

### SS355.mp3

Side 3 with Frank Holloman, August 14, 1973. This is side 3.

David Yellin: Okay, you said you wanted to clarify.

Frank Holloman: I want to clarify for the record my statement regarding responsible and irresponsible journalism. I feel that there's a place for opinions as I mentioned a few moments ago on the editorial pages, and in the columns of the people who write in the newspaper and which everyone expects that this is a person's opinion and it's so labeled. But as far as the facts of the news reporting is concerned, I think it's very comparable to an investigator, and I compare this to the time when I was with the FBI, a special agent of the FBI, that one of the cardinal rules in the FBI was that we reported facts and not opinion, and as a matter of fact in our training, oddly enough, we were compared to newspaper reporters. In our training we were told how to report. As a matter of fact, we were told of how a newspaper reported, sorted out and reported facts and facts alone and that his opinion was not supposed to be in the relation of his facts in the news story. And so as a result, an investigator when I was in the FBI, no investigative report of the FBI ever contained an opinion of the investigator. He went and interviewed an individual, he recorded what that individual said, and he reported what that individual said, whether it was good, bad, or indifferent, regardless of whether at that time the investigator wouldn't even be given the right to decide whether or not at that point the information was even pertinent because two weeks later it might be pertinent. So he was reporting facts in words. And I think that the newspaper profession, or the news media profession should do what they have been taught, which I think is the very same thing, to report the facts and then leave the editorial comments and so forth to the editorialist and the commentators and let it be so labeled. I just wanted to bring out a further clarification. Now, I'm not indicting the journalism profession, because I have a very high respect for it, but I do think it's contemptible to have an irresponsible reporting because after it's printed, after it goes out on the air, it's almost irretrievable, and too many people give it significance, probably more significance than should be given to it, and then later on there is no way to correct it in my opinion.

David Yellin: Yeah, you're right. I just have one comment on that that probably you've thought of, and perhaps you would comment on this. That the difference between an investigator or an FBI report is that the investigator gives a complete report, whereas the newspaper and television commentator must of necessity condense or leave out certain things because of time. And the tendency therefore then is to lop 15 minutes of testimony into a half a minute, and then you are almost forced to editorialize by selection, and I think that's part of it.

Frank Holloman: I agree, but I think that our profession is good enough, and I know reporters who are good enough not to editorially cut, but to be able to intelligently and expertly summarize both sides of the question and present a factual objective statement rather than using the editorial method of bringing their personal opinion in by cutting this, or including this, or omitting that. I think a good journalist can take the 15 minutes

of facts or words, and can accurately summarize them in one minute, that will give whoever's listening or reading a factual reflection of what happened.

David Yellin: Well, I mean apropos this and you did mention before about the local stations here and their fairness. I recall that after the assassination, WMC Channel 5 had a program 40% speak.

Frank Holloman: Right, I remember.

David Yellin: And I think their second program had to do with, maybe we ought to put quotes around police brutality, and you were given a half-hour to answer.

Frank Holloman: Right, right. Channel 5, I thought was very, very -- I won't say reasonable, I think they were very responsible in giving both sides of a question, which was at that time (muffled) in the minds of a lot of citizens.

David Yellin: Did you feel that was adequate for you?

Frank Holloman: Yes, I did. I thought it was entirely adequate, and I had my opportunity to express my opinion or to present facts, which I thought should have been brought to the attention of the public.

David Yellin: Right. Okay, now. I want to make a big switch in time, and then come back, because quite frankly I want to pay you a compliment that many people have paid you, including some that you thought were not favorably inclined to, and I would not, therefore, I will not disclose my sources. I would if you ask me. Many people have commented on the April 8 march in Memphis, the Monday after the assassination that really took place of the scheduled march, and was in a sense a memorial march, of your action in walking in front of Mrs. King. You recall this?

Frank Holloman: Yes, I do.

David Yellin: Would you care to just comment on why you did it, what you did, what your thoughts were?

Frank Holloman: Yes, I felt very personally affected. I was very personally affected over the assassination. I felt that here was a responsibility that was mine to protect life and property in Memphis, and here a life had been lost. Not only did I feel that way regarding the assassination of Dr. King, but during the time that I was director of fire and police I felt that way every time a person was murdered in Memphis, every time a person was assaulted in Memphis or raped in Memphis, I felt a personal responsibility because I felt that when I became director of fire and police that I had the responsibility for the protection of life and property in the city. The assassination of Dr. King was a very severe blow to me. I felt it very keenly personally, as well as officially. I felt that I would do anything within my power to see that there was not a recurrence. I felt that the memorial march might be a time in which there might be further violence, and I also felt

that the men of the Memphis Police Department who were assigned to the line of march and to participate in the march were also subjecting themselves to a great deal of danger, and I have always felt that I never have, and never would ask my men to do anything that I wasn't willing to do myself. I felt that possibly the very fact that I took a position directly in front of Mrs. King, which I maintained throughout the march, and this may sound corny to some people, but I actually was placing my life in priority to her life. And I felt that it would have been better if there had been an attempt on her life or those in the front of the march, that I felt that my body was protecting, I felt it would have been much better for a bullet or whatever to have been absorbed by me at that time rather than by anyone else in that march and that was the reason I was willing to, and I really felt it. I was advised by my friends and others not to participate. And I -- no one knew that I was going to participate, even the higher echelon in the police department did not even know that I was going to assume the position I did until I would say 15 minutes before the scheduled march. I knew the night before. I made the decision the previous night that that was the position I would take. But those who watched it will recall that I was -- that my position in the march I was trying to place my body the shield to Mrs. King and those who, the other leaders who were there in the front of the march.

David Yellin: Yes, many people have testified to this. We also have films that indicate this, so it doesn't sound corny at all. Interestingly, you said you made the decision the night before it. Did you discuss it with anyone?

Frank Holloman: No, I didn't.

David Yellin: Your family?

Frank Holloman: No, I discussed it with certain members of my family the next morning, and I was -- they implored me not to do so, that they did not feel it was necessary. They knew me well enough to know that they were not trying to persuade me not to jeopardize my life, because I guess my life has been one of which its been in jeopardy many times, but they felt it wasn't necessary, and I guess they did feel a great deal of concern. But it was only about 15 minutes before the march that it was even well known to even my family that I had made the decision. The decision had been made the night before and it was not until 15 minutes before the march that even members of my family -- one of my sons, Frank, Jr., was in headquarters when I announced that I was going to do what I did, and it was only at that time that even members of my family really knew that I had made the decision to do what I did.

David Yellin: In other words, you did not discuss it at breakfast or that morning.

Frank Holloman: Oh, no. No, no, no. They suspected that I might do something of that kind, but we did not discuss it the night before or the next morning as I say. And my wife, I presume, I'm almost sure I can say this, that my wife didn't even know that I was going to assume that position or to do that until she saw it on television.

David Yellin: They didn't ask.

Frank Holloman: No, no. Well, at that time my -- over the years of my career in the FBI and so forth, we don't discuss official matters in our family, and we just don't...my wife and my family have never asked questions. They have not...well, it was just not the thing to do that we felt. That my job was official, and sure they're concerned about my safety, but we in my family never discuss business at home of that kind.

David Yellin: Well, that's what I want to get to, and of course in that way you've answered it and also gotten out of an answer. I think you've answered that business about the morning that you decided to walk in front of Mrs. King. I want to come back to what you've just said about your discussion, your life with your family. When you said you would announce it, you just tell someone, or did you make a pronouncement to a lot of people in your office?

Frank Holloman: No, as a matter of fact there were the chief of police and some of the assistants were in my office at the time, and all of the plans had been made, and I would say it was 15 minutes or 30 minutes give or take before the leaders were to go to the assembly point where the march was to begin, and I at that time announced that I would take the position that I did, and it was a surprise to them because we had not discussed it because it was a decision that I felt that I had to make and my being there did not change the overall strategy. In other words, Chief Lux was there, Chief Proctor from the Sheriff's Department were the two who were assigned to be in the forefront of the march, and I just assumed the third position, which didn't change the general strategy, except that we had three individuals, and I felt that my position there might be a deterrent, or it might add to the protection or the security of those participating.

David Yellin: Now, two things. Did you have any evidence or any information that there might be an attempt at Mrs. King or anybody else?

Frank Holloman: No, no, no. At that point I think the climate had changed. This was a memorial march, but at the same time I felt that here was the national attention was now directed on Main Street of Memphis, and I felt that if we had someone at some place in the United States who wanted to really dramatize the opposite views and so forth that this would be the even better time than the assassination of Dr. King, here was an opportunity for somebody to perform an assassination that would have been even more dramatic, here in the middle of a memorial march. So I felt that although we had not received any, it was reasonable to believe that this was a more critical time than we had ever been through at the time.

David Yellin: Now, how about threats on your own life?

Frank Holloman: Oh, I had lots of threats on my own life; telephone calls and otherwise, but which I paid no attention to.

David Yellin: But I mean on the march, here you were exposing yourself as a target because you would feel that there would be a response to the assassination of Dr. King to

get them.

Frank Holloman: Right, and I took that into consideration, that I was exposing myself to those who might want revenge you might say, misplaced revenge, but that didn't enter into...actually my personal safety did not at any time play a part in the decision I made. I never gave it any thought. I mean after many years in this profession, you really don't -- sure you think about your personal safety, and people who say that a policeman or an FBI agent is never afraid, and never know fear they are greatly mistaken. We fear. We have fears and always have had fears, but for some reason you say this is my job, when I accepted this responsibility I accepted the jeopardy of my life, and so really you take it in consideration, you take the precautions, you do all these other things, but then when the moment comes, you just go ahead and do it.

David Yellin: Okay, now to get back a little bit. Did you do anything particularly different than what you had been doing when Dr. King returned on April 3? You knew he was coming back with a question of a march and so on.

Frank Holloman: No, except for the fact that I clearly recall the detail that was sent to the airport to meet him, and that is when we got our strongest rebuff, was when he arrived at the airport with his people, and our detail that we had sent there, who had been instructed to offer personal security/protection for him and to stay with him. Their instructions were to stay with him at all times that he was in Memphis and to comply with whatever he desired, as far as his personal activities were concerned, but yet to provide this personal security. I would say that it would have been equal to that of the protection of the president of the United States, or some other celebrity of that type, to stay with him on a personal basis during the entire time. But it was refused, they were rebuffed, they were told they were not welcome, and so therefore we had to change our tactics.

David Yellin: Yeah, you changed your tactics, you didn't change your plan about protecting him. So, this is where you put the person in the firehouse?

Frank Holloman: Right. We put him as close as we could without -- we had been given to believe that, as you mentioned before, that our own purpose and our own motivation was spying on them, which was not. I couldn't have cared less, as far as the labor problem or question was concerned as I have mentioned and I want to emphasize that again. I couldn't care less because I wasn't taking stories to the mayor or to the negotiators or to other people as to what we were learning as far as what the labor leaders were talking about as far as settling the strike was concerned. It was strictly on a question of public safety and the personal security and safety of the people.

David Yellin: So, that would explain the fact that you not only had people looking at him, therefore, secretly because that's the only way you could get observation, but you also had a pretty large force of officers in the neighborhood, which would explain when after the shot, why there were so many officer.

Frank Holloman: Oh, they were within seconds. The entire area was surrounded you might say. Well, it was surrounded from that standpoint, but I would say that we had one, two, three, four -- my recollection is we had four or five tactical units within 1 minute of the motel.

David Yellin: Well, then of course this brings up the next point that I'm sure you've heard, and would you comment on the conspiracy angle about whether there might have been a conspiracy to assassinate Dr. King.

Frank Holloman: I don't know whether there was a conspiracy to kill Dr. King or not, but I do not think that the assassination was a result of a conspiracy. In other words I don't think that this individual was a part of a conspiracy. I think he was acting entirely on his own. I think that some of the responsible books that have been written concerning it have pointed out some of the reasons why he did it. Particularly, *The American Death*, I think he did, in my opinion I think that he did a very responsible research on it, and I think that I will have to agree with his conclusions as to what motivated this man. And I do not think -- there is no evidence, there has never been any evidence, and I am personally convinced positively that it was carried out by an individual without any conspiracy.

David Yellin: Could you add any more to what has already been told or known about the police activity after the assassination, the two cars that looked alike, I mean why there was confusion?

Frank Holloman: Well, there was -- oh you mean the radio. Oh I think that that was...

David Yellin: There were two white cars, one went north and one went south.

Frank Holloman: They were strictly hoaxes. It was strictly a hoax, in which some ham operator, with some diabolical sense of humor put that out on a ham station. There was absolutely no -- we pursued that I would say as vigorously as anything that happened and there was never anything except to substantiate the fact that this was a hoax that was being perpetrated by some ham operator. Other than that there was no confusion. A lot of people think that, and have expressed the opinion, that this took people, took officers from the area of the assassination. That couldn't be further from the truth. In other words, it did not divert any of our strength. All we were doing was listening to the radio. We were not chasing anyone. We never at any time diverted our forces in connection with this radio broadcast.

David Yellin: In this hoax, what turned out to be a hoax.

Frank Holloman: Some people said, well it was diversionary to try to pull the officers away, and that some of the officers were pulled away. That's untrue. We considered it from the very beginning as an unbelievable story because of the period of time and what was happening that it just couldn't happen that way. The speed of the automobile and so forth.

David Yellin: Do you remember when you first heard of Dr. King's being shot and so on? Can you recall where you were and what you did?

Frank Holloman: Yes, my -- I'll never forget the statement I made. I was in my office alone. We had been in court all afternoon, and when I returned from the courtroom about 4:00, 4:30, whatever time that it was, late in the afternoon, I went back by my office. And a threat had come in, a direct threat against one of our officers had been received, one of our black officers. So, for the next hour or so I was involved in trying to provide protection for this officer, and for his family to move his family and so forth so that he could be protected because there was to be an assassination attempt on his life that night.

David Yellin: Do you care to name him?

Frank Holloman: I would prefer not to, to name him. I don't think it's necessary, and I don't think it's pertinent to what we're saying, but that took my time for approximately an hour or so. Then shortly before 6:00 I was in my office alone. My radio was on, and I recall it was 6:01 when the first announcement came over the radio, and when it did I remember the words I said, I said, "Oh my God, not this." And then of course after that we went into action and we were busy then for two or three days, but I do remember my words, "Oh my God, not this." Because this was the ultimate that I had hoped would never happen.

David Yellin: Now, do you remember the words that came over the radio? This was an on the scene report?

Frank Holloman: No, no I don't. That's a matter of record, but it was whatever it was it was -- there was no question in my mind from the very first words that were spoken on the radio that Dr. King had been shot.

David Yellin: That he might be dead?

Frank Holloman: No, not at that point, no. No, it was not until several minutes later that there was an indication that he had actually been killed. And I know that for several minutes I was hoping, surely, surely he's just wounded, that he hadn't been killed.

David Yellin: Do you remember anything that you did specifically that you would like to recall?

Frank Holloman: No, I would say at that point my recollection would have been dull, not by time but by the excitement of the moment, and the necessity to put into operation all of our forces in order to respond to what had happened.

David Yellin: So you responded by reflex action.

Frank Holloman: Right.

David Yellin: Okay. You mentioned something about the Sheriff. Just very quickly, you worked together with the Sheriff's office.

Frank Holloman: Right.

David Yellin: Do you have any papers, records, that you would be happy to turn over to history at some time concerning this? Scraps of paper, notes that you made? Doodles?

Frank Holloman: Yes, I have all my doodling and all my notes, and all of the things that were on my desk at the time.

David Yellin: What are you going to do with them?

Frank Holloman: I don't know. That's a decision I'll have to make at a later date.

David Yellin: All right, can we record that you have them?

Frank Holloman: Yes.

David Yellin: Could you make some notation that in case you don't dispense with them, indicate to your family that maybe you might want to turn them over to history?

Frank Holloman: I think probably I would leave that decision to them, because I don't think that I will be affected by what might be done with them, and I have two sons that are lawyers, and I would say that in all probability they know my feelings, they know what I have tried to do in serving my country and the community, and I think that their decision would probably be better than mine, and I would trust their decision, so I would defer to their judgment at that time as to what was good for the community, and what was good for the nation as to the decision to be made. So, I'm going to leave that to them.

David Yellin: Well, I'll go back again and say, would you now give these to history.

Frank Holloman: No.

David Yellin: I assume that by what you said.

Frank Holloman: If you want to say why...

David Yellin: Yes, I want to say why?

Frank Holloman: I don't know, but for some reason I just at this point in time, I just would prefer not to.

David Yellin: In a sense, this is the final question: Would you make an assessment of



the situation in Memphis from any angle that you care to five years later? What good, what bad, what harm, what have we learned?

Frank Holloman: Well, I think we've learned the same thing that has been learned throughout the nation, and throughout the world as a matter of fact. I don't think this was Memphis. I think this was America, and this was society, and I think that it was something that a lot of people have been guilty, a lot of people have been falsely accused. I think that a lot of people over the years, and I'm speaking now of a span of years, I think a lot of people acted in what might say was good faith in what they thought at the time was reasonable and so forth, but then later on it reflected that it was not. So, it's hard to really assess it from that standpoint, but I do think that we made tremendous progress. I think that we understand -- people understand each other better. I think that we have become to accept people as people and not as groups more. I think we've still got things to do. I think that we have some challenges ahead of us, but I think that the challenges are not -- I will not agree with certain people who say there's a lot to be done by the white community. I say there's a lot to be done by both the whites and the blacks, and I think that the encouraging part of this entire story is that we have had black responsible leadership that has surfaced. I think for the first time, I think that -- and I know this to be a fact, I'm not thinking, I know that for a period that there was responsible leadership in the black community that did not surface for various reasons. They did not step out, but I think that when, as recently a black leader in Memphis steps out and publicly says on television and to the press and to the people of Memphis that the crime problem is -- a large part of the crime problem is in the black community and the black community has to do something about solving that crime problem, then I think that that is the indication to me that we're making progress, that now -- this question of racism, we have had racism in the past, but it has been black racism and white racism. We still have black racism and white racism. I think it's lessening, but I think that when we talk about racism, I don't think we should be foolish enough to say it's just white racism. I think we have black racism, too. I think they are blacks who just hate whites. I think they hold them in contempt. Well, that's racism as far as I'm concerned, but I think that that is lessening, and I think that we're beginning now to see people as people and not as groups.

**END OF RECORDING**