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Ray Got No Pay If Plot Existed, Probers Say

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WASHINGTON — The House Assassinations Committee has concluded that if James Earl Ray was part of a conspiracy to kill civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., then Ray received no payment for his role in such a conspiracy.

The committee's chief investigator, Edward M. Evans, said today that based on the staff's investigation, that Ray lived on his share of the money taken during the July 13, 1967, robbery of the Bank of Alton, Ill.

Evans told the committee that the

staff has discounted Ray's contention he received large amounts of money from the mysterious "Raoul," who Ray claims masterminded King's assassination in Memphis on April 4, 1968. z

How and where Ray received the money he lived on from the time he escaped from the Missouri State Penitentiary April 23, 1967, until his capture in England June 8, 1968, has always been a source of speculation in the investigation.

Conspiracy buffs contend that Ray had to have had outside help to escape the country after the shooting of King, and financial aid to effect that escape. And investigations by the FBI and the

Department of Justice have provided many theories how Ray got the money he lived on during that period, but there is very little hard evidence to prove them.

The committee's version of how and where Ray got his funds differs from that of the Justice Department, which concluded that Ray financed his travels by conducting petty robberies in the cities he visited during his period as a fugitive.

"Apart from Ray's Raoul version, the committee has examined closely several other alternative sources of his finances. Of these, two merited the most substantial investigation," Evans said. They were:

1. The possibility that Ray accumulated several thousand dollars while engaging in illegal activities in Missouri State Prison from 1960 to 1967, and that he smuggled the money from the prison to family members who safeguarded it until his escape.

2. The possibility that Ray and one or

both of his brothers, John and Jerry Ray, robbed the Bank of Alton of approximately \$27,000 June 13, 1967 — the crime which to this day remains officially unsolved.

Evans said that after interviewing inmates in the Missouri State Prison the committee discounted the first possibility. Ray was characterized by those who knew him as being a "second-rate hustler" who engaged in a variety of illegal activities, namely bookmaking, narcotics and smuggling of contraband.

"But almost all those interviewed indicated the activity was on a relatively small scale," Evans said.

The investigators said the evidence accumulated by the staff linking James and John, and possibly Jerry Ray, to the Bank of Alton robbery is significant.

"First, the Alton robbery is virtually identical in modus operandi (method of operation) to five other bank robberies in which John Ray was involved with Jerry Ray participating in at least one of these robberies, and four of these five robberies occurred within an hour's drive of Alton," Evans related.

Secondly, he added, the scene of the crime, the location of the evidence abandoned after the crime and the significant role that Alton has played in James Earl Ray's criminal background, suggest the involvement of the Ray brothers.

"The means, motive and opportunity to rob the Bank of Alton were clearly available to the Ray brothers," concluded Evans.

The investigator told the committee members that Ray's portion of a three-way split of the \$27,000 taken in the Alton robbery would have provided him with some \$9,000, "enough to explain the

documented difference of over \$8000 in his known income and known expenses."

Ray's known income for the period when he was a fugitive was only \$1238.54. His known and unknown (estimated) expenses for that time came to \$9607.94.

The committee's chief counsel, G. Robert Blakey, said that if Ray had any substantial funds in any financial institutions, the staff could find no record of it.

"He has had such a small life — eating hamburgers, drinking beer and living in flop houses," Blakey told the committee. "We (the staff) cannot see that if Ray was part of a conspiracy, he never realized any financial benefit."

Blakey added that what the staff was presenting, amounted to "negative evidence" and that is never satisfactory. He said, "If there was a conspiracy, there is

no evidence that Ray was paid."

The committee will meet tomorrow in executive session to discuss the Kennedy assassination. Its next public hearing will be at 9 a.m. Friday, when it will review the actions of the FBI and Justice Department and their investigations of Ray and his flight from justice.

Memphis attorney Duncan Ragsdale expressed shock and concern after learning his ward, Mrs. Grace Walden Stephens, had appeared on NBC's Today Show at the request of lawyer Mark Lane to detail her story alleging Ray was not the assassin of King.

Ragsdale and Lane, who now lives in Memphis, are the co-guardians of the 63-year-old Mrs. Stephens, who has been declared mentally incompetent by the Shelby County Probate Court.

The two lawyers appeared before the House Assassinations Committee yesterday in behalf of their ward. It was there that Ragsdale learned that Lane and Mrs. Stephens had appeared on the Today Show last August, when the committee opened its public hearings on the King murder.

Lane, who represents Ray, has been trying to get a new trial for the confess-

ed killer of the Civil Rights leader, and he has been accused of using theatrics and sensationalism as a means to that end.

Ragsdale, who was appointed Mrs. Stephens' co-guardian, in August by Memphis Probate Judge Joseph Evans, told the committee he would take court action against anyone who tried to exploit his ward for sensationalism or money.

Although Ragsdale did not openly threaten to take Lane to court if he is using Mrs. Stephens to promote a book or other venture, the young attorney indicated he would.

Mrs. Stephens had been subpoenaed by the committee to testify on her allegations that she saw King's assassin flee from a rooming house bathroom, from which the fatal shot was believed to have been fired April 4, 1968, and that he was not Ray.

The flamboyant Lane said he would not allow Mrs. Stephens to testify because she "has suffered through so many traumatic experiences that her appearance would be detrimental to her emotional health."

"I could not gauge the extent of this committee's cruelty in attempting to destroy Grace Walden Stephens," thundered Lane. "She is a decent human being who you have tried to destroy in front of all America."

"You make me ill," shouted the lawyer, who abruptly got up and stalked from the hearing room.

This left Ragsdale to try and repair the damage done by the expert medical testimony presented by the committee which paints Mrs. Stephens as a mentally unstable person, whose past bouts with alcoholism and her mental problems seriously question her credibility.

The committee also wrecked Lane's charges of a conspiracy to silence Mrs. Stephens by having her committed to a mental institution so she could not endanger the state's case against Ray.

Mrs. Stephens' story has changed several times over the past 10 years concerning the events she witnessed on the

evening King as gunned down on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis.

She and her then-common-law husband, Charles Q. Stephens, lived in Room 6-B of Bessie Brewer's rooming house at 422½ South Main St. Their second-floor room was adjacent to 5-B, the room Ray admitted renting under the alias of John Willard.

Shortly after the shooting, Mrs. Stephens was interviewed by Wayne Chastain, a reporter for The Memphis Press-Scimitar at that time. She told Chastain she had heard the shots from the bathroom and saw through her partially opened door a man fleeing down the hall.

She described that man as being short, wiry, short crew cut, salt and pepper hair, and wearing a colored plaid shirt and military jacket.

Chastain submitted a signed affidavit to Ragsdale which stated: "Grace appeared sober but weak. She appeared coherent and in control of her faculties.

"Charlie Stephens came in while I was in the room. Charlie was staggering

drunk and told me, 'I saw who done it and it was a nigger.' Grace said that Charlie didn't see anything."

Lt. Glynn King and Capt. R.L. Williams of the Memphis police later interviewed Mrs. Stephens, who told the officers she did not see the man. She told them that she had been "sick in bed" all day. During subsequent questioning by the Memphis police and the FBI, Mrs. Stephens did not deviate from her statement until she was released from Western State Mental Hospital.

Charlie Stephens, however, was taken into protective custody as a possible witness to the King killing. It is believed the stress of this led to Mrs. Stephens' deep depression which resulted in her being committed to John Gaston Psychiatric Ward. While there, Mrs. Stephens attempted to hang herself, which prompted authorities to have her committed by the Shelby County Probate Court to Western State, a long-term care facility.

Mrs. Stephens was diagnosed as suffering from "organic brain syndrome, chronic (irreversible), secondary to alcoholism, not psychotic."

Throughout yesterday's hearing, medical testimony was taken from the doctors and administrators of John Gaston and Western State, including: Dr. David Moore, the supervising psychiatrist at John Gaston when Mrs. Stephens was there; Dr. James Druff, who was superintendent of Western State Mental Hospital from 1967-69; Dr. Jack C. Neale III, who succeeded Dr. Druff.

They all agreed Mrs. Stephens was suffering from organic brain syndrome and that it was irreversible. She was prescribed medication which she received in the required amounts, the doctors agreed.

"When one suffers from this disorder," said Dr. Druff, "it tends to break down the memory, insight, judgment, all the intellectual functions."

The doctors said Mrs. Stephens was committed because she had suicidal tendencies — not to keep her from telling her story.

Ragsdale reviewed all of the facts brought out by the committee during the hearing, but when asked if he could produce any new evidence, the young Memphis lawyer said he could not.

Even though Lane and Ragsdale refused to let Mrs. Stephens testify, the committee had decided not to call her following the medical testimony.