

Assassin Hunt Focuses on Escaped Con

By TIMOTHY LEE

There were no apparent indications today that the FBI was any closer to apprehending the suspected assassin of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. despite its identification of the man.

The FBI said yesterday that Eric Starvo Galt, whom it earlier had sought in the killing, is really James Earl Ray, an ex-convict high-school dropout and Army reject. He is now the target of a massive nationwide manhunt.

FBI spokesmen minimized reports that a hitchhiker answering Ray's description had been seen about four miles from El Centro, Calif., last Monday and had told a local driver he was heading for Yuma, Ariz.

"We're not getting excited about this," an FBI aide in San Diego told the New York Post. "We just put out the notices of the report."

An FBI spokesman in Phoenix said the hitchhiker had not been seen in Yuma or elsewhere in Arizona.

Police and sheriff's agents in the Imperial Valley in and around El Centro and in Yuma also said they had been alerted by the FBI reports but had no reports of anyone's seeing the unidentified man.

The FBI said a "systematic and exhaustive search" through its fingerprint files revealed Galt and Ray—a 40-year-old drifter, loner, avid dancer and prison escapee—to be the same man.

In its first positive identification of the man sought for the slaying of King in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, the FBI pictured Ray as a man in trouble with the law since his youth, and one who "should be considered armed and extremely dangerous."

Ray escaped from Missouri Penitentiary on April 23, 1967, while he was serving the seventh year of a 20-year sentence for a 1959 armed holdup and auto theft in St. Louis.

Prison officials said a 1966

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escape attempt by Ray was foiled.

The earlier escape attempt landed Ray in a Fulton, Mo. prison hospital facility for a mental checkup.

"We gave him our Grade A, Class I workup," recalled Dr. Donald B. Peterson, hospital superintendent. "We found no mental disease or defect within the law."

Prison and police records showed Ray was born in Alton,

Ill., son of a laborer of the same name.

Records at the Fulton facility indicated both parents were dead.

The FBI said Eric Starvo Galt was one of a string of aliases favored by Ray in frequent brushes with the law beginning when he was 21 years old—several years after he dropped out of high school in the 10th grade.

In addition to the aliases John Willard and Harvey Lowmyer listed on the FBI fugitive warrant, the bureau said Ray also has called himself James McBride, James Walton, W. C. Heron and James O'Connor.

John Willard was the name used by the man who checked into a shoddy Memphis rooming house overlooking the Lorraine Motel, where King was fatally shot as he stood on a balcony and talked with friends.

The FBI has said Eric Starvo Galt purchased a 30.06 rifle in Birmingham five days before the assassination. That rifle, with a telescopic sight intact, was recovered outside the rooming house just after the assassination.

The FBI did not make clear where it got the fingerprints which it matched against its files to show Galt is actually Ray.

But speculation was that the prints may have been left in the rooming house, on the rifle or on a 1966 white Mustang—since impounded in Atlanta—that witnesses reported seeing leaving the vicinity of the shooting.

The FBI said the fugitive's acquaintances called him a loner who likes beer and vodka, favors country and western music and speaks with a rural twang. The loner tag seemed to conflict with the FBI description of him as an "avid dancer."

In more obvious conflict was the FBI's Wednesday statement saying Galt "took dancing lessons" in New Orleans in 1964 and 1965—time when Ray was still imprisoned in Missouri.

A bureau spokesman said the earlier Galt description should have said he "reportedly" took the dancing lessons, rather than stating flatly that he had