

The King Suspect: His

By JERRY COHEN

LOS ANGELES—The criminal career of James Earl Ray, the man suspected of killing the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, began in downtown Los Angeles early on an October evening 18 years ago.

He tried to steal a typewriter from the third floor office of the Forum Cafeteria.

The assistant manager caught him in the act and scuffled with him. Ray got away—but not for long.

As he fled across a parking lot, an attendant heard the assistant manager's cries and grabbed Ray.

The two struggled. Ray broke free, but a bank savings book and his Army discharge papers fell to the pavement from his torn shirt pocket.

That happenstance, and an extraordinary coincidence, led to the first arrest in Ray's long career of lawlessness—a span of misconduct which allegedly reached a climax in Memphis April 4, when Dr. King was assassinated.

On Oct. 11, 1949, four days after the incident at the Forum Cafeteria, the parking lot attendant recognized Ray emerging from a bank.

He attracted the attention of nearby policemen, who arrested Ray and matched him up with the bank book and Army papers.

Ray, whom the FBI has identified as the "Eric Starvo Galt" sought for Dr. King's assassina-

tion, was given 90 days in the county jail and placed on two years probation by Superior Judge W. Turney Fox, now retired.

Judge Fox's leniency was based on the report of Deputy County probation officer Herbert W. Audit and the plea of deputy Public Defender Richard S. Buckley, who represented

Audit today is in the Probation Dept.'s Santa Monica office, while Buckley has risen to head of the Public Defender's office. Ray, who was unemployed at the time and broke.

Buckley, in appealing for probation when Ray appeared Dec. 30, 1949, before Judge Fox for sentencing, said:

"... I feel he not only is eligible for probation but that he is a fit subject for probation... this man is in a position to stand on his own feet, and apparently has done so for a period of time..."

"He apparently is thrifty, acquired some savings and also did fairly well in the Army. In view of these circumstances, I feel he is a good risk on probation..."

"I think you have a point there," Judge Fox told Buckley.

Then the judge turned to Ray and informed him that as a condition of his probation:

"I want you to stay out of drinking places and not indulge in the use of alcoholic liquor or frequent or go to places where it is the principal order of sale..."

Audit, the probation officer,

had noted that Ray "spends much time on dates with girls" and admitted to "occasional excessive use of intoxicants."

His remarks, and those of the judge, have an ironic echo today, since women and liquor appear to have played major roles in the subsequent life of Ray, who was only 21 at the time.

Audit also observed that Ray appeared to be of normal intelligence, was a Roman Catholic but did not attend church, attended movies two or three times a week and "likes to read magazines and common ordinary books."

Raised in Illinois

Ray, who had been in Los Angeles only two days when he got into trouble at the Forum Cafeteria, was the oldest boy in a family of three, Audit reported to Judge Fox.

The probation report also disclosed that:

He was reared by his parents in Alton and Quincy, Ill., across the Mississippi River from St. Louis.

His father, Gordon, died in 1946, by which time young Ray had quit high school in Ewing, Mo., across the river from his home. He got only as far as the ninth grade.

Ray joined the Army Feb. 19, 1946, got a general discharge—still a private—on Dec. 23, 1948.

He spent most of that time in Germany, and during part of his service career there he was assigned to the military police.

After his discharge, he apparently lived at home on his serv-

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First Crime

iceman's readjustment pay, and when that expired moved to Chicago, where he got a job operating a mold in a rubber plant while attending a TV repair school five nights a week.

He earned \$55 a week, but was laid off work in September, 1949. He remained in Chicago only a few days before heading for Los Angeles.

He denied that he had entered the cafeteria here to steal. He

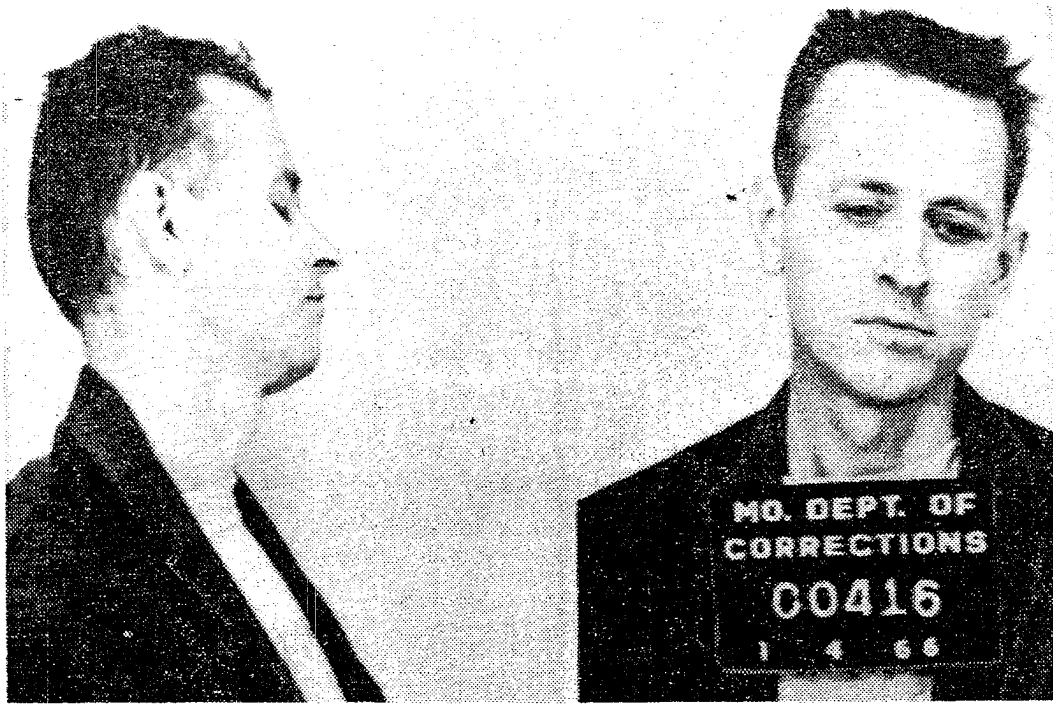
claimed he had attended a downtown movie earlier, then had climbed a fire escape into the Forum's third floor office because:

"I guess maybe I had some beers or something."

When apprehended, he denied he ever had been in trouble with the law before. A check of FBI files could establish no previous arrest record.

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These pictures were taken of James Earl Ray on Jan. 4, 1966, at Missouri State Penitentiary where he was serving a 20-year sentence for armed robbery. The FBI description of Ray: Five-foot-10, 163 to 174 lbs., brown hair, blue eyes, small scar on forehead and right palm, left ear protrudes farther from head than right.

Associated Press Wirephoto