(Mount Clipping In Space Below)

Ray Regretted Plea Before Prison Trip

Sheriff William N. Morris yesterday said James Earl Ray talked about changing his mind about his guilty plea even before he left Shelby County on the way to the state prison.

The sheriff said Ray talked about a post-conviction hearing while Morris and the prisoner waited for state prison officials at the sheriff's substation on Hemcrest Road early March 11.

"He told me he wished he hadn't pleaded guilty, that he had not inteneded to plead guilty and that he was sorry he took that route," the sheriff said. He said Ray then told him he would file for a reversal under the post-conviction processes.

"When I told him I was glad to see him leave, he told me, 'Oh, I'm planning on coming back," the sheriff said Ray never said he was innocent, only expressed his displeasure with the legal process which had been used.

Ray, in his letter to Judge Preston Battle, said he was dismissing Percy Foreman as his lawyer. Arthur Hanes, the former Birmingham mayor whom Ray fired on the eve of his scheduled trial last Nov. 12, confirmed Wednesday that he has been contacted by Ray from the prison.

Criminal Court Clerk James A. Blackwell said more than 100 post-conviction proceedings are filed each year in Shelby County.

A petition from Ray, which would have to allege how his rights had been violated by earlier proceedings, would be docketed in the division where he was tried, before Judge Battle. If the judge turned down the petition, Ray would then be able to appeal that decision through the higher state courts and the federal courts.

If Ray should be granted a new trial under the post-conviction process, he would be liable to all the possible penalties for murder in the first degree, including death in the electric chair.

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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