

Confess and go free? No

By DWIGHT LEWIS

Staff Writer

In less than a year, James Earl Ray is slated to walk before the Tennessee Paroles Board and tell why he should be released from prison.

But don't expect Ray to admit to the April 4, 1968 slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Ray said parole officials have stated "that my hearing would be short if I didn't admit to killing Martin Luther King."

"Well, if they've got a fetish for confessions, they had better go hang around a Catholic priest," Ray said in an interview this past week.

Ray's comments come on the heels of a recently concluded investigation by a New York attorney and consultant whose opinion is that Ray did not assassinate King.

Jack E. Robinson also said his five year investigation points to evidence of a conspiracy in the killing of the slain civil rights leader.

"After the House Select Committee on Assassinations released its findings in 1978, the case appeared to be closed," Robinson said. "But in

the late 1980s, after reviewing the committee's findings and talking to some of the witnesses, I decided to investigate the case myself.

"What I found was very disturbing. The House investigation was sloppy and incomplete, and its findings misleading. James Earl Ray, in my view, is innocent."

Robinson says he believes there are enough questions in the case to warrant a new investigation. He suggests that:

- Congress pass a law immediately releasing all files in the case.

- A special prosecutor be appointed with subpoena power.

- President Clinton put the FBI back into the case.

"I truly believe that with a special prosecutor, today's FBI can crack the case," Robinson said.

In a telephone interview, Robinson said he has no new evidence to substantiate his findings.

"Most of the issues have been raised," he said. "My concern is the treatment of the issues by the HSCA. They were glossed over by the select committee."

William Pepper, the attorney who

represented Ray in a Home Box Office mock trial last April, said Friday that there will be a new breakthrough in Ray's case in the near future.

"You will be aware of it," he said in a telephone call from London. "After it breaks, there will be a clear indication of James Earl Ray's innocence. And then, pressure will come for the governor of Tennessee to release him from prison."

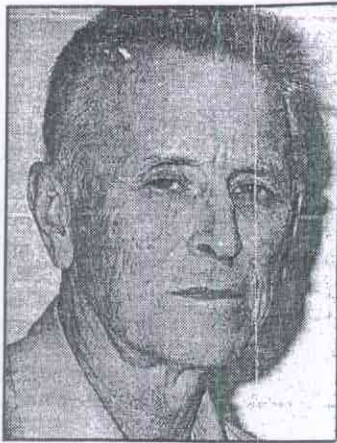
Pepper said because of this "dramatic evidence," he expects Ray to be released from Tennessee's prison system prior to his scheduled Nov. 18, 1994 parole hearing. That hearing could come as soon as next August because of sentence credits Ray could earn before the November date.

Ray, meanwhile, is incarcerated at the Riverbend Maximum Security Prison in West Nashville.

Ray, who once was portrayed the late attorney Percy Foreman as a man who hated blacks and who wanted desperately to gain some type of notoriety, has been in Tennessee's prison system since July 19, 1969. His sentence expires in the

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way, says James Earl Ray



James Earl Ray
Still denies killing King

year 2069.

Much of Ray's time in the prison system has been spent segregated from other inmates. Ray said being in segregation causes his blood pressure to increase because he is not able to exercise.

For the past three weeks, Ray

has been working in the kitchen at Riverbend washing pots and pans.

"This place is not a country club as some people on the outside have stated," Ray said. "Yes, we have grass, but I work seven days a week."

In his job, Ray works from 3 to 7:30 p.m. each day. He is paid 34 cents per hour.

He said he spends much of the \$40 he makes per month buying whatever documents he can that might pertain to his case. Some of the wording on the documents he has obtained from the Justice Department has been blotted out.

Ray has also said he would like to see the investigative files of the House Select Committee on Assassinations dealing with King's slaying, but they are sealed until 2029.

Meanwhile, he has written to the state paroles board, asking it to request certain records he refers to as being classified, according to Mike Bradley, the board's executive director.

"The board will make a decision at the appropriate time regarding that request," Bradley said.

During this past week's interview, Ray said a problem he has with admitting to the paroles board that he shot Martin Luther King is that "they would want details."

"I'm not going to give them that satisfaction," he said. "If I couldn't provide all of the details, they would just keep me in here."

Ray admits to being at the rooming house where authorities say the shot came from that killed King. However, he says he did not shoot King but was in Memphis to participate in a gun deal.

"Some people were going to take some guns into Mexico," he said.

Ray also claims that he has been treated unfairly by the legal system. He entered a plea of guilty in the King case but has maintained that he was coerced into doing so.

"At that time, I didn't see anything else I could do but plead guilty," Ray said. "I know more about the law now and how the political system operates."

Ray said what he wants now is to get some satisfaction out of proving that "I did not do the actual shooting." ■

Nashville Banner