

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

**Now Caretaker of C-Block at Brushy Mountain Prison**

**James Earl Ray Comes Out of Solitary Confinement**

PETROS, Tenn. — (UPI) — After almost two years of solitary confinement, the convicted slayer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has been allowed to become a part of prison society.

James Earl Ray is caretaker of C-block at Brushy Mountain Prison, the state's maximum security institution.

Brushy Mountain, a brick fortress hidden among East Tennessee's Cumberland

foothills, has been Ray's home for two weeks.

It is only the latest stop in a tumultuous two-year journey for Ray since King, struck by a 30.06 deer rifle slug, slumped to the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

Now 42 years old, Ray is a thinner man and pale from living in the dark shadows of solitary confinement in the state penitentiary at Nashville. He doesn't talk much, guards at the prison say.

His job is to sweep and clean the cellblock and pass out tin plates of food to transient prisoners being transferred to Nashville. The warden calls him a "roustabout."

His fellow inmates are the first men Ray has been allowed to associate with, other than attorneys, prison authorities and interviewers, in two years. Warden Lewis Tollett insists he's just another prisoner.

"The name James Earl Ray doesn't mean anything to me," he said.

One of Ray's two attorneys, Richard Ryan of Memphis, says a new appeal is in preparation to bring his client back to court and tell what he knows about King's slaying.

Ray didn't get that chance on March 10, 1969, when trial attorney Percy Foreman of Houston, Tex., advised him to plead guilty in exchange

for a 99-year sentence.

The next day he was in the state prison at Nashville, writing Criminal Court Judge W. Preston Battle that he wanted a new trial.

The letter was to be the first in two years of consistent legal defeats for Ray, marked by his angered and passionate letters asking another chance to be heard and by the recurring specter of a conspiracy.

Ray never won his retrial

motion. Judge Battle died before he could make a ruling on the request, and the state Supreme Court finally killed it in a caustic opinion which said "he made the bargain."

In 32 years, when he is 74, Ray will be eligible for parole. But his attorney has more immediate plans. "If we get this appeal," Ryan says, "He will come home a free man."

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