

# In Exclusive ENQUIRER Interview . . .

## James Earl Ray Tells of: The Mystery Man Who Tricked Me Into Taking the Rap for Martin Luther King's Murder

"I am the victim of a conspiracy . . . I was set up from the word go."

With those bitter words, convicted killer James Earl Ray admitted — for the first time ever — that he believes he was duped into taking the rap for the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In an exclusive ENQUIRER interview, Ray said a mystery man named "Raoul" had talked him into buying a rifle, then brought him to Memphis on April 3, 1968 . . . just in time for him to become the fall guy for King's assassination the following day.

"I swear I knew nothing about any plot to kill Martin Luther King," Ray said heatedly.

"At the time King was shot, I was three blocks away having a tire changed on the Mus-

**By ROBERT G. SMITH**

— I part-owned with Raoul. I was set up."

Ray, now 49, and graying at the temples, spoke with THE ENQUIRER in the library at Tennessee's gloomy Brushy Mountain Penitentiary, where he's held under maximum security. Outside, cold rain lashed the monstrous stone-concrete prison, which is built into the face of a mountain.

The air inside the library was chilly.

Speaking in measured tones, Ray — serving 99 years — told a fascinating tale of being deceived by the mysterious Raoul, whom he said he met in Montreal while on the run. Ray had escaped just four months earlier — in April 1967 — from a state prison in Jefferson City, Mo., where he'd been serving 20 years for armed robbery.

"I'd gone up there (to Canada) to try to get myself some false papers so I could get out of the country," Ray explained. "One night I was in a bar and I got to talking to this man, who I came to know simply as Raoul. He was a Spanish-looking guy with dark reddish hair.

"He was about five feet eight and weighed about 150 pounds.

"He asked me if I'd like to work for him.

"He promised me money, and said he'd fix me up with false papers.

"Over the next few months



**BITTER:** "I" was set up from the word go," says James Earl Ray, pictured in Brushy Mountain Penitentiary, Tenn.

he paid me \$9,500 to drive cars for him. I drove a 1962 Plymouth on trips between the U.S. and Canada.

"Hidden in the lining of the car were lots of plastic bags, which I assumed contained drugs. We also made trips to Mexico, using the 1967 Mustang.

"This is how I made most of my money while I was on the run from Jefferson City."

Eight months after casting his lot with Raoul, Ray said, he was "set up" to take the blame for King's murder. He said he and Raoul first drove to Birmingham, Ala., where, at Raoul's instructions, he bought a military rifle.

"I'd already bought one rifle, but he made me take it back — saying it wasn't the kind he had written on a piece of paper," said Ray.

"Then we drove to Memphis, arriving there on April 3, 1968.

"We checked into a motel called the New Rebel Motor Hotel. I assumed we were in Memphis for more guns, and that they were part of a contraband deal Raoul was handling.

"I dropped off the car at a service station (to have a tire fixed, the following day), and while I was waiting for the work to be done I went to a nearby cafe for a Coke." He then picked the car up without the tire being fixed. Some time after 6 o'clock he was driving back to the motel when he heard on the radio that King had been shot.

"I thought little of the matter at the time. It didn't concern me much. But a few minutes later I heard on the radio that the police were searching for a white Mustang — and the description they were putting out fit my car.

"Then I saw a roadblock.

That's when I panicked. I was a man on the run from a 20-year prison sentence, and my only thought then was to avoid detection.

"I drove straight to Atlanta where I dumped the car in a parking lot and rode a Greyhound bus to Toronto, Canada. Then I set about finding myself a new identity."

Ray said he randomly picked the name "Ramon George Sneyd" out of a newspaper, forged that name to an application for a birth certificate, and then used the certificate to get a passport.

"I used that passport to get myself to London," he said. "What I really wanted to do was get to Australia like the Great Train Robbers."

But Ray's romantic fantasy of losing himself Down Under never became reality . . . because, incredibly, he continued to be a loser.

On June 8, 1968, while returning to England from a trip to

Portugal, he was arrested by police.

"You see," he said, "the problem was that Ramon Sneyd, whose name I'd used to get a passport, was a Canadian policeman."

Asked why he later pleaded guilty if he was innocent, Ray charged that his attorney at the time, Percy Foreman, had "acted in his own self-interests and not mine, and made a deal with the prosecution." (Foreman denied to The ENQUIRER that he failed to protect Ray's interests. He said he counselled Ray to plead guilty and take a 99-year sentence because "there was no doubt in my mind, nor in his, that he would have received the death penalty.")

Ray, asked to explain how the rifle — bearing his fingerprints — happened to be found on the sidewalk near the rooming house from which King was shot, replied:

"Either he (Raoul) put it there, or someone else did. I just don't know."

Ray, who still has 90 years to go, said he doubts if the mysterious Raoul will ever be found.

"People like him, criminals, don't go around giving themselves up," he noted.

Ray's new attorney, Jack Kershaw of Nashville, was more optimistic. "We have leads (to Raoul)," he said. "I feel reasonably confident we shall be able to trace this man."

"I have reason to believe he is on the North American continent."

Ray was asked how it felt to be serving 99 years in prison. "It doesn't bother me," he shrugged. "After all, I've been in prison before. But I'll say one thing . . . I'd rather be guilty on the outside than innocent on the inside."

And with that wry remark he excused himself, turned up the collar of his jacket, and walked with hunched shoulders out into the driving rain . . . headed back to his cell.