

Ray to testify for panel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., will be the main witness this week as the House Assassinations Committee begins public hearings on its investigation of the killings of Dr. King and President John F. Kennedy.

Ray pleaded guilty to killing King in Memphis on April 4, 1968, and is serving a 99-year sentence in Tennessee.

However, Ray has publicly recanted his confession and has contended that he was set up to take the blame by a man he knew only as Raoul.

"We'll question him on his story and on what evidence corroborates it or disputes it," said Rep. Walter E. Fauntroy (D., D.C.), chairman of the subcommittee conducting the King investigation.

Security for Ray's hearing is so tight that only reporters and people who have been cleared will be allowed in the hearing room.

Reporters have been warned not to move as Ray is being brought into or taken from the hearing room. Metal detectors will be set up at the doors.

"We are custodians of a person on whom no chance will be taken that he will not get back to Tennessee," a committee spokesman said at a briefing.

The first scheduled witness today is the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, who succeeded Dr. King as leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

He is to present testimony about Dr. King's presence in Memphis and the events that preceded the assassination.

A pathologist is to give details tomorrow of the fatal shooting of Dr. King.

Ray will be at the witness table for the rest of the week, and the committee says it does not know what to expect.