

FBI Files in King Killing Reveal Clash With Clark

Washington

Attorney General Ramsey Clark accused the FBI of keeping him "in the dark" during its Martin Luther King murder probe, and an insulted bureau official immediately hung up the phone on him, FBI files disclosed yesterday.

Continuing review of the just-released King assassination files also indicates J. Edgar Hoover's aides viewed Clark — nominally their boss — as a publicity-seeking meddler who made "unnecessary" and "foolish" suggestions on how to handle the case.

And, despite Clark's early public statement that no conspiracy seemed likely in the King killing, the documents show the FBI wanted fighter planes to escort captured suspect James Earl Ray home from England for fear of an aerial attack by persons who might have conspired with him in the slaying of King at Memphis April 4, 1968.

Nonetheless, Hoover recorded in a June 20, 1968, memo that he had advised Clark in a long, amiable chat that day — two weeks after Ray's arrest in London — that he doubted any conspiracy existed.

Evidence of behind-the-scenes frictions between Clark and the bureau is recorded in memos written by Cartha Deloach, a top-ranking Hoover aide, beginning June 8, 1968, the day of Ray's

capture.

Deloach said Clark bellowed at him: "Who the hell do you think you're working for? I'll tell you who you're working for, you're working for the Department of Justice."

He said Clark "stated that obviously he had been kept in the dark thus far and that he did not intend to put up with this in the future."

"I told the attorney general if he insisted upon making such falsifications that there was no need to continue the conversation. I then hung up the phone on him."

Deloach said Clark called him right back and summoned him to his office, where they clashed further on such subjects as how many FBI agents should be sent to fetch Ray from London and whether Clark should send his personal deputy, Fred Vinson, to handle the extradition.

Vinson did go, and a later FBI file memo states he "accomplished his obvious purpose of getting publicity for himself and the attorney general."

The FBI prevailed in its request to have Ray brought home by military aircraft — an Air Force C-135 — although there is no record in the files that the fighter planes were used. Clark wanted Ray returned by commercial aircraft.

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