

Ray expected to become hero

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WASHINGTON (AP) — James Earl Ray told a Scotland Yard inspector he will return to the United States in 1968 that he killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and expected it would make him a national hero, according to preliminary evidence unveiled Friday.

Ray denied making any such confession during his incarceration in England, while awaiting extradition to America, but he said "That is probably the most damaging statement made against me." Ray's attorney, Mark Lane, declared the allegations lacked credibility.

Rep. Samuel L. Devine, while Ray was on the witness stand for the first day of interrogation by the House assassinations committee, revealed a recent interview by the panel's staff with the former Scotland Yard official now retired.

Devine, R-Ohio, quoted Alexander Anthony Elst as saying he was Ray's near-constant guard during the weeks of his imprisonment in London, and thus became something of a friend of the fugitive.

Elst, now a pubkeeper, was asked by the committee's investigators on Aug. 4 whether he recalled Ray actually admitting killing King, or instead merely acknowledging a connection with the murder weapon.

"Oh, no, no, no," Elst replied. "During the course of the conversation he definitely, he didn't actually come out with it, but it was there in the conversation that he'd done it."

At another point, Elst said: "He was telling me that after the shooting on April 4, 1968, when he let this place be searched and threw the gun away, I remember there isn't any doubt that he was admitting to me that he had done the murder."

Asked if Ray expressed a hatred of blacks — something Ray has long denied — Elst said, "There wasn't any doubt at all. He just hated black people. In fact, he said he was trying to go to Africa to try to shoot some more," when he was arrested at London's airport on June 5, 1968.

"He was telling me," Elst went on in

the interview, "that for him to have shot a black man or two in certain parts of America would make him into a national hero anyway. He seemed absolutely mad about publicity. He really wanted it."

Elst said that Ray predicted he would make \$250,000 to \$300,000 for the killing because "he would have no shortage of friends, no shortage of third parties. He would get them to go on TV and he could write books."

After the entire interview was read in to the committee's record, Ray was asked to respond and said simply: "That is probably the most damaging statement made against me. It is false." Ray then charged that the interview of Elst was evidence that the panel intends to crucify me.

Lane, his attorney, returned to Ray's side about that time and said he had just placed a call to a barrister in England who denounced Elst as corrupt and called him "a disgrace to the England and police force." Lane said his British contact told him Elst had been forced off the job for unlawful conduct.

Ray's attorney said that for the panel to have sprung Elst's statement on Ray was unjustified. "I have never, in 26 years of practicing law, seen anything as terrible and as outrageous as this," he said.

The acting committee chairman, Rep. Richardson Preyer, D-N.C., promised that the committee would pursue the issue of Elst's credibility. Elst, meanwhile, was quoted by Devine as saying he had long ago reported his conversations with Ray to reporters who likely could substantiate such reports.