

The Commissioner



The Commissioner

A True Story of Deceit,
Dishonor, and Death

BILL KEITH



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*To the so-called “Dirty Five,” a.k.a. Shreveport’s
“Untouchables”—Police Chief T. P. Kelley, Chief of Detectives
Kenneth Lanigan, Detective Major James Byrd,
Detective Captain Sam Burns, and Detective Lieutenant Robert
Merolla—all former policemen who many years ago saved
the City of Shreveport from the tyrannical rule of a dangerous
lawman and the specter of organized crime.*



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*The price good men pay for indifference to
public affairs is to be ruled by evil men.*
—Plato



Prologue

A gentle breeze carried wave after wave of warm air across the state capital from the quiet waters of the Mississippi River as the legendary river, powerful and beautiful, made its way through the city on its long journey to the sea.

The streets of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, were virtually deserted in the early morning hours of July 9, 1976, as Jim Leslie, a young advertising executive from Shreveport, drove toward the historic old Prince Murat Inn only blocks away. He was tired and fighting sleep to stay awake. It had been a long day.

When he turned off Nicholson Drive into the rear parking lot of the Prince Murat, he saw only one vacant parking space near an old six-foot wooden fence, with several strands of barbed wire around the top, almost hidden in the darkness. He parked and locked his car and walked toward the back entrance of the motel.

Two men lurked in the shadows behind the wooden fence. One of them aimed a twelve-gauge shotgun, loaded with OO buckshot, through a crack in the fence and shot Leslie in the back. He reeled to one side and fell face down to the asphalt parking lot and was dead before he hit the ground.

As blood inched slowly around his body and turned a small portion of the parking lot crimson red, the two assassins jumped into a car, wrapped the shotgun in a blanket, and disappeared into the dark night.



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