

Ray's Prison Record Gives Little Light

By a Staff Correspondent of the Post-Dispatch

JEFFERSON CITY, April 23 — James Earl Ray said and did little in seven years of confinement at the Missouri Penitentiary here that would indicate a motive in his alleged conspiracy in the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King.

"He had never shown the least interest one way or another in race," said Fred T. Wilkinson, director of corrections. "Ray was indifferent to people around him and, in many ways, just a nonentity."

Ray escaped from the prison April 23, 1967, after serving seven years of a 20-year sentence for two armed robberies and automobile theft in St. Louis. Prior to his escape, in a bread truck, Ray had made two unsuccessful attempts.

Two Minor Infractions

Aside from those two attempts, in 1961 and 1966, Ray's prison record showed two infractions, both minor. He was disciplined for trying on one occasion to smuggle contraband cigarettes and other items to a fellow inmate in the hospital.

Another time, he refused to work in the vegetable room, saying there was "too much horseplaying" among prisoners assigned there.

Warden Harold R. Swenson said that no representative of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which has placed Ray on its list of most wanted fugitives, had come to the prison to examine Ray's records or to interview inmates who knew him.

Swenson noted that "none of the inmates gave us any feedback after the first pictures of Ray were published in newspapers."

"They usually talk about an inmate after he's done some-

thing," he said. "They really blab about it. But while he's doing something, you don't hear a word."

'Too Tight to Gamble'

One prisoner who purports to have "run around" with Ray behind the gray walls of the prison said: "Jim didn't drink, except a little prison home brew. He never talked about himself very much and never expressed any liking for music or dancing and he was too tight to gamble."

Another inmate who said that he had known Ray "about as well as anybody" remarked that Ray was "not a violent guy" and never expressed racial hatred.

"I just couldn't believe it myself. If the man (Ray) did kill that man (the Rev. Dr. King) it had to be for money. He didn't seem like the kind of guy who would kill anybody. He was the type of guy you didn't fool with, but he didn't fool with anybody."

The inmate was shown a photograph of a man first identified by the FBI as Eric Starvo Galt. A check of fingerprints showed that the man actually was Ray. "Nobody thinks it's him (Ray)," said the inmate. "They think it's a different guy altogether. We think it's two different people altogether."

Other prisoners, the inmate went on, "say they're just trying to pin it on him because he escaped from here. They think they've got to lay it on somebody, so they're trying to lay it on him."

Ray was visited when in prison by his two brothers, Jerry and John. Permission to visit had been granted also to his mother, Mrs. Lucille Ryan and his grandmother, Mrs. Mary Maher, but there is no record of their having done so. The latter two no longer are living. At the time, all four gave the same address, in the 1900 block of Hickory street in St. Louis. Ray has a sister, Miss Melba Ryan, who lives in a Quindcy, Ill., hotel. His father is believed to have died in 1946.

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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