

OBITUARIES

Art Hanes Sr. Dies; Mayor, Ray's Attorney

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM—Former mayor Art Hanes Sr., 80, a lawyer who defended Ku Klux Klansmen in two infamous killings and briefly represented James Earl Ray, died May 8 at his home. The cause of death was not disclosed.

In 1962, a year after he was elected mayor of Birmingham, Mr. Hanes ordered the closing of all city parks after a federal judge ruled that the city's public segregation laws were unconstitutional. Letting blacks in would hasten integration of schools, Mr. Hanes said. The parks eventually were reopened.

He served a single term as mayor on a three-member City Commission that included Public Safety Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Conner, who gained nationwide notoriety for using fire hoses and police dogs against blacks during civil rights marches.

Mr. Hanes was Ray's first attorney

after his arrest in the slaying of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. On the day Ray's trial was supposed to begin in November 1968, Ray fired Mr. Hanes and hired Texas lawyer Percy Foreman, in what officials believed to be a stalling tactic.

Four months later, Ray confessed to the slaying and was sentenced to 99 years in prison. He recanted almost immediately and has been trying to get a trial ever since.

Earlier in his legal career, Mr. Hanes had successfully defended two Klansmen charged with killing civil rights volunteer Viola G. Liuzzo near Selma in 1965.

Mr. Hanes, aided by his son, also represented Klansman Robert Chambliss, who was convicted of the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, in which four black girls died. Chambliss died in prison in 1985.

Despite his repeated defense of white supremacists, Mr. Hanes said he was not a racist.

"Why, I've never known a man who was a Klansman. I've never associated with the group. I merely acted as an attorney for men who were alleged to be Klansmen," he said in a 1979 interview.

However, in 1963, Mr. Hanes was quoted as saying, "Any way you look at it, the white race is superior to the black race."

Survivors include two sons and a sister.