed the gun at Lee but didn't shoot the first time. He shot the second time."

Allen knew that what he had just seen was better forgotten, so he continued on his way. A few minutes later, he was apprehended at a barber shop, made to get in a car, and driven back to the gin.

"We found that tire iron that nigger had," his white driver told him.

"What tire iron?" Allen asked.

"You know what tire iron," he was told.

At the gin, a coroner's jury had been convened. "There were men with guns there," Allen related later.

"Did you see that tire iron?" Allen was asked.

He answered "No," but when the question was put to him a second time, he lied, and said "Yes."

Eugene Hurst was acquitted. The jury's verdict--and the verdict of a grand jury that heard Louis Allen lie again--was self-defense. But not until Allen's testimony at the gin was over was he sworn as a witness, and not until all testimony was

completed was Herbert Lee's lifeless body removed from the concrete sidewalk where it had lain in a pool of blood since the shooting.

When Julian Bond talked to Allen, he freely admitted perjuring himself at the coroner's inquest and before the grand jury. He lied, he said, simply because he was afraid for his life. His parents were living still, and he had to support them until they died. But if he could be assured that someone would protect him, and protect his right to tell the truth, then "I'd let the hide go with the hair," Louis Allen said.

He had told the same story to Bob Moses, director of the Mississippi Project of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The two had called the U. S. Department of Justice, which is authorized to prosecute anyone who does "under color of law" intimidate voters and would be voters and those who assist them, and had appealed for protection.

"We're not running a police department," was the answer they received.

Allen also signed, in 1962, an affidavit stating that Hurst killed Lee "without provocation."

It was perhaps because of all this that rumors began around Liberty that Allen may have become a "tip-off man" for the Justice Department. Allen soon began receiving warnings that local whites were out to "get" him. In the next two and a half years before his slaying, Louis Allen was beaten by a deputy sheriff, threatened with being killed, and arrested several times on various charges.

A month after the Lee slaying, a white man came to Allen's house and told Allen's daughter that he was going to kill Allen. She ran into the woods where her father was working and told him.

In July, 1962, "Daniel Jones (then a deputy sheriff) came up into the yard," Mrs. Elizabeth Allen told Bob Moses. "He told Louis he was going to arrest him for interfering with the law. Louis asked him could he get out on bond. Daniel Jones told him he couldn't. Louis asked if he could get his hat. Daniel Jones didn't answer. Louis looked around and told Henry to bring him his hat and Daniel Jones hit Louis with his flashlight while the side of his face was turned to him and he broke his jaw...then they carried him on to jail.

"I ran out behind them. Henry was driving. I was going after our other son Tommy. Daniel Jones was coming from the jailhouse and I stopped and asked him if Louis was in jail. He cursed us and told us yes, that's where he was going to stay and asked us where we were going. We told him we were going to Tommy's. He cursed and told us to get Tommy and get on across the damn river...if we didn't some of ~~the~~ rest of us would be up there in jail too. We got Tommy and came back to the house."

The day after their father's arrest, Henry and Tommy Allen went to the Liberty jail. Tommy asked Sheriff E. L. Caston, "What did they have Daddy for?"

"He told me and Henry to get away from there; if we didn't we'd be up there too."

Tommy Allen then went to see a lawyer, Joe Garden. "I asked him to call the sheriff and find out the charges. He called out. They didn't tell him but said they would have his trial the next day at 11."

Louis Allen was freed that next day. He then went to see a doctor about his jaw. He had been denied a doctor in jail.

In August Sheriff Caston picked up Louis Allen at the Hawkins Service Station where Allen was having gas put in his truck. He said he had a warrant for his arrest but wouldn't say what the charges were. "Daniel Jones searched Daddy and the truck," Tommy Allen related. "He found a weapon in the glove compartment-- where he kept it all the time for protection. Daniel Jones told Daddy to come on and go with him. They took him to jail and told me to bring the truck on to the house."

A preliminary hearing was held the next morning but neither Tommy or Henry Allen or Jerry Norwood were permitted into the hearing. Later they found out that Louis Allen was charged with carrying a concealed weapon and passing a bad check. Before Allen was released--the trial was set for March 1, 1964--the jailer warned him that he should get out of Liberty by the end of the year.

The week before Louis Allen was killed, a number of small incidents occurred.

On Saturday morning, January 25, a Negro man saw two cars park in the road to Allen's house, just off the highway. They were carefully studying the area. That night, another Negro man noticed Daniel Jones, a deputy and another white man in their car closely watching Allen as he drove into town.

Several nights later, Allen heard a noise outside of his house--"dogs were barking and mules were snorting." He had devised a way of secretly leaving and entering the house and quietly slipped outside--but he saw nothing.

On Thursday, the day before he was killed, Allen was chatting with a Negro by the highway. Mr. C-----, a white man,



drove up and the Negro jumped in a ditch so he wouldn't be seen talking to Louis Allen.

A couple weeks after Allen's slaying, Sheriff Jones closed the investigation. Jones, who had broken Allen's jaw and intimidated the Allen family, said he was unable to find "a single clue."

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