

APR 20 1968

HOW MANY 'GALTS'? WITNESSES DIFFER

Three Earlier Descriptions of Suspect Vary Widely

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Special to The New York Times

BIRMINGHAM, Ala., April 19—The descriptions given the police and the F.B.I. of the assassin of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. have varied so widely it appears that as many as four men may have been under suspicion.

A source in the Justice Department said that credible witnesses in Memphis and in Birmingham who saw Eric Starvo Galt, now identified as James Earl Ray, the accused murderer of Dr. King, seemed to be describing different men.

This, observers believe, is why the Federal Bureau of Investigation changed its view and decided that death of the civil rights leader may have resulted from a conspiracy.

Shortly after the murder, Attorney General Ramsey Clark said that there was no evidence of a conspiracy.

Before the bulletin on Ray, there were at least three separate descriptions from witnesses who had known a Galt in the last six months.

Galt had been described as follows:

GA long-nosed man in his late 20's who was seen in a Memphis rooming house from which the shot was fired that killed Dr. King April 4.

GA 30-year-old quiet-spoken man who talked about the weather at a Birmingham rooming house last fall.

GA 36-year-old "avid dancer" who bought a rifle in Birmingham and who took dancing lessons in New Orleans at the time James Earl Ray was imprisoned in Missouri.

Ray Is Described

James Earl Ray, a five-time convict, was described by the F.B.I. as being 40 years old, 5 feet 10 inches tall, 163 to 174 pounds, with blue eyes and brown hair. He has a scar in the center of his forehead and on the palm of his right hand.

The witnesses who saw a Galt at a Memphis rooming house the day Dr. King was slain said that he was 5 feet 11 inches or 6 feet tall, slender,

165 pounds, with sandy hair. The highest estimate of his age was 32 years, the lowest 26. He was said to have a long pointed nose and a Southern accent.

At a Birmingham rooming house where a Galt lived for six weeks last fall, he was described as being 5 feet 10 inches tall, 175 pounds, with brown hair and a slightly Southern accent. He was described as being about 30 years old.

The first F.B.I. description of Galt, which came principally from a gun dealer in Birmingham, from whom a Galt bought a rifle, and a gun dealer in Memphis, from whom he bought a pair of binoculars, was not precise.

The description, which was released Wednesday night, said that Galt was between 5 feet 8 inches and 5 feet 11 inches tall, weighed 160 to 175 pounds, was of medium build, and had brown hair and blue eyes.

A 'Rural' Accent

His birth date was given as July 20, 1931, a date that the bureau apparently got from an application that a Galt had made for an Alabama driver's license. The bureau said that Galt's voice had a "rural" accent.

Newsmen showed copies of a picture released Wednesday of Galt to the people who had seen him in Birmingham and in Memphis.

Almost every witness said that the picture did not resemble Galt.

Two developments have tended to bolster the speculation that more than one man used the name Eric Starvo Galt.

On March 1, 1968, an Eric Galt telephoned the Alabama Highway Patrol to ask for a duplicate copy of the driver's license he got in September of 1967. The copy was mailed to a Birmingham address and a bill for 25 cents that was enclosed with the duplicate was returned to Montgomery on March 6 with the 25 cents.

The F.B.I. had said that Galt had been in California during this time.

In its bulletin describing Galt as an avid dancer, the F.B.I. said that he had taken dancing lessons in New Orleans in 1964 and 1965.

Today's bulletin said that Galt, under the name James Earl Ray, had been in prison in Missouri from 1960 until he escaped in April, 1967.

No Mention of Brother

It did not mention Galt's "alleged brother," who the F.B.I. had said entered into a conspiracy with Galt in Birmingham on March 29, 1968, to deprive Dr. King of his civil rights.

Statements by officials of the Justice Department have indicated confusion within the F. B. I.

The day after the assassination, Attorney General Ramsey Clark said that there was no conspiracy to kill Dr. King. He repeated this assertion three days after the slaying and again the following day.

Last Wednesday, the F. B. I. charged that Galt had "conspired" with an "alleged brother" to violate Dr. King's civil rights by injuring him.

On several occasions, the bureau has been reported as knowing the identity of the killer

and being close to arresting him. On April 7, for instance, Mr. Clark said that the killer was "on the run" many miles from Memphis with F. B. I. agents close behind him.

A poster from the Missouri authorities stated that Ray's grandmother, Mrs. Mary Maher, and a brother John lived in St. Louis, while another brother, Jerry, resided in Wheeling, Ill.

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APR 20 1968
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