

FBI Under Fire on

3

King Case

By RALPH BLUMENFELD

The FBI today faced mounting criticism of its tactics in tracking down the sniper who killed the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 18 days ago.

Police in Memphis and other cities charge that federal officials have discouraged local investigations of King's murder and caused confusion with varying descriptions of alleged slayer James Earl Ray, 40, alias Eric Starvo Galt.

"You don't know what to look for," complained Asst. Police Chief Bill Price in Memphis, citing "a whole lot of discrepancies" in the FBI's Friday identification of Ray.

An while FBI director J. Edgar Hoover ordered a special Mexican border alert to keep fugitive from leaving the country, Memphis detectives continued working on their own theory—that Galt was amnyth carefully created by conspirators to hide the killer's real identity.

Little on His Past

"Somebody has muddied the waters," said Price.

Until three days ago, a major problem was the limited federal dossier on Galt's past. The FBI resolved that problem by saying that a fingerprint check showed Galt was actually Ray, an escapee from Missouri State Prison missing since April 23, 1967.

Police in Atlanta, Birmingham and Los Angeles as well as Memphis quickly noted discrepancies between the FBI's description of Ray and its earlier data on Galt.

Ray was four years older, a native of Alton, Ill. with a Midwestern twang. Galt had a Southern drawl. Ray was an indifferent drinker but Galt liked beer and vodka. Ray was a sloppy dresser, Galt neat and

clean.

Took Dancing Lessons

Galt liked country and Western music and reportedly took dancing lessons in New Orleans in 1964 and 1965—a time when Ray was still in prison on a 20-year sentence for armed robbery. A fellow inmate said Ray "never expressed any liking for music or dancing and he was tight to gamble. He was tight as a tick. Boy, if you owed him money, even a few cents, he'd bug you to death."

In contrast, Galt was depicted as a free spender. He paid at least \$500 for dancing lessons, plus tuition for bartending school, and \$2,000 cash for the white 1966 Mustang which was his alleged getaway car in Memphis, later found abandoned in Atlanta.

Ray's fellow inmate expressed doubt that he could be a "hired assassin" who killed

King for profit. And the prison's warden, Harold Swenson, said: "I won't believe he did it until it's proven."

Dr. Donald B. Peterson, a prison psychiatrist who examined Ray for five weeks in 1966, said he was a recidivistic habitual criminal whose crimes were all associated with money. "We didn't find anything to indicate he was a killer or had tendencies to kill."

There was growing concern that when Ray is tracked down he might be shot by his captors,

since the FBI has labeled him "armed and extremely dangerous."

An Atlanta newspaper questioned the wisdom of that label, warning that if the No. 1 suspect in the King case is killed the motive for the assassination may never be known and the country may be wracked with rumors and doubts as it has been since President Kennedy's murder.

Needs Protection

"We regard it as imperative that James Earl Ray . . . be taken into custody alive and closely protected thereafter," the paper said in a lead editorial. "If this is the killer, every possible step must be taken to see that he is not silenced before he talks . . . The country can be done great harm if the truth is not established."

Ray's trail ended in Atlanta in the early morning of April 5, some 12 to 14 hours after the Memphis assassination, when a man believed to be Ray was seen leaving the Mustang in an Atlanta public housing project.

Police in the four cities where the manhunt is concentrated have practically been shunted aside by federal agents. In Birmingham a detective lieutenant who tried to question a clerk who allegedly sold Ray a rifle was called off by the FBI when the clerk refused to talk.

The FBI investigation is being handled at the highest level. Its only two press releases have been issued by Atty. Gen. Ramsey Clark and Hoover. They have given no indication why more widespread police efforts have been discouraged in a case that technically concerns a state offense—murder.