

Experts fail to pinpoint where shot that killed King came from

By Jim Adams
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WASHINGTON — The House Select Committee on Assassinations was told yesterday that scientific tests had failed to prove whether the bullet that killed the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been fired from the window of a boarding house or from the bushes below.

The panel heard that testimony as it prepared for today's appearance by James Earl Ray, who pleaded guilty to slaying Dr. King on April 4, 1968, while the civil-rights leader stood on the balcony of a Memphis motel across from the boarding house. Ray has since recanted his plea and now maintains that he did not kill Dr. King.

If a rifle shot came from the bushes, it would significantly contradict eyewitnesses' testimony and the conclusion of Memphis police that Ray assassinated Dr. King from the bathroom window of the boarding house.

The committee refused to say whether it could settle the question of where the shot came from, but Rep. Samuel Devine (R., Ohio) said he thought that hearings scheduled for November would leave no doubt that the fatal shot came from the window.

Dr. Michael Baden, a spokesman for a team of committee pathology experts, testified that measurements and a review of Dr. King's autopsy had established that the shot could have come from the window.

But he also said that a shot from the bushes below would have been only 2 to 5 degrees lower, and that the experts could not establish the direction of the shot so precisely.

"At the moment of firing of the weapon, the barrel of the gun had to be somewhat slightly upward from (King's) chin," Baden said.

But he said that Dr. King's head had been down as he talked from the balcony of the Lorraine Motel to a follower below.

The pathologist said that the autopsy and X-rays taken at the time clearly showed the path the bullet took through Dr. King's cheek and

neck and into his shoulder.

Two engineers hired by the committee measured the bullet's path through the body to determine where it had come from, he said.

But Baden said that even if the experts had had a photograph showing Dr. King's precise position when he was shot, their measurements could not have proven whether the shot came from the window or the bushes.

A committee investigator, who did not want to be named, said one witness would testify that someone ran from the bushes after the assassination. But he said that other witnesses had testified since the assassination that they saw a man walk down the boarding-house hall from the bathroom with a rifle after Dr. King was killed.

In a related development, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, a civil-rights leader, declaring that "Ray appears to be a small cog in a large wheel," asked the Justice Department to reopen its investigation of the assassination.

Mr. Jackson said, "There is overwhelming circumstantial evidence that he (Ray) did not act alone," and that one way to get at the truth would be a new trial for Ray.

Mr. Jackson met for more than 1½ hours with Deputy Attorney General Benjamin R. Civiletti, then told reporters that he wanted a new investigation to find out whether there had

been a conspiracy that might have involved the FBI.

However, Terrence Adamson, the chief Justice spokesman, held out little possibility that the department would initiate any new investigation.