

2D MAN TESTIFIES LIUZZO KILLED BY FBI INFORMANT

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Wednesday, March 23, 1983

Author: HELEN FOGEL Free Press Staff Writer

ANN ARBOR -- An Alabama Ku Klux Klansman tried twice for killing a Detroit civil rights worker 18 years ago became the **second** person in two days Tuesday to testify that **FBI informant** Gary Thomas Rowe fired the fatal shots at Viola **Liuzzo** .

Collie Leroy Wilkins, who was never convicted of the killing, testified on videotape in the courtroom of U.S. District Judge Charles Joiner. Wilkins said Rowe shot the 39-year-old white woman after a 100-mile-an-hour chase on a dark, rain-soaked Alabama highway.

"We got up beside her and Rowe rolled down the window and shot her," Wilkins testified. "He just stuck his arm out and shot."

Wilkins' testimony came in the **second** day of a \$2 million damage suit filed against the U.S. government and the **FBI by Liuzzo** 's five children. The suit charges the **FBI** failed to control Rowe, a Klan **informant** for the agency at the time **Liuzzo** was shot.

LIUZZO in Alabama to help with civil rights demonstrations stemming from a drive to register black voters in Alabama. **Liuzzo** was ferrying a young black civil rights worker between Selma and Montgomery, Ala., when a car driven **by** Eugene Thomas carrying Rowe, Wilkins and W. O. Eaton, another Klansman, chased them.

Thomas, formerly the **second** -ranked leader of the Alabama Klan, accused Rowe of the killing in testimony Monday. In cross examination Tuesday, Thomas, who testified he has become a born-again Christian, said he no longer belongs to the Klan.

Alabama twice tried Wilkins on charges of firing the fatal shots at **Liuzzo** . Rowe, who was promised immunity **by** the **FBI** in the case, was the government's chief witness. Wilkins' first trial ended in a hung jury. He was acquitted the **second** time.

Murder charges brought against Rowe **by** Alabama were dismissed **by** a federal judge who ruled that Rowe's grant of immunity protected him against prosecution in the case.

WILKINS, THOMAS and Eaton were charged and convicted with violating **Liuzzo** 's civil rights under federal law and served more than 5 1/2 years of a 10-year sentence.

Government attorney Ann Robertson said Monday she would prove Wilkins fired the fatal shots at **Liuzzo** , but both Wilkins and Thomas testified that Wilkins was unarmed during the ride.

At issue in the trial, expected to continue through next week, is whether the **FBI** was negligent when it recruited and trained Rowe to be a Klan **informant** .

Memo: SHORTER VERSION RAN IN STATE EDITION

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

Page: 10C

Index Terms: MAJOR STORY ; TRIAL ; VIOLA LIUZZO

Dateline: ANN ARBOR

Record Number: 8302040063

Copyright (c) 1983 Detroit Free Press