

MAN LINKED BY POLICE TO DRUG KILLINGS FREED

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Thursday, October 11, 1984

Author: SANDY McCLURE Free Press Staff Writer

The man police believe is the leader of the "A-Team" execution squad for the Young Boys Inc. drug trafficking organization has been released from jail, the Free Press learned Wednesday.

Homicide investigators say they think hired killers working for the A-Team committed at least nine recent murders in Detroit, Highland Park and Troy, with the actual toll probably much higher.

Four of the victims were killed on Detroit and Highland Park streets since Sept. 16.

James Earl Butler, 22, charged in the most recent case, was freed shortly before 5 p.m. last Friday -- five days after he was charged with first-degree murder and a week before a scheduled court hearing, law enforcement sources said.

DETROIT District Court Judge Marion Moore dismissed the murder charge and ordered Butler released on a motion from the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, the sources said.

"We thought there was probable cause to issue a warrant, but subsequent investigation weakened our case," Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Charles Marr said Wednesday.

Butler was charged in an Oct. 1 warrant with gunning down James Harriel, 20, in a parking lot at W. Eight Mile and Lahser at about 7:45 p.m. Sept. 29.

A warrant request seeking to charge Butler and a female companion with Harriel's murder was reviewed and signed Oct. 1 by Detroit Police Lt. Robert Deane, acting on behalf of Homicide Section Inspector Gilbert Hill, court records show.

Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Joseph Koch approved the request, recommending that both be charged, according to the records.

But Detroit District Court Magistrate Vesta Svenson, who was asked to sign the warrants, approved murder charges against Butler only, saying there was insufficient evidence to charge the woman.

AT BUTLER'S arraignment, Svenson ordered him held in the Wayne County Jail without bond until his Oct. 12 preliminary examination.

But Hill, Koch and Butler's attorney, Donald Gratrix, met last Thursday to review evidence against Butler, a source in the Prosecutor's Office said.

The next day, a key witness to Harriel's murder was unable to identify Butler either from a live police line-up or from photographs, the source said.

Butler was released later that day.

Butler was the fifth YBI operative to be charged with first- degree murder since late summer.

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

Page: 3A

Index Terms: RELEASE ; JAIL ; YOUNG BOYS INC. ; JAMES EARL BUTLER; MAJOR
STORY ; SHOOTING ; DEATH ; JAMES HARRIEL

Record Number: 8402050577

Copyright (c) 1984 Detroit Free Press