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The Brushy Mountain State Prison, a maximum security institution, in Petros, Tenn.

Ray Known as 'Escape Artist' by Inmates

*Theft of Typewriter in '50
Began Criminal Record
Marked by Ineptness*

By MARTIN WALDRON

In his 25-year prison career, James Earl Ray had earned a reputation of being an "escape artist," and was a fugitive from the Missouri State Penitentiary in 1968 when he was accused of murdering the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis.

Other convicts who served time with Mr. Ray in prison have said he was constantly plotting escape. He had a history of bizarre escape attempts, most of which failed.

The authorities still do not know how Mr. Ray escaped from the Missouri State Penitentiary at Jefferson City in April 1967. He slipped away one Sunday morning while he was assigned to work in the prison bakery. The official version has been that he probably hid under loaves of bread being shipped from the main prison to satellite prison farms.

Unofficially, the authorities believed he had considerable help in getting out of the maximum-security prison. For several months, attention was focused on his brother, John L. Ray, who had visited James Earl Ray the day before the escape. But no charges were ever brought against John Ray.

Mr. Ray himself said he got out of a Missouri prison by scaling the wall, an assertion discounted completely by investigators.

Before yesterday, Mr. Ray had previously tried to escape twice from the Tennessee State Penitentiary where he was



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James Earl Ray as he was taken to Tennessee State Prison in 1969

... serving a 99-year sentence for the killing of Dr. King.

A high school dropout, Mr. Ray has been in nearly constant trouble with the law since 1950, when he was arrested in Los Angeles for stealing a typewriter and sentenced to 90 days in jail.

Questions on His Abilities

From the time he escaped from the penitentiary in Missouri in 1967 until he was arrested in England on June 8, 1968, two months after Dr. King was killed, Mr. Ray had led the authorities on a 25,000-mile chase through three countries, eluding them with an ease that belied the general ineptness he had showed as a criminal.

In his life of crime, he had once jumped into a police car on one occasion thinking it was a cab that he hoped to use to escape from the scene of a holdup. On another occasion, after robbing a dry cleaning establishment, Mr. Ray dropped his wallet on the floor and cut himself on the glass he had broken to get into the store.

This ineptness in robbery and his ability to escape apprehension during a long period of intensive search after Dr. King's slaying, had caused many authorities to believe that Mr. Ray was receiving considerable assistance from others.

After he had escaped from the Missouri State Penitentiary, he had gone to Chicago where he worked as a busboy in a restaurant for several weeks, and then had gone to Montreal. He later told his attorneys that he was trying to get false identification to be used to get out of the country. Instead, he said that he ran into a "blond Latin" man whom he referred to as Raoul, who enlisted him in a smuggling scheme.

Mr. Ray said that he was paid for bringing several items into the United States from Canada for Raoul. After leaving Montreal, he set up housekeeping in Birmingham, Ala., in the summer of 1967.

Waiting for Orders

Mr. Ray said that he was told to wait there for further orders from Raoul, and that on Raoul's order and with money furnished to him by the "blond Latin" he bought a white Mustang automobile.

While in Alabama, Mr. Ray got a driver's license, and took dancing lessons in Birmingham. In the fall of 1967, he left Birmingham and went to Mexico where he spent several weeks.

In the late winter of 1967-68, Mr. Ray came to Los Angeles where he took a course in bartending, and continued his dancing lessons. He also underwent hypnosis, and had plastic surgery done on his nose.

Mr. Ray had a long pointed nose, and a distinctive walk. Many persons who knew him described him as walking as if he were plowing.

In the early spring of 1968, after visiting in Louisiana twice, Mr. Ray went to Alabama, where Dr. King was involved in civil rights activities.

After checking into a motel near where Dr. King was working, Mr. Ray stayed a couple of days, and then moved on to Atlanta, where he rented a room on the city's North Side. In late March 1968, Mr. Ray drove to Birmingham where he bought a rifle from a marine supply store.

The day after he bought the rifle, he

returned it to the store, saying that it was the wrong size, and that his brother wanted him to get a rifle of larger caliber. The second rifle was the one that was found near the scene of Dr. King's slaying in Memphis.

On the day that Dr. King was shot in Memphis, James Earl Ray had checked into a flop house across the street from the motel where Dr. King was staying. The manager of the motel, a woman, later was unable to recognize Mr. Ray, but the authorities said that they found his fingerprints in the room.

After Dr. King was shot about 6 o'clock on the evening of April 4, 1968, the Memphis police put up roadblocks around the city, but Mr. Ray was able to elude them and drive back to Atlanta.

There he abandoned his automobile, and

took a bus to Toronto. He then obtained a false birth certificate. With this certificate, he obtained a visa for Britain and flew to London while 4,000 agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and thousands of other police officers were looking for him.

In London, he stayed in small hotels for several days, associating with no one, and then flew to Portugal. While in London, he had expressed interest in joining white mercenaries fighting in Africa, going so far as to call several persons whose names had appeared in the newspapers in connection with these mercenaries.

After staying in Portugal several days, Mr. Ray flew back to London, where he was arrested on June 8, 1968, the same day that Senator Robert F. Kennedy was buried.

Mr. Ray refused at first to waive extradition to the United States, and hired a former agent of the Central Intelligence Agency, Arthur Hanes Sr. of Birmingham, to defend him. Mr. Hanes flew to London where he conferred with Mr. Ray and then announced that Mr. Ray had agreed

to be brought back to the United States to stand trial.

Mr. Hanes had worked for the C.I.A. in the early 1960's, and, as security officer for an aircraft company in Birmingham, had helped hire and train the pilots used in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Mr. Hanes, however, denied that his former connection with the C.I.A. had any connection with Mr. Ray. Mr. Hanes had also been an F.B.I. agent.

The day before he was scheduled to go on trial for Dr. King's assassination in Memphis, Mr. Ray announced that he had dismissed Mr. Hanes as his attorney and had replaced him with Percy Foreman of Houston. Mr. Foreman then convinced Mr. Ray to plead guilty to the slaying, saying that the case against him was so strong that he would undoubtedly be convicted.

Mr. Ray agreed to do so, but on the day of the trial, after he had entered his guilty plea, he told the court he did not agree that there had not been a conspiracy to kill Dr. King. He later used this contention as the basis for a plea for a new trial.