

SS133.mp3

David Yellin- This is tape number 2 with Charles Holmes tape number two.

Charles Holmes- Criticize wrongly the city of Memphis I was afraid and I am afraid of yet might do as other communities and with draw behind the defensive wall of animosity to the rest of the world, the criticizing world. This would probably might be compared to the old Laissez Faire attitude, which is archaic now of course. You cannot have a let us alone attitudes. The state of Mississippi is an example of an entire state supported by its government that has in the past withdrawn within its borders and sought to stay there, they have suffered financially and economically. They are now beginning there are flickers across the state of progress, there are people beginning to come out of this and they will.

David Yellin- I mean this is important to Memphis because Memphis really is so much part of Mississippi it can't help it.

Charles Holmes- Well you know the state of Mississippi has claimed Memphis several times in history, there is a boundary dispute. People still say that Memphis is the largest city in Mississippi and Faulkner said the Mississippi delta began in the Lobby of the Peabody, things like this. We are closely tied in. But as I say Memphis is changing it is becoming a regional center, a metropolis, a cosmopolitan center and it will be there. You have noticed a great emphasis among our city leaders, city business people to emulate Atlanta and that is what Atlanta has become.

David Yellin- Yeah even as of today June 27th yesterday this big thing about the chamber of commerce and so on.

Charles Holmes- Exactly and that gives you some psychological insight into the psychology of Memphis.

David Yellin- Ok now this is fine and you have had your background now can you tell.

Charles Holmes- Well let me quickly say that I graduated from Memphis state college in 1957. I worked for the commercial appeal for 5 years with 2 years out to serve with the army. Then I returned in 1960 to work for the commercial appeal and I worked mostly during those last two years as a police reporter either at night or during the day. So on the day after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King I found myself in this situation. I had an understanding that the police department was unable to cope with even the news media of Memphis and I knew that they were going to be completely over run by this out of town media. So I was concerned about the police department. They had 3 major duties. They had to quell the rioting that was going on in the city., they had to search for the murder of Dr. King and they had to plan for the proposed 40,000 person memorial march that was to take place on Monday three days away. Anyone of these three things are too much for the

capacities of the Memphis police department. At the same time as I have earlier said I wanted to ensure that the media of the world that I expected to come here would give a fair presentation of the city of Memphis. At that time, recall, the murderer, the name of the accused assassin was not known nor his whereabouts. There could only be an assumption that the man was a Memphian because it happened here. Well let me quickly, well I will give it in chronological order. I reported to Frank Holloman and he gave me a briefing of what I could tell the media. What would not hamper there investigation or possible prosecution, would you like me to give you just this it will take about one minute.

David Yellin- Surely, but is it your suggestion or his suggestions to what capacity you would fill or did you, or both of you knew immediately what...

Charles Holmes- Again let me back up. Frank Holloman had worked as director of development at Memphis state for a year and half and he knew what my capacity was here and he knew what my capacities would be there so I fitted into that organization in the same manner that I operate at Memphis state under an emergency situation. Now just briefly this was the first information that was approved and it was repeated many many times that first day. The murder weapon a 30 out 6 Remington pump rifle with scopes was found in front of 424 S. Main. It has been sent to the FBI laboratories in Washington for further investigation. The shot was fired from a bathroom in the rear of 420 S. Main. That is a distance of 205 feet and 3 inches. Other evidence was obtained at the scene and has been furnished to the FBI laboratories in Washington. Every resource in the investigation top bring to justice the individual responsible for the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King will continue, no further statements regarding the investigation will be made a this time. In comment on the riot situation. Looting and shooting continued in a wide area in the north south and west portions of the city. Liquor stores, appliance stores, and grocery stores seem to be the favorite target of looters. Shots have been fired at police helicopters. Three police officers have been injured at this time, this is the first day, in the rioting.

Carolyn Yellin- That was April 5th?

Charles Holmes- Yes the first day I worked. At this time which was mid day and these figures were from the night before, 89 people have been arrested in connection with looting and rioting, 14 were arrested during the daylight hours of that morning. No arrests have been made in regards to the investigation. Now at this point I would like to say I was assigned to an office a small office that was about 10 feet square which was the office of then assistant chief Henry Lux. Chief Lux was busy in the field all policemen were on 12 hour duty. Ordinarily they work 3 shifts they were working 2 shifts to give them additional man power. The machinery had been set into motion to bring what would eventually amount to 6,000 national guardsmen into Memphis plus an undisclosed number of state troopers and deputies and the reserve of Arkansas police was held in readiness. The news media that began to pour in I finally estimated that somewhere between 100 and 150 that I dealt with directly in the police headquarters and there were many more in town

and I have no inkling of the number of, the number or the origin of all the telephone queries that I answered. I do recall one from Hawaii, one from Australia, and from all over the United States. Now amongst the people that came to my office where, representatives of the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times news service, The Associated Press, Time magazine, The London Standard, The Australian, the Star Telegram, NBC, The London Times, Washington Post, a man from Yugoslavia, from Belgrade Yugoslavia who I could not understand except that is where they are from. And Mr. Hansen from Sweden, the St. Louis Globe, the Philadelphia Bulletin, Life Magazine, local media, metro media, CBS, The Chicago Daily News, France Press, Mutual Broadcasting Company, Esquire Magazine, United Press International, ABC, Newsweek Magazine, KYW Radio, another now we also, these were the news people. We also had representatives of ABC, NBC, CBS, who formed a network pool to cover the march on Monday. This was a problem that was completely separate from the news gathering. Night newspapers, Hearst newspapers, the New York Times, Nashville Tennessee and other local media. This was only a portion.

David Yellin- This was all here physically?

Charles Holmes- Yes in touch with me physically.

David Yellin- Now did you have anything to do with setting them up and getting them accommodations or anything?

Charles Holmes- I referred then to hotels but this as I say was an emergency situation, there was no time for any planning and the major thing I was trying to do at this point was to establish a locale, a location, where the media that were pouring in here in a panicked situation not knowing if they were missing a portion of the story were these people would know there was one office they could come to and get the latest available information.

Carolyn Yellin- A clearing house.

Charles Holmes- Exactly an authentic clearing house. One of the early questions that came up was one accreditation and travel after the curfew hours. We had no form or identification at the police department., I checked their individual press identifications and word was given to the policemen to respect proper press identification during the curfew hours. Only a few of the people that showed up did not have proper press identification or what I thought was authentic press identification and I told them that I did not think it would be honored by the police. These were generally stringers and I don't even know if they were legitimate I didn't have a chance to check them out. They had cameras and showed up and said they were representing various news media but did not have identification as such.

Carolyn Yellin- I am wondering people who wanted to get to the scene of the murder or talk with the people who had been associated with Dr. King. Did you have an arrangement with any of the southern Christian leadership people? Or were you purely handling, I mean was there some liaison between these people who were associates of Dr. King and the police at that time?

Charles Holmes- Not with me at the time. Later an association was formed with Bayard Ruston in regard to the march.

Carolyn Yellin- But he wasn't in the city that night?

Charles Holmes- No.

David Yellin- Just offhand do you recall any amount or whether any negro representatives of the press.

Charles Holmes- Yes.

David Yellin- Other than the negro press around the country did they contact you?

Charles Holmes- Yes, I am trying to recall specifics. I do recall, I am thinking of one time when we had the group that I had been dealing with met in a police lounge when we gave them the regulations that had been sent to us from the march leaders as to what they were supposed to do during the march. I recall there that out of approximately 60 or 70 reporters there were probably 10 negro there. Now I don't know if they were representing negro media or whether they were...I know there was some from Life Magazine I believe there were one or two negro there. I just really didn't have time to stop and think about it.

David Yellin- Ok, I think the best way is to go on and tell it your way.

Charles Holmes- Alright. Let me see now. I will give a quick run down of some ideas, some of the requests that came in most of which could not be honored. The Associated Press that first day wanted to know and it was later the request repeated by other people, has there been a composite made of the suspect. Now a composite is the police procedure for taking noses and ears and things and matching them together until they have something that looks like the person according to the witnesses that had seen them. I told them no after checking. I told them no. Of course we later found out that they didn't need a composite because they had an identification and then later of course they had a photograph. Mr. Zim from Time magazine called with various questions. He wanted the nature of the Memphis police department injuries. He wanted the details on the police guard around the Lorraine motel. And let me make a point here, Dr. King had not asked for police protection when he came into town the police had on their own assigned some 20 to 25 men to the 3 block area around the motel just as a safe guard. They were mostly in mobile units, in automobiles and such, One policemen was actually looking at Dr., Martin Luther King when he was hit by the bullet.

David Yellin- Where was he?

Charles Holmes- He was on the street in front of the motel. But you see as he was looking at Dr. King and that of course would be one of the primary things you would have, his back was necessarily turned to where the bullet came from. There was a reaction time of 2 or 3 minutes of which the policemen in the area knowing the

object of their being there heard the shot and the commotion that followed and immediately reacted to the hotel during this time.

David Yellin- They ran to Dr., King rather than where it was from because they had...

Charles Holmes- Their immediate reaction was to get within view of the motel and his balcony. And during this time the assassin made his escape by going in the opposite direction. It is a normal thing to react. Now going on further here. He wanted to talk to the man that was in charge of it, he indicated from his questions he struck me immediately as he was going to try and put the knife in and turn it.

David Yellin- This was the fellow from Time?

Charles Holmes- Mr. Zim from Time magazine. How many people were detained he asked, what about the binoculars found there, he wanted details on fingerprints and where they were purchased and such, what other evidence been found. What name had the man used at the hotel. Again he said he wanted to talk to the director of the TAC security unit that was around the hotel.

David Yellin- Now what is that?

Charles Holmes- TAC, T-A-C tactical unit. This is a new police concept that had been originated before this assassination. It is to react immediately with a heavy force to any violence in the city. It was very effective during the curfew hours and it operated in this manner. Basically operated in this manner. You would have a white squad car with its lights on driving through some riot area. It is a decoy. Immediately behind it would be 3 or more black squad cars bumper to bumper with it with their lights off.

David Yellin- You are now talking about the color of the car?

Charles Holmes- Yes sir. In each car would be 4 or 5 people, city policemen, deputies, highway patrolmen, and national guardsmen. Heavily armed, shotguns, rifles, whatever weapons necessary to react. This parade that you would see, you would see headlights on bright and then you might be able to see one white car, you could not see the rest. If someone shot at it or made any overt action then they would be immediately met with approximately 20 to 25 heavily armed policemen.

David Yellin- now was this used after the 28th rights during that curfew?

Charles Holmes- I don't know. This TAC unit, a TAC unit killed one man. The one man who was killed in the rioting following Dr. King's death had a release on him here but I don't have him now. He was seen carrying a rifle in the shadows beside a liquor store. The policemen in the lead car as they spotted him and they began getting out of the car quickly told him to drop the rifle and come out of the shadows, he turned and ran. He ran several feet and then turned and he was carrying a .22 caliber automatic rifle. And fired a shot at the policemen, again you see from where he was standing he could only see the white squad car and anyone who has watched

or been aware of police procedures knows that there are two men in a white squad car. He turned and fired one shot, his rifle had 17 cartridges in it and apparently was only supposed to hold 16 when he fired the first shot and it ejected that first shell then two shells came in and it jammed. After he fired the initial shot fire was returned by 11 officers and he was hit 9 times by police bullets. They found 60 something cartridges in his front pocket. He was a 48 year old ex-convict who had the record of 3 or 4 arrests and convictions on various charges but all of them involving assault and battery and he had served one 3 year sentence in the penitentiary for assault and murder.

David Yellin- Is he a Memphian?

Charles Holmes- Yes sir. From that general vicinity. But the assumption was to be made that he was out to do a night of rioting, I mean of sniping. There was sniping all throughout the city at this time. Sniping and firebombing and looting stores.

David Yellin- Charlie do you know the ambulance that came to pick up Dr. King and take him to the hospital. Where was it from?

Charles Holmes- They had a fire station within 3 blocks.

David Yellin- Well there is a firestation across the street.

Charles Holmes- I don't know, I don't know Dave.

David Yellin- Is there any way to find that out?

Charles Holmes- Surely it is a simple matter.

David Yellin- I mean is this a legitimate request to make?

Charles Holmes- Sure, you could talk to the fire chief or Mr. Holloman either one would tell you there is no security there.

David Yellin- No that is the point we would see in our recording we are not interested in unearthing secret affairs as such we are interested in telling the story with as much detail as you know. So we want not only the fire, where it came from but who the drivers were. And then if possible how long it took them to get there and how long it took them to go to the hospital. So that we can have a minute by minute accounting. Is that possible to find out ourselves or can we call on your good offices?

Charles Holmes- I think if you call and talk personally to Frank Holloman.

David Yellin- Well we want to talk personally to Frank Holloman anyway what is your suggestion?

Charles Holmes- Well just call him and if he is available to talk on the phone then you can make your appointment then.

David Yellin- Well yeah okay you don't think it will be any difficulty?

Charles Holmes- No I don't think so he is very available.

Carolyn Yellin- When would be his least busy time.

Charles Holmes- Before this trial gets started.

David Yellin- Oh yeah. We want to do it sooner rather ...

Charles Holmes- You better do it as soon as possible because if you don't he is going to be tied up all fall. Now I am going to have to take a break in this interview here because it has run longer.

David Yellin- Primarily because we started a little later. But that.....Also you see because this is fine and what you have to say is very important and I think for the record can Dewey Pruitt have these things so we can make photo stats or if you want to turn them over or something for the archives.

Charles Holmes- Surely I will loan them to them to make photostatic copies of them, let's wait until we get finished with this project.

David Yellin- You mean when you get finished but you will promise it to him?

Charles Holmes- Oh yes I will keep these but I really I am involved in this other voluntary project.

David Yellin- But we will talk about that off the tape. Can I ask you one other thing and this borders somewhat on the detective thing, but for instance it has been indicated and mainly by rumor that there was watching from the fire house across the way, do you know anything about that?

Charles Holmes- Watching?

David Yellin- Yeah. Of the Lorraine Hotel.

Charles Holmes- You mean?

David Yellin- Before the murder.

Charles Holmes- By the police?

David Yellin- Yes.

Charles Holmes- Now I don't know specifically but I would assume that would be a good location though for the police to observe.

David Yellin- What would be your assumption or your knowledge as to why they were doing it.

Charles Holmes- You mean while King was there before the shooting?

David Yellin- Yes.

Charles Holmes- To keep it as part of the security I am sure.

David Yellin- What kind of security?

Charles Holmes- Trying to protect Dr. King because there had been threats on him.

David Yellin- So they would watch who was coming and going and so on.

Carolyn Yellin- The same as the policemen who was on the street and was watching as he was shot.,

Charles Holmes- Yeah the policemen on the street could have been at this firehouse I don't know exactly where he was.. but he was actually looking at Dr. King's face when he was hit by the bullet and thrown back.

David Yellin- Was it a uniformed policemen?

Charles Holmes- I doubt it. I don't know.

David Yellin- Would he be available to give, not to give, his description of this?

Charles Holmes- After the trial.

David Yellin- Not before because that is certainly some kind of security thing.

Charles Holmes- I don't know but if he was looking at Dr. King and it was an angle like this where the sniper was if he was looking at him and he saw him get hit by the bullet then he would look here and he may have seen the man looking out the window, I don't know.

Carolyn Yellin- This is important to have in the record both for our current research and for history is that the police record on this and the so that the picture of the police doing their job that was necessary to be done at that time, this I feel is essential to be in the record.

Charles Holmes- I think so.

Carolyn Yellin- Naturally you can understand that when you get into as many interviews as we are we are getting into rumors and this sort of thing and we must be able to check these out or else these rumors will go in unsubstantiated and uncontradicted and I think that would be very wrong and we are very aware of our responsibility on this and we need...

Charles Holmes- I think the police operation will bear scrutiny I think it will stand up well.

David Yellin- Alright now well we are going to stop this now with an idea of coming back and then you can explain your day....

Charles Holmes- My routine.

David Yellin- Fine thank you.

(Tape End)