

Ray's Jail Break—In a Bread Box

By JAMES DEWEY

James Earl Ray, suspected slayer of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., escaped from the Missouri State Prison by hiding in a bread box aboard a bakery truck.

The warden of the prison in Jefferson City, Harold Swenson, said Ray worked in the prison food service building and thus had access to trucks that delivered bread baked at the prison to prison farms outside. It was Ray's third escape attempt, Swenson said.

The warden said Ray apparently curled up in one of the large wooden bread boxes in which the bread was carried and covered himself with loaves. The box was loaded into the back of the truck and driven outside.

He apparently crawled out of the box and jumped from the truck before it made its delivery to a farm, Swenson said.

The farm later reported some of the bread was damaged and unusable. Prison officials presumed it had been crushed in the box with Ray.

Swenson estimated the escape took place between 2 and 3 p.m. on April 23, 1967. Ray's disappearance was first noticed at the 5 p.m. prisoner count.

On March 14, 1966, Ray was found hiding in a ventilator shaft while trying to escape. On Nov. 19, 1961, he tried to go over the prison walls by using a ladder. The ladder collapsed.

Swenson described Ray as a "loner."

"I don't think anyone liked him or disliked him," the warden said. "He had no close associates or friends."

Except for his escape attempts, Ray had a reasonably good prison record, Swenson said. He was reported only twice in the seven years he was in prison for breaking discipline. Both reports were for minor infractions, Swenson said.—CDN.