# Long Shot Puts John Ray In Jail

By Charles Bosworth Jr.
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

In what may have been a "10 million-to-1 shot," a Madison County law enforcement officer who had previously met fugitive John Larry Ray saw him walking along a road Monday near Alton and arrested him.

Sgt. Conrad "Pete" Baetz of the Madison County Sheriff's Department said he was returning from a shopping trip with his wife while off duty about 5:45 p.m., when he saw a man walking along Illinois Route 140 east of Alton. Baetz said he noticed the man looked like Ray, who was wanted for questioning in a May 30 bank robbery at Liberty, Ill., in Adams County.

Ray also was being sought as a federal escapee for failing to report to a halfway house in St. Louis in February after his release from the federal penitentiary at Marion, Ill., where he served time for bank robbery.

Baetz had met Ray, the brother of James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., when Baetz was a staff investigator for the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations. He had talked to John Larry Ray several times, including twice when serving Ray with congressional subpoenas.

On Monday, when Baetz told his wife, Madilyn, that a man they saw

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**Sgt. Conrad "Pete" Baetz**
*"Damn, that is him"*

# Ray

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walking on the road looked like Ray, she suggested he take another look.

"I turned around and drove past him again," he said. "I said, 'Damn, that is him,'" Baetz said.

Since he was in civilian clothes and was with his wife, Baetz went to a nearby tavern and called the sheriff. Baetz waited for Deputy Thomas Bearce to arrive. Then, as Bearce talked to Ray in front of the patrol car, Baetz approached from the other side.

"To distract him and to confirm his identity, I called him by his nickname, Jack," Baetz said. "When he turned around, that confirmed to me that he was John Larry Ray, so I stuck my gun in his face and told him he was under arrest. After he had been patted down and handcuffed, I asked him if he remembered me. He looked at me and said, 'Oh, hi, Conrad. I thought you were in Edwardsville.' I told him county venue included Alton."

Baetz said Ray, who was wearing a blue leisure suit, did not resist arrest. Baetz would not comment on reports that a loaded pistol was found in a shopping bag Ray was carrying. Baetz said that, to avoid interfering with the investigation of the Liberty bank robbery by the Adams County Sheriff's Department, Ray was not questioned. Ray was scheduled to be arraigned before a circuit judge in Madison County today.

Baetz said he did not know why Ray was in Madison County or where he had been staying.

Baetz said he rode back to County Jail in Edwardsville with Ray. Baetz said Ray told him that he had not been in contact recently with his brother, James Earl Ray, who is in a federal prison in Tennessee. John Larry Ray also told Baetz that he had not been doing much since they last saw each other. "He said they've been keeping him in jail most of the time," Baetz said.

Baetz said Ray had accused him of harassing him during the House investigation of the King assassination; Baetz said a review of the charges produced no evidence of that.

Baetz said he believes Ray should be questioned about the shooting last month of civil rights leader Vernon Jordan in Fort Wayne, Ind.

"There is nothing to indicate John Larry Ray was involved," Baetz said. "However, the possibility should not be ignored. The possibility that John Larry Ray was involved in the King assassination with his brother has not been eliminated, and the circumstances with Jordan are almost identical. A 30.06 rifle was used. Jordan, leader of the National Urban League, was shot in front of his motel. The reports on Jordan sound like the first reports on King. I would never ignore the possibility, but there is nothing to indicate a probability."

A spokesman at the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Indianapolis office, which is handling the investigation into the shooting of Jordan, said that John Larry Ray was not a suspect. "We are not seeking him for this purpose," the spokesman said. "We are not aware of any connection that he has with this matter."

Said Baetz of his chance encounter Monday with Ray: "It was a 10 million-to-1 shot. I'm without a doubt the only guy in the area that has met John Larry Ray."

The FBI had been among several agencies searching for Ray. The FBI entered the case only last week when the bureau and St. Louis police were notified of Ray's escape four months after the fact. St. Louis Police Chief Eugene J. Camp and Robert Kingsland, U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Missouri, were critical of the delay, saying they should have been notified immediately.

Jerry Ray, the brother of John Larry Ray and James Earl Ray, said in a telephone interview from Marietta, Ga., that he had last heard from John Larry in early February.

Jerry Ray said that John Larry had telephoned a motel in Clinton, Iowa, where Jerry had been working temporarily, but that he was out. "He talked to the switchboard operator and told her that he was in St. Louis," Ray said. "He took a bus from Springfield to St. Louis the day he was released. He was supposed to report to Dismas House that day, but he jumped parole. I knew he wasn't going to report to a parole officer. He told me he wouldn't."

Baetz manned the St. Louis area office of the House Assassinations Committee in 1977 and 1978 while on a leave of absence from his job with the Madison County Sheriff's Department. Baetz had been assigned to learn whether James Earl Ray had accomplices in this area. James Ray was born in Alton and lived for several years in St. Louis.

Baetz is a native of Alton. Before joining the Sheriff's Department in 1970, he was a legal technician with Army Intelligence.