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Prison Had Relaxed Its Security for Ray After a Court Ruling

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NASHVILLE, June 11—For the first three years after his capture in London for the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., security surrounding James Earl Ray, one of the nation's most notorious prisoners, was extremely tight. Tighter, in fact, than the law allowed.

But in July 1971, a Federal judge ruled that solitary confinement for Mr. Ray's protection violated his constitutional rights, and since then security has loosened, despite two attempts by Mr. Ray to escape from the Brushy Mountain Penitentiary. Last evening, he succeeded on his third try.

"Security arrangements for Ray were the same as for all others in the general prison population," Brooks Parker, a spokesman for Gov. Ray Blanton, said here today. "It is a maximum security prison, but Ray has always been watched closely."

Escape Appeared Planned

Mr. Ray was confined to a two-man cell, worked in the prison laundry and was accorded the same open-yard exercise privileges as the other prisoners. And although his attorney and prison officials expressed surprise at his escape, it was obvious from the mechanics of the enterprise, including the equipment used, the placement of the equipment and the diversionary tactics employed, that the

escape had been planned for some time. It also was apparent that security was somewhat lax.

For example, the homemade ladder, utilizing plumbing pipe, apparently was covertly taken to the open yard a piece at a time and assembled and hidden there.

The ladder then was placed in a corner of the yard about 100 yards from the nearest occupied guard tower and almost hidden from view from the tower. A closer guardhouse, which prison officials said was for emergency use, was unmanned at the time of the escape.

And the prison officials' intelligence network appears to have failed in view of the fact that seven men attempted to escape, six succeeding in getting over the wall, while several other prisoners were involved in a diversionary bogus fight to attract the guards.

The authorities were served notice of Mr. Ray's intentions two weeks ago when a Nashville newspaper with a statewide circulation, *The Tennessean*, quoted Mr. Ray as saying: "The only reason I am in a maximum security prison is because they know I want to get out."

Adding to the apparent laxity, there were no guards patrolling the outside perimeter of the prison, so that when the six men leaped to freedom and raced into the dense woods, they were protected from the guards inside and in the towers.

If Mr. Ray is returned to the prison, he will, however, face stricter security than he enjoyed before his escape.

According to Mr. Parker, Tennessee's Commissioner of Corrections, Murray Henderson, has said that Mr. Ray will be placed in "lockdown," which means that he will have no roommate and will be locked in his cell for all but an hour a day. That hour will be set aside for solitary exercise in a screened area near his cell. He will also lose his \$22-a-week job in the prison laundry.