

Assassin's Trail

Fading Clues Raise Question of Conspiracy

MEMPHIS.—When the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed by a rifle shot as he stood on the balcony of a Memphis motel two weeks ago, police at first thought it would be an easy murder to solve. The killer had left behind an unbelievable number of clues.

Witnesses said the shot which killed Dr. King had come from a dilapidated rooming house, 205 feet from the motel balcony. On the sidewalk in front of the rooming house, a deputy sheriff found a 30.06 caliber Remington rifle in a box. Beside it was a blue suitcase which contained a pair of pliers, some clothing, and a pair of binoculars.

One witness said a young white man came down the steps from the rooming house and dropped the box and the suitcase.

Two patrons at a bar said they saw the man drop the suitcase and the box and then get into a 1966 white Mustang car and drive away.

With all this evidence, and more, on hand in just a few hours, Attorney General Ramsey Clark predicted that a solution of the murder would be forthcoming almost immediately and the arrest of the assassin made.

Two weeks later, all of the physical evidence seemed to have led practically nowhere, and the alarming word "conspiracy" has begun to sound loudly.

The bullet which killed Dr. King was so smashed that F.B.I. technicians in Washington were able to tell little more than its caliber—a 30.06.

Best Evidence

Fingerprints found in the long-nosed man's room at the flophouse could not be classified.

The rifle seemed to be the best bit of evidence. It was traced to Birmingham, Ala., to the Aero-marine Supply Co., where it had been sold March 30, 1968, to a young white man who bore very little resemblance to the long-nosed man from the flophouse.

On Monday, April 8, F.B.I. agents got a name from the gun store. The search led agents to a \$22 a week boarding house in Birmingham. A former resident of the boarding house, Eric Starvo Galt, fit most of the physical description of John Willard, the name given by the alleged sniper when he had registered at the Memphis flophouse; the main differences appeared to be in the ages and in the noses.

Galt had been gone from the Birmingham boarding house for more than seven months when F.B.I. agents went there looking for him.

On April 11, Galt's white Mustang, for which he had paid \$1,995 cash in Birmingham, was found in Atlanta. It had been abandoned for almost a week. The F.B.I. got no useful fingerprints from it.

On April 18, the F.B.I. asked the public to help look for Galt and a photograph was distributed. And, for the first time,

the F.B.I. agreed that Galt had had some help in the slaying. Agents said an "alleged brother" had conspired with him.

True Identity

Late Friday, the F.B.I. said that it had learned the true identity of Galt.

He was, the F.B.I. said, James Earl Ray, a five-time convict who had escaped from a Missouri prison in April, 1967, and who had been sought by the F.B.I. since last July on a fugitive warrant.

The F.B.I. had been unable by Friday night to develop a firmer motive for the slaying, which touched a wild weekend of riots in the United States.

Unnamed F. B. I. sources have been quoted in the Birmingham newspapers as saying that the F.B.I. has considered the possibility that Dr. King was shot by a professional killer.

The F.B.I. itself refused to comment.

—MARTIN WALDRON

NYT
4-21-68