

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

Grumbling Ray Goes on Sit-Down Strike, Refuses To Work

By LARRY DAUGHTREY

James Earl Ray, grumbling about his treatment at the Tennessee State Prison, has started a sit-down strike — refusing to clean hallways, serve food or paint walls.

The convicted killer of Dr. Martin Luther King is still taking his daily exercise, but

has not worked since Feb. 26. Warden W. S. Neil said yesterday.

RAY ALSO has written a blistering letter to state officials, complaining about the press, food and his treatment in general. In the letter, he threatened to return to federal court to continue his battle against solitary confinement.

The work and recreation program for Ray was ordered by U.S. Dist. Judge William C. Miller after a January hearing here. The plan called for Ray to paint the interior of the maximum security building, help serve food to other prisoners and keep the canteen clean.

Miller said when he was out of his cell, Ray was moved around out of the building. Miller said Ray, "I can understand how he interrupted the program and had to be in the corridors. The rest of the other prisoners were out."

"HE DID a lot of painting before he quit. Our maintenance engineer tells me he did a good job."

Ray's nine-page letter, apparently written the week before he quit work, went to Corrections Commissioner Lake Russell, Gov. Buford Ellington and the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee.

Much of the letter was devoted to criticism of the press, and particularly a press tour of the prison Feb. 6. When reporters approached his cell, Ray hid under a blanket.

"I TOLD Mr. Neil I did not want to see or talk with the press. It's been my opinion, this far, that anything

I might have to say should be said in court.

"I was then locked in a cell, the reporters were called in, and while the cameras were grinding away in a zoo-like atmosphere Warden Neil expounded on how long 'he' was going to keep me in

"After about 20 minutes of this the warden's sideshow moved on. Then about 10 hours later, while I was taking the daily walk, I was again taken to a cell for a repeat performance.

"THESE TYPE games have been the rule since my arrival at the prison. As an example, every time I enter or leave the prison the press is let inside the prison grounds. I am then chained up, officials

assume their junior G-men poses, with me in tow, while the picture crew goes into action."

Ray also charged that "distorted information" has been given reporters by prison officials, but did not specify what information he meant.

"I personally have no objections, or a right to object, to the press doing what they have a legal right to do. But let's don't try to fool anyone, we all know what these managed news stories and sordid pictures and newsreels emanating from the prison are calculated to achieve," Ray said.

RAY POINTED out that he had removed his brother from the list of visitors he will receive because his brother quoted him to the press.

"I thought you indicated at the hearing before Judge Miller that my isolation would terminate after the post conviction hearing in Memphis," Ray continued to Russell.

"However, if my case has been turned over to Warden Neil, and since head softening is no longer in style, I assume he will apply his kill you with kindness philosophy of doing everything for 'my own good' and proceed to hold me in isolation thinking my physical or mental health will become so impaired that I might make another Pueblo type statement or confirm some other fairy tale for the prosecution."

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RAY SAID he has lived under "fish bowl conditions" for two years and has had no trouble with other prisoners.

"In concluding, it's my opinion that, although I don't rate as high on the prison social ladder with some offi-

cials as molesters and stool pigeons I should not be singled out for any harsher confinement unless a judge and jury recommend such."

Russell said no decision has been reached on what, if

anything, will be done about Ray's sit-down strike.

"I'm sorry he doesn't like the warden," Russell said, "but every prison has to have one, and the prisoners don't elect him."