
Book Reviews

Dirty U.S. military networks implicated in King assassination

by Edward Spannaus

Orders to Kill: The Truth Behind the Murder of Martin Luther King

by William F. Pepper

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Shortly after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in April 1968, one man who was with King when he was shot down, Rev. James Bevel, urged the civil rights movement to demand a fair trial for the man accused of King's murder. "We should not allow this country to give us a poor, defenseless goat for the body of our lamb," Bevel told a meeting of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference leadership in early 1969. "I don't believe Ray was capable of killing Dr. King, but whether he did or not doesn't really matter now. Ray's execution would not take us one step further in recognizing Dr. King's dream. It would furnish our enemies with a scapegoat. They could wash their hands of guilt."

Dr. King's successor as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Rev. Ralph Abernathy, first supported, and then repudiated Bevel's motion, and publicly censured Bevel.

Bevel was subsequently driven out of the SCLC, in large part because of his continuing advocacy of justice for the accused assassin, James Earl Ray.

It is a cause which Bevel has never given up. In a January 1994 speech to a conference of the Schiller Institute in Washington, Bevel spoke on the theme of Martin Luther King and James Earl Ray. Bevel told of how he had fought for a fair and impartial trial for Ray since 1968. He told the conference:

"You're going to claim that you love Martin Luther King—and James Earl Ray sits in jail for 25 years, which totally denies the reason King even came to the country. He only preached two things: 'Don't judge a man by the color of his skin but by the content of his character,' and, 'Injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere.' He didn't preach

but two things. And he died; and we hadn't learned either one of the lessons. That's tragic."

'Raul' and New Orleans

Now, dramatic new evidence confirming the innocence of James Earl Ray, and identifying the actual killers of Martin Luther King, Jr., has emerged in published form. Dr. William F. Pepper, the author of *Orders to Kill: The Truth Behind the Murder of Martin Luther King*, had worked around Dr. King during the last years of King's life, and was executive director of the National Conference for New Politics, organized by Dr. Benjamin Spock and others, which hoped to put King forward as a third-party candidate for U.S. President in the 1968 elections.

After King's assassination, Pepper walked away from politics. But, in 1977, as the House Select Committee on Assassinations was beginning its investigations, Reverend Abernathy asked Pepper to interview James Earl Ray. Pepper familiarized himself with some of the background and literature on the case; he later found that key books and articles on the King assassination and James Earl Ray had been directly commissioned by J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI, so as to present a deliberately falsified portrait of Ray as a hardened racist and career criminal to the public.

Pepper, accompanied by Abernathy and a psychiatrist, conducted a lengthy interview with Ray in prison in October 1978. Ray's story centered around the man whom Pepper calls "the shadowy character Raul," who Ray says coordinated and directed his activity from the day Ray met him in Montreal in August 1967, up until April 4, 1968. The existence of Raul (or "Raoul") was dismissed out of hand both by the state prosecutors in Tennessee, and by the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

Pepper comments that, in the initial interview with Ray, he and the psychiatrist noted "a vagueness and apprehensive equivocation relating to any connection with persons or places in Louisiana."

Louisiana, and New Orleans in particular, plays a crucial role in Ray's story. He had met Raul in Montreal, where

Raul recruited Ray into low-level gun-smuggling operations; subsequently, Ray usually met Raul in New Orleans, and Raul had given him a phone number in New Orleans to call for instructions. Years later, Pepper determined through painstaking work that the building where Ray went for meetings in New Orleans was the International Trade Mart, at that time run by Clay Shaw, a well-known central figure in the conspiracy which carried out the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

To anyone familiar with the Kennedy assassination, such discoveries jump out of the page. Although Pepper never references Permindex, the international assassination bureau which actually coordinated the Kennedy assassination, as well as numerous attempts on the life of Charles de Gaulle, the overlap is obvious. Permindex was established in Montreal in the 1950s by Maj. Louis Mortimer Bloomfield, who was detailed to the FBI's counterintelligence section, Division Five during World War II. Clay Shaw was a board member of Permindex, and his Trade Mart was part of the Permindex ("Permanent Industrial Expositions") network.

It is this sort of item which makes Pepper's book both fascinating and extremely credible. The book is written as a more-or-less chronological account of Pepper's investigations from 1978 up through the summer of 1995. Pepper is not a "conspiracy buff," and he did not start with a fixed doctrine as to who was ultimately responsible for the murder of Martin Luther King. Pepper takes the reader through the process of his own discoveries, step by step, showing how pieces of evidence, which corroborated other pieces of evidence, filling out the picture, came together over a long period of time.

The 'Commercial Appeal' articles

Indeed, Pepper's most important discoveries, regarding the role of U.S. military intelligence agencies, only began to emerge in 1993, after the publication of a series of articles in the Memphis, Tennessee *Commercial Appeal* on U.S. Army surveillance of King's family for three generations.

The Memphis newspaper articles, written by reporter Stephen Tompkins, drew upon both Congressional hearings from the early 1970s and Tompkins's own interviews with former military personnel. Tompkins showed that Army intelligence units were on the scene in Memphis the day King was killed, but he said in the lead article, on March 21, 1993, that his investigation had "uncovered no hard evidence that Army Intelligence played any role in King's assassination." This would change.

The key protagonist in the *Commercial Appeal* series was Maj. Gen. William P. Yarborough, the U.S. Army Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (ASCI) who, prior to assuming that position, had run the Army's special warfare school at Ft. Bragg in North Carolina. Yarborough is popularly described as the founder of the Army's "Green Beret" special forces commandos, although the actual history of Army spe-

cial forces is more complicated. But in any event, Yarborough, one of the U.S. military's top experts in intelligence and counterinsurgency, became convinced in the mid- to late-1960s that the United States was on the verge of revolution, and that the Chinese or Soviets, via Cuba, were behind much of it, and particularly, that they were bankrolling and directing black militant leaders.

Tompkins's account in the Memphis newspaper documented that elements of two Army units were involved in Memphis at the time of King's assassination. There was the southern-based 111th Military Intelligence (MI) Group, which conducted surveillance, and the 20th Special Forces Group (SFG), based in Alabama and Mississippi. The 20th was a National Guard unit, into which a number of Special Forces veterans from Vietnam had been "dumped" for safekeeping. The 20th worked closely with the Ku Klux Klan, trading weapons and training for information on black activists, and it was also involved in broader gun-running operations.

Tompkins's newspaper account—not quoted in Pepper's book—contained the following cryptic statement: "Eight Green Beret soldiers from an 'Operation Detachment Alpha 184 Team' were also in Memphis carrying out an unknown mission. Such 'A-teams' usually contained 12 members."

We now return to Pepper's narrative.

The military trail

Pepper met with Tompkins four months after the series was published, to see what, if anything, Tompkins knew about King's assassination—which was not the subject of his articles. Tompkins told Pepper that he had stumbled across certain information which he could not print for lack of corroboration. He said that he believed that the Army presence in Memphis involved more than mere surveillance, and that it had a more sinister mission related to the assassination.

Tompkins had talked with a former member of the Alpha 184 Special Forces team, whom Pepper calls "Warren," who had left the United States for Ibero-America after one of the members of the team had been killed. He feared that a "cleanup" was in progress.

Over a period of a few months, Tompkins agreed to help Pepper. He also told Pepper that members of the 20th Special Forces Group were involved in gunrunning activities in New Orleans, with organized crime figures tied to Carlos Marcello.

Another lead came through a private investigator who had recently had a discussion with General Yarborough, who reportedly had said that he believed it was time for the American people to be told how close America was to civil war in the 1960s, and how extensive was the military preparation for this.

Pepper followed the trail, eventually succeeding in putting questions to both "Warren" and a second member of the Alpha team, via reporter Tompkins. Pepper learned that the team had been specially selected by a top officer of the 902nd

MI Group; unlike the geographically based MI groups, the 902nd was deployed directly by General Yarborough, and handled highly secretive, sensitive assignments. The 902nd also worked closely with J. Edgar Hoover and with the head of FBI's Division Five. Hoover had assigned an FBI agent, Patrick Putnam, to work directly on Yarborough's staff.

(Hoover's famed turf battles with other intelligence agencies did not extend to Army Intelligence. His top aide (and reputed homosexual lover), Clyde Tolson, came to the FBI from Army Intelligence in the 1920s, and Gay Edgar himself held an honorary rank of lieutenant colonel in Army Intelligence.)

While Army Intelligence had increased its domestic activity since 1962-63, there took place a dramatic escalation in surveillance, infiltration, and the preparation of contingency plans for civil insurrection in 1967, sparked by urban rioting and by the growth of the movement against the war in Vietnam. The formal command structure was designated as the U.S. Strike Command (Cincstrike), headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida (the current headquarters for the U.S. Special Operations Command).

The existence of the formal command structure and the various units described in Pepper's book (except, obviously, the assassination teams) has been independently verified by this reviewer consulting Congressional hearings and reports from the early 1970s.

The overall planning for the Cincstrike operation took place in the U.S. Intelligence Board, consisting of representatives of all U.S. intelligence agencies, but heavily weighted toward the military intelligence services.

Overall policy was clearly set at a higher level of the Anglo-American establishment than this. But within the U.S. framework, one notable meeting took place on June 12, 1967, and included the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Earl Wheeler, CIA director Richard Helms, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, and National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy. Pepper writes: "Out of this session, which focussed on the ever-growing combined anti-war and civil rights movements, decisions were made to mobilize the 20th SFG for special duty assignments in urban areas and for the 11th MIG to provide a new analysis of the intentions of Dr. King and his organization." The orders went out that day.

'Focal Point'

Pepper says that he obtained a copy of the actual deployment orders for the Alpha team from "Warren," one of the members of the team. Warren, a noncommissioned officer, himself did not know the meaning of many of the markings on the document, which a Pentagon source interpreted for Pepper. While the authenticity of the document is not 100% verified to the satisfaction of some experts, or to this reviewer, the document is highly interesting—in fact, even more interesting than Pepper himself realizes.

It is a Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) teletype, dated April 3,

1968, and references Cincstrike as well as the well-known "Oplan Garden Plot." It describes the mission of the team as "recon riot site Memphis prior to King, Martin L. arrival," to be further elaborated at a briefing at 0430 hours on April 4.

The distribution of the teletype included the Chairman of JCS, the Director of the Joint Staff (DJS), Secdef (Secretary of Defense), other Pentagon offices, and the White House. Pepper was told by his Pentagon interpreter that one of the acronyms, "SACSA," was "the FBI's Special Agent in Charge of Security Affairs."

As *EIR* (see June 12, 1992, p. 57-58), and the 1972 book *The Secret Team* by Col. L. Fletcher Prouty (ret.), reported, SACSA is actually the acronym for "Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities." This position existed in the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1962 to 1970, and, as Prouty describes it, this was essentially the CIA office within the Pentagon; it included the "Focal Point" system which was, at that time, a secret and hidden channel of communication within the military for the CIA. From the beginning of its creation in the 1950s by Allen Dulles, the Focal Point expanded to include a worldwide covert operations capability way beyond the CIA, both inside and outside the military, free of Congressional oversight, and which utilized private funding for many of its operations.

The assassination

The select 20th Special Forces Group Alpha-team members were deployed with orders to kill Martin Luther King and his aide Andrew Young. While "Warren" had Young in his sunsights, the shot rang out which killed King. Warren says he was ordered to disengage, and was never given an explanation as to what had happened.

Pepper's conclusion is that King was shot by Raul, not by the Army team. In his view, the operation had at least three levels: 1) James Earl Ray, the patsy, 2) a contract killer, Raul, deployed and paid for through New Orleans organized-crime networks tied to H.L. Hunt and coordinated with J. Edgar Hoover and Army Intelligence, and 3) the Army team, which was on the scene as a backup in case the level-two operation failed.

Most of the focus of Pepper's investigation has been on the middle level; in December 1993, Loyd Jowers, who owned Jim's Grill behind the Lorraine Motel where King was shot, confessed that he had paid the actual assassin. Jowers said that he had been contracted by two others, one from New Orleans.

Unable to get a new trial for James Earl Ray (who pleaded guilty in 1969 to avoid the death sentence), Pepper filed a civil suit against Jowers in August 1994 for conspiracy to deprive Ray of his civil rights, which resulted in Ray's wrongful imprisonment for 25 years. In the spring of 1995, Pepper located the man he believes to be Raul, and on July 5, Raul was served with a summons and made a defendant in the *Ray v. Jowers et al.* civil lawsuit.