

EYES ONLY

The Attorney General

July 11, 1968

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Assistant Attorney General  
Criminal Division

James Earl Ray

This is an interim report on plans being formulated for the transportation of James Earl Ray from the time we get custody in England until he is turned over to authorities in Shelby County, Tennessee. This is in the form of an interim report for we are still actively working on several aspects of the plan. I would suggest that only you, myself and Tully be aware of these plans here in the Department, and Mr. Rosen of the FBI has told me that only those persons in the Bureau necessary to the plan will be acquainted with it.

1. Aircraft - I discussed our requirements with Secretary of the Air Force Brown who designated John Steadman, General Counsel of Air Force, as the person responsible for working out the details. I have conferred with Mr. Steadman and Col. Burleson, who has operational command of the Special Air Missions force. S.A.M. has available five C-135 aircraft, a transport version of the Boeing 707, which can fly non-stop from London to Memphis with five hours of reserve cruising time. The trip from London to Memphis in one of these planes will take approximately 10 hours. This plane can easily land at the Memphis Naval Air Station, but there are only two airports near London from which it can take off-- Heathrow, the commercial air field and Mildenhall, a military field about 60 miles from London. Regardless of which air field is used, there will be necessity for security measures between Wandsworth Prison and the airport, and Heathrow, the commercial airport, would pose many additional security problems. Therefore, my recommendation is that the military airport be used, even though it means an additional 40 minutes of road travel. The Air Force will need 24-hours notice and proposes to fly a C-135 from Andrews Air Force Base to the military airport near London with a double crew on board (approximately 14 men). They propose to have an acceptable cover story for their flight and will land near London approximately two hours before the anticipated trip back, which will give them adequate time to refuel and service the plane. The crew will be chosen at the last minute from approximately 110 airmen, all of whom have Top Secret clearance. The crew will not know the purpose of the mission.

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At the London end, only Major General Lawrence S. Lightner, Commanding General of the Third Air Force, South Ruislip, London, and one aide of his will be advised of the mission. Gen. Lightner is in Washington and will be briefed by the General Counsel of the Air Force prior to his departure for London late this week. John Minnick, Legal Attache at our Embassy in London is to contact Gen. Lightner some time the week of July 15 in order to work out such details as the need to be met at the gate of the military base and escorted directly to the aircraft.

The plane itself appears to be ideally suited for this sort of mission. The crew quarters and bunks are forward and the aft compartment seats 16 persons. The only problem is the presence of the galley at the rear of the aircraft which will necessitate one or two stewards going through the aft compartment several times during the flight.

On the return flight the aircraft will file a flight plan for an east coast airport, but will overfly that airport and proceed to the Memphis Naval Air Station.

The trip should be planned in order to arrive in Memphis during the middle of the night. Optimum departure time from the London airport would be midnight, with an arrival time in Memphis of 4 a.m.

2. Exit and Entry Arrangements - The Air Force advises that it will probably not be necessary to have the crew of the plane processed at either end for they will not leave the military base in London. It will be necessary, however, to have the escort officers and Ray processed.

At the London end, the Consul General of our Embassy will issue a certificate of identity to Ray. The Legal Attache, Mr. Minnick, will make arrangements to have the escort party and Ray processed out of England.

At this end, Commissioner Farrell of INS has advised me that upon a few hours notice, he can have one representative at a place of our choice equipped to handle the immigration, public health, and custody requirements for entry into this country.

3. Ground Transportation - At the London end, Mr. Minnick will have the responsibility of coordinating with Scotland Yard and prison authorities in order to afford secure transportation from the prison to the airport. Depending upon circumstances at that time, consideration is being given to

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a decoy transport or other means whereby Ray's departure from prison can be camouflaged.

At the Memphis end of the trip, the authorities are only being told that Ray's prison quarters should be ready late in July. Bureau of Prisons representatives have gone over with me and with Shelby County officials detailed plans for Ray's detention there. These appear to be very satisfactory to all concerned.

The FBI plans to send one of the escort officers to Memphis some time within the next week. He, together with the SAC in Memphis, will work out detailed arrangements for the transport of Ray from the airport to jail, as well as the precise place where custody will be transferred to state authorities (either at the airport or at the jail).

4. Personnel

A. Escort party - At present, plans call for the escort party to consist of 4 FBI agents, with Mr. Minnick in charge. One of the agents included in the party will be a gentleman who is thoroughly familiar with the entire investigation.

B. Physician - The Air Force will furnish a flight surgeon for the flight. He will give Ray a physical as soon as the aircraft is boarded and in turn will examine him just prior to surrender of custody to state authorities in Memphis.

C. Aircrew - As previously stated, approximately 14 persons will be selected to crew the plane out of a pool of 110 men at Andrews. In the nature of things these men cannot be selected until we give the 24-hour notice required by the Air Force. This means that the crew cannot be given a comprehensive security check, but this appears to be balanced off by the fact that all have Top Secret clearance and none will know the nature of the mission until just before the plane takes off from London for the return trip.

5. Miscellaneous

A. Food - Food required on the aircraft for the trip from London will be supplied by Mr. Minnick, Legal Attache, for Ray and the escort party. There will be no cutlery and only paper plates, paper cups, etc., will be used.

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B. Restraining Devices - These will be used. The FBI tentatively tells me they plan to use handcuffs, leg irons and a lead chain. Furthermore, Ray will never be out of the sight or reach of at least two of the escort party.

C. Escort Party - The names of the escort party must be furnished to the State Department for inclusion within a letter from our Ambassador in London to the Home Office just prior to the final execution of the extradition order.

D. Clothing and Search of Ray - Mr. Minnick, Legal Attache, will be responsible for furnishing a complete change of clothes for Ray. He will be stripped entirely of his present clothing upon boarding the aircraft, will be strip searched, and will be given the new clothing for the trip back. Mr. Minnick will arrange to receipt for any personal belongings with the prison authorities in London and in turn will obtain a receipt when custody is surrendered in Memphis. He will also have a document signed by the state authorities in Memphis acknowledging receipt of custody of Ray.

E. Arrangements with Memphis Naval Air Station - No advanced notice need be given to the Air Station of the intent to land there. Depending upon arrangements for transfer of custody and transport of the prisoner from the Air Station to the jail in Memphis, however, it may be necessary to liaison (just in advance of the landing) with the Commanding Officer of the Air Station.

F. Extradition Order - The last formality in the extradition process is the signing of a formal order by the Home Secretary in England. I intend to take up with him, either personally or through the Embassy, the possibility of this order being executed late one evening following which the transfer of custody can be made, with no publicity being accorded the order until the following day, when presumably the prisoner will be safely in Shelby County.

G. Press - There should be absolute secrecy with respect to our plans and our timing. With luck, we can get away from London without public knowledge. If there should be a leak, we can still maintain the security of the trip between the prison in London and Mildenhall airport. There have already been inquiries of the Department and of the Embassy by the press and these have been handled with a "no comment". However, we should prepare, well in advance, a press release, as to which we can fill in dates and issue a release once Ray is safely ensconced in the Shelby County jail.

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I have prepared only an original and two copies of this memorandum. I would suggest that you keep your copy in your safe. My copy is in my safe and I am sending the other copy to Mr. Hoover with the request that it be held closely.

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