

The Greatest Manhunt in Law-Enforcement History

The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., last April, touched off a massive search for the trigger man. That search involved police in five countries. And now it has brought to bay a prime suspect

By JEREMIAH O'LEARY, WASHINGTON STAR correspondent

AT LONDON'S Heathrow Airport, last June 8, a Scotland Yard detective scrutinized the list of passengers about to board British European Airways Flight 466 for Brussels. One name leaped out at him. Quickly, he checked it against an All Ports Warning issued by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington, D.C. Hurrying across the terminal, the detective approached a nervous traveler wearing horn-rimmed glasses, a cheap sport jacket and light raincoat. "Would you mind stepping aside, sir," he said.

Thus ended history's greatest manhunt, the search for the accused killer of civil-rights crusader Martin Luther King, Jr. In its pursuit, the FBI spent \$1,400,000, deployed 3014 agents and logged 500,000 miles of travel. Police forces throughout two

continents joined the search for a shadowy suspect who sought in cities of four nations. They follow a tortuous, seemingly haphazard trail from Tennessee through Georgia, California, Alabama, Canada, Portugal and Great Britain. How they pieced together a trail of clues to achieve an arrest that is said would never be mad is the subject of one of the most riveting detective stories of our time.

Into the Twilight. It began before 5:30 p.m. last April. An ordinary-looking man in a dark suit locked himself in the bathtub of a seedy rooming house in Memphis, Tenn. Carefully, he unwrapped a high-powered rifle loaded with dum-dum bullets, hideous projectile designed to tear a fist-size hole in human flesh. The man stepped into the bathtub, raised a small window

9/19/72 Dear Jim, I figured you wanted me to read the O'Leary piece so when I got a chance I did. I guess we missed another one. We should have tried to speak to him long ago. There really isn't time to start investigating two years afterward, or to start lining up stuff for the habeas corpus petition two months after its planned completion. But we did miss what the Shaw decision makes even more relevant. Note this appeared in the Reader's Digest dated August 1968. That means it can't have been anything but handout-based. For O'Leary, on the Star, Hoover's favorite leading-reading, there was but one possibility. In this case it was not from internal evidence and, in fact, on the same basis, could not have been the prosecution in Memphis. All this stuff, good and bad, came from Hoover/FBI. If we can get him to say that and are refused for the defense what was used for propaganda, I think we score a few possibly valuable debating points. We have a few like this in reserve as it is, but let's add to them. However, the significance here is the poisoning of the mind before the possibility of trial. It has the world's largest circulation, RD, I think. This is the kind of stuff that figure prominently in the Shaw decision, RD, I think. Alleging it with this and the many others, beginning with Blair, who credits and we can photocopy the credits. JW

and braced his elbows on the dusty sill. Through an expensive telescopic sight, he trained his rifle on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, 205 feet away.

Suddenly the doorknob behind him rattled. "Anybody in there?" a roomer shouted. The gunman froze, and waited silently. Finally the intruder's footsteps creaked away.

At 6:01 p.m. Martin Luther King, Jr., walked out onto the motel balcony—and into the cross hairs of the gunsight. One shot rang out. Instantly, Dr. King was dead.

The figure in the bathroom covered the rifle, picked up a small bag and hurried down a dimly lighted hall. "That sounded like a shot!" shouted roomer Willie Anschutz. "Yes—it was," said the stranger, smiling. Moments later, a white 1966 Mustang sped off into the twilight.

Rifle for Cash. The hunt began minutes after the assassination, when an FBI agent in Memphis telephoned Washington. "Put every man who can conceivably help on the case," Director J. Edgar Hoover decreed.

During the first hours, Memphis police, searching door to door, ascertained that the shot had been fired from the rooming house. Making a microscopic examination of the bathroom, intensively questioning tenants, FBI agents had by midnight reconstructed the murder. "The guy we want checked in at 3:15 p.m. under the name John Willard," an agent telephoned Cartha D. DeLoach, Assistant to Director

Hoover. "He's medium build and height, brown hair. He might have a scar on his forehead."

Meanwhile, a block from the motel, police discovered a Remington 30.06 hunting rifle, a bedspread, and a blue travel bag containing toiletries and underwear, discarded in a doorway. By 5:30 a.m.—just 12 hours after the killer crouched in the bathroom—this expensive rifle had been inspected for fingerprints and was being test-fired in the FBI laboratory. Through the manufacturers, the FBI later in the day traced the weapon to the Aeromarine Supply Co. in Birmingham, Ala. Records there showed that on March 30 a Harvey Lowmyer had paid cash for the rifle, together with a telescopic sight and a box of bullets.

But there were problems. Fingerprints on the rifle were too indistinct to be of immediate use. And nowhere in the country did union rolls, tax lists, credit, military or crime records reveal anything about the John Willard who registered at the rooming house, or the Harvey Lowmyer who purchased the rifle.

Look Westward. On the morning of April 11, a housewife in Atlanta, Ga.—some 330 miles southeast of Memphis—learned from a friend that the FBI was searching for a white Mustang. "Why, I saw a man leave a car like that in front of my apartment the morning after Dr. King was shot," she exclaimed. "It's still there!"

The Atlanta police were notified.

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Later, agents made an inch-by-inch inspection of the Mustang. On a soiled sheet inside, an agent detected a few green threads—like those on the bedspread found in Memphis with the rifle. They thus helped link the Mustang to the rifle found after the murder.

The car offered still more clues. A *Turista* sticker showed it had been driven into Mexico last fall. Oil-company stickers pasted inside the door revealed it recently had been serviced in Los Angeles. And, finally, the car registration yielded the name of its owner: Eric Starvo Galt, 2608 Highland Avenue, Birmingham, Ala.

Meanwhile, a long shot paid off. The underwear in the blue bag found with the rifle in Memphis bore laundry markings. Determining which cleaning establishment—among many thousands in the nation—made the marks seemed impossible. But with help from the laundry industry, agents concluded that they were imprinted by a type of machine manufactured in Syracuse, N.Y. Guided by the manufacturer, they then ascertained that the marks probably were left by a particular machine sold to a laundry in Los Angeles.

Now two clues—the oil-company stickers on the Mustang and the laundry markings—pointed westward. They caused Hoover to concentrate 300 agents for a saturation search of the Los Angeles area. "We've found out that an Eric S. Galt took dancing lessons in Bir-

mingham," he told the special agent in charge of the California detachment. "So you might start with dance studios."

Sure enough, an agent located a dance studio in Long Beach where an Eric S. Galt had taken lessons last December, January and February. No one could remember much about him except that he was a shy, evasive loner. To one employe, however, he had mentioned something about taking bartending lessons.

On the Seamy Side. Immediately, the FBI began checking vocational schools. In Los Angeles, two agents visited the International School of Bartending. "Have you ever heard of Eric Starvo Galt?" one asked owner Tomas Reyes Lau. "Sure," answered Lau. "He was here about six weeks. Just graduated last month." Suddenly, an agent jumped up and pointed to a group graduation picture on the wall. "Would Galt be in here?" he asked. "Yeah," said Lau. "There he is." An FBI courier carrying the photograph boarded the next plane for Washington.

The face resembled descriptions of the stranger who lurked in the Memphis bathroom and the "sportsman" who bought the game rifle in Birmingham. Flashing copies of the picture, FBI agents now spread through hotels, motels, bars and rooming houses in Southern California. They established that Willard-Lowmyer-Galt had lived on the seamy side of Los Angeles from mid-November 1967 until March 17,

1968. Scores of people offered small but telling descriptions of him.

A prostitute thought he looked "kind of funny" in an overly pressed dark suit with starched white shirt, green tie, brown shoes and dirty fingernails. Another recalled that he had a "sweetly offensive" odor, the result of using large doses of sprays and deodorants instead of soap and water. He sometimes squinted and tugged at his ears. Shy, he had trouble looking anyone in the eye, and tended to stutter upon first meeting someone. He never seemed to have a job, but always could peel off \$20 bills from a large roll of cash.

The hunted man began to change from a shadowy figure into an individual. He was a heavy-drinking frequenter of run-down rooming houses and neighborhood bars. His attire, bad grammar and twangy accent suggested a poor education, and perhaps a small-town Midwestern background. Lacking any perceptible trade or skills, he well might be a professional criminal. He was not intelligent, but he was crafty enough to lie well, and to meld easily into the murky milieu of drifters.

A Single Fingerprint. Thus, by mid-April, the FBI knew a great deal about the wanted man. But *it still did not know who he was.* Alluring clues were leading nowhere. First, a bearded songwriter told of going along with Eric Galt last December on a trip from Los Angeles to New Orleans. En route, said the songwriter, his companion made a

series of unexplained phone calls. Acting on an FBI tip picked up in California, Royal Canadian Mounted Police located a Montreal apartment where Galt lived during the summer of 1967. There, he had claimed—falsely—that he worked at Expo 67.

Mexican police verified that Eric S. Galt visited the resort of Puerto Vallarta last October. They also found prostitutes who had known him in Mexico, and a man who remembered Galt's saying, "After I make a big score, I'm gonna come down here and live on beer and beans." Yet for all the round-the-clock effort, the trails simply evaporated in mystery.

Then, unexpectedly, the massive questioning produced another dividend. Making inquiries at a hippie rooming house, not far from where the Mustang was abandoned in Atlanta, two agents saw some letters lying on the foyer table—addressed to Eric S. Galt.

The agents left at once, for they wanted to do nothing which might forewarn the suspect and lead to a gun battle. The FBI was determined at all costs to capture him alive. Secretly, 22 agents set up a watch on the house, hoping to grab Galt by surprise if he came in or out. But, after 48 hours of futile waiting, Washington ordered them to go in. Galt was not there.

But he had indeed rented a room in the house. Left in it were: a portable television set, a booklet entitled *Your Opportunities in Lock-*

What is it?

1968

THE GREATEST MANHUNT

smithing and a collection of maps. On a street map of Atlanta were four penciled black circles, drawn around Martin Luther King's home, the headquarters of his Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the hippie rooming house, and the exact spot where the white Mustang was abandoned. Another map contained something else—a single clear fingerprint, the best one the FBI had been able to find anywhere!

But this lone fingerprint posed a nightmarish technical problem. FBI files include the fingerprints of 82 million people. Identification experts can pick out any given set within minutes if they have an entire set of prints. But if only one fingerprint is available, it is necessary to pull out each card and make an eyeball comparison with each of the ten impressions on it—820 million prints in all!

The FBI had to find a shortcut. From all it had learned, Hoover reasoned that the wanted man might be not only a criminal but also an escaped convict. So he ordered identification experts to pick out all cards bearing fingerprints of fugitives. Out came 53,000 cards—still too many. Thus, it was decided to narrow the search to cards of white male fugitives between 25 and 50. This shrank the number of cards to less than 2000. Now teams of the best FBI experts began the tedious investigation.

Born Loser. At 9:50 a.m., April 19, the search suddenly stopped. A veteran identification man picked

up FBI Record Card No. 405,942G, the 702nd examined. He stared hard at it and said, "I believe this is it." Crowding around, other experts looked. All agreed that the ridges of the lone print taken from the map in Atlanta matched those on the card.

A supervisor asked, "Who is No. 405,942G?" The almost instant answer: "James Earl Ray, born 10 March 1928, Alton, Ill. We have 19 separate cards on him. He's a born loser."

The file on Ray showed that he was an escaped convict often imprisoned for crimes ranging from forgery to armed robbery. By nightfall, the dossier was brimming with new reports being telegraphed from 500 agents combing the Midwest to recreate Ray's life in minute detail. They sought out his father, seven brothers and sisters, his former teachers and schoolmates, prison officials and fellow convicts—everyone who might know anything about him.

Aimlessly drifting with his family among Mississippi River towns, James Earl Ray grew up in poverty, sometimes living in dirt-floor shacks. He skipped school often. Friendless and scorned, he developed into a rock-throwing, knife-wielding bully and thief. His family disintegrated when he was a teen-ager, the children shifting for themselves as best they could.

Ray dropped out of school at 15, joined the Army in 1946 and spent 30 months in Germany. But the

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Army sentenced him to three months at hard labor for drunkenness and breaking arrest, then kicked him out as undesirable. After losing a job as a factory worker in Illinois, he turned to crime. At that, too, he was a failure.

He stole a typewriter in Los Angeles but dropped his bankbook at the scene and was caught. Fleeing from a grocery-store robbery in Illinois, he fell out of the getaway car when it made a sharp turn. After a robbery in Chicago, he ran into a blind alley, was shot, and tumbled through a basement window. He tried to elude a deputy sheriff in St. Louis by jumping into an elevator, but forgot to close the door and was dragged out. Twice he was caught attempting to escape from the Missouri State Penitentiary, where he was serving 20 years for armed robbery. He finally succeeded on April 23, 1967, by hiding in a bakery truck.

Now, relatives, bars, vagrants' hangouts, rail, air and bus terminals throughout the nation were quietly watched. Never has so tight a law-enforcement net been woven. Yet, as the days passed and every trail grew cold, the FBI concluded that he must have slipped out of the country. But how, and where?

North and Away. Hoover calculated that Ray might have obtained a passport by using still another alias. Since he broke out of prison, some 1,500,000 passports had been issued. But the FBI assigned teams of 30 agents each to go

through passport files one by one, looking for an application that contained a photograph of James Earl Ray. At the Passport Office, a block from the White House, they began work, laboring only at night so as to preserve secrecy.

At the same time the Royal Canadian Mounted Police began a similar examination, at FBI request. Each night and on weekends, a team of 12 young officers assembled secretly at the Blackburn Building in Ottawa. They painstakingly compared passport photographs by the tens of thousands. A dozen pictures looked enough like Ray to cause investigation, but each application turned out to be legitimate. By late May, more than 240,000 had been inspected.

Then on Saturday morning, June 1, one constable came across an application submitted by a Ramon George Sneyd. For a whole minute, he studied the picture of a man wearing heavy horn-rimmed glasses. "This could be it," he said.

Within the hour, two RCMP plainclothesmen drove to the listed address—a run-down rooming house in Toronto. "Sneyd" had been in Toronto only four weeks. The woman manager of the travel agency through which the passport application had been made recalled him as "a nebulous character, the kind of man who fades right into the wallpaper." Her records disclosed that on May 2, Sneyd had paid \$345 in Canadian cash for a round-trip ticket to London. He was booked aboard

the May 6 Flight 600 of the British Overseas Airways Corporation.

At FBI headquarters the morning of June 6, an extraordinary report was drafted: FOR EYES OF THE DIRECTOR ONLY. Just one copy was made and knowledge of it was restricted to only six men, so great was the concern to avoid any inadvertent leak. Its substance: FBI handwriting analysis strongly indicated the man masquerading as Sneyd was in fact James Earl Ray. Scotland Yard had flashed word that, upon landing in London, Ray, alias Sneyd, had switched tickets and flown on to Portugal. And now intelligence suggested that he was somewhere in Europe, possibly preparing to join mercenaries in the jungles of Africa, where the FBI might never apprehend him.

At Hoover's order, two FBI agents flew to Lisbon. FBI bulletins urgently requested police and immigration officials throughout Europe to seize anyone using the name Ramon George Sneyd. Then there was little more to do but wait, and hope.

At 7:15 a.m. on Saturday, June 8, the phone rang in DeLoach's home outside Washington. "The British have picked up a man named Sneyd trying to leave the country," reported the FBI agent in London. "He was carrying a loaded pistol."

At the dark, Victorian Cannon Row police station in London, two of Scotland Yard's top investigators questioned the traveler. The man insisted he was Ramon George Sneyd, Canadian. To obtain his fingerprints, a time-consuming court order would have been required. Instead, his questioners casually offered the suspect a drink of water. As soon as he put the glass down, it was whisked away to the laboratory for examination. At 11:20 a.m., the FBI agent telephoned Washington. "The fingerprints check."

DeLoach conferred with Hoover. Then at last the long-awaited, hard-earned bulletin went out to all points North America and Europe: JAMES EARL RAY APPREHENDED THIS DATE LONDON, ENGLAND. DISCONTINUE SEARCH. The historic manhunt was over.

Typographical Aid

A FEW days before the general election some years ago, the Rev. Golder Lawrence, pastor of the First Methodist Church in Phoenix, telephoned the *Arizona Republic* office and said, "I want to thank your paper for the error made in the story announcing my Sunday service."

A startled reporter gulped and asked why the minister was pleased if the story was in error. "My sermon topic," the pastor answered, "was 'What Jesus Saw in a Publican.' But the newspaper said, 'What Jesus Saw in a Republican.' I had the biggest audience for my sermon that I've addressed in many weeks."

—Dick Hyman, *Stop the Press!* (Hawthorn)