

Trial For 1964 Civil Rights Killings Delayed

Written by Robert ID931

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Reputed Klansman Edgar Ray Killen, his orange jail jumpsuit replaced by a dark business suit and tie, appeared jovial during a brief court appearance that resulted in his murder trial being delayed three weeks.

During Thursday's hearing before Circuit Judge Marcus Gordon, the 80-year-old part-time preacher was flanked by his wife and other family members. Gone was his strained appearance that was noticeable in court proceedings that followed his Jan. 6 arrest on charges of killing three civil rights workers in Neshoba County in 1964.

Gordon delayed the trial until April 18 to give lawyers time to prepare a questionnaire for potential jurors and to give the defense time to examine previously undisclosed records.

Killen, a former lumber mill operator from Union, is accused of orchestrating the murders of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman in rural Neshoba County. A 1967 federal trial revealed that the killings were part of a Ku Klux Klan conspiracy.

Defense attorney Mitch Moran of Carthage requested records Thursday from a tip line set up in the revived murder investigation.

Assistant Attorney General Lee Martin objected to releasing the information gathered by the tip line, which offered a \$100,000 reward for information.

"We have not received any information that we would use at trial," Martin told the judge.

Moran argued that prosecutors have no reason to withhold the information unless they are so intent on prosecuting Killen that other leads are being ignored.

"Irregardless of whether or not these tips are going to be used by the state in this case is

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meaningless to me," Moran told the judge. "But if the names are pointing to a different direction, I need to know that."

The judge gave Moran access to records of 14 calls to the tip line but stipulated that names would be withheld unless Moran can provide the court with a compelling reason to use the information in Killen's defense.

Officials have said they received responses to the reward offered by the Mississippi Religious Leadership Conference. The reward was posted on Dec. 20.

Attorney General Jim Hood has said all the information presented to the grand jury that indicted Killen on Jan. 6 was gathered without the tip line.

The Religious Leadership Conference was formed in the wake of the killings and has helped rebuild churches burned by the Klan. An anonymous donor put up the reward, with an independent panel overseeing its distribution.

The money won't be given until there's a verdict and appeals are concluded, organization attorney Wayne Drinkwater has said.

When the judge met privately Thursday with attorneys to discuss delaying a scheduled March 28 trial, Killen laughed and told family members that "they"re discussing whether to hang the defendant or shoot him."

Killen walked through the courtroom during the recess, smiling and shaking hands with family members before sitting next to his wife and stepson.

The judge rescheduled the trial, saying it would take longer than the few days first anticipated. He also said hotel rooms would have to be booked because the jury would be sequestered.

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"In this case, there will be a great number of jurors summoned," Gordon said.

Approached by The Associated Press after the hearing, Killen declined to comment, putting a finger to his lips and saying "Judge's orders."

Circuit Clerk Patti Duncan Lee said Gordon hasn't issued a gag order in the case but "has cautioned Killen" and others to be careful when speaking to reporters. Killen has had highly publicized interviews recently with Jackson television stations and a German TV crew in which he denied being involved in the murders or the Klan.

Lawmen are preparing for the possibility that the Klan or other groups will stage protests during Killen's trial.

Neshoba County Sheriff Larry Myers told The Associated Press that his office received a request on Wednesday from a Georgia-based Klan chapter that wants to hold a demonstration during Killen's trial.

"Whatever the judge says, that's what we'll go by," Myers said. "We don't have any way from keeping them from protesting."

Myers said the request came from J.J. Harper of Cordele, Ga., who identified himself as the Imperial Wizard of the American White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Inc.

Previous news reports identified Harper as the leader and sole member of the American White Knights. He staged a demonstration during the 2003 Masters golf tournament to show support for Augusta National Golf Club's right to an all-male membership.

Harper showed up at the tournament wearing a shirt and jeans instead of a robe, and showed

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people pictures of his poodles, Q-Tip, Biscuit and Tinker Bell.

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