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Ray placed in 'involuntary segregation'

by John Avery Emison
Oak Ridger staff

Prison authorities have declined to say why convicted killer James Earl Ray has been placed in "involuntary segregation" at the Brushy Mountain Prison in Petros — but The Oak Ridger has learned that Ray and two other inmates are suspected of plotting a prison break.

Brushy Mountain Warden Donald Eberhart confirmed this morning that Ray has been taken from his cell and placed in "in-

voluntary segregation."

Eberhart deferred all other questions to a Department of Corrections spokesman in Nashville.

Corrections Department spokesman Brandon Maloney would say only that the action was taken "for security reasons."

Ray, who was convicted of the 1968 slaying of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, has maintained his innocence and claimed that he was railroaded by his attorney, famed trial lawyer Percy Foreman.

Authorities found some unauthorized clothes in Ray's cell

last week, and placed the 62-year-old inmate in involuntary segregation on Friday, according to a friend of Ray who called the newspaper.

Memphis resident Tommy Potts called The Oak Ridger Monday afternoon and said he received a call from Ray on Saturday.

Potts described himself as a friend of Ray and of his brothers John and Jerry, having known them for "many, many years."

Potts said Ray told him to call the newspaper "and see if we could

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RAY: Inmate told reporter he is not a violent man

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find out what's going on." He said Ray told him he could make one call per month while in involuntary segregation.

Potts said Ray told him that prison authorities believe the extra clothing was to be used in a prison break. He said Ray told him that two other men are also suspected of plotting with him.

Potts said Ray told him there was no plot to break out. "He said he hadn't even thought of the idea," Potts said.

He said Ray expressed surprise at being placed in segregation because of the clothing items. Ray had the extra clothes because they were left by a cellmate, Potts related.

Ray's last reported prison job was in the laundry.

Ray has attempted to break out of Brushy Mountain four times, twice with other inmates.

The last, most successful attempt was 14 years ago.

On June 10, 1977, Ray and six

other inmates used a jerry-built pipe ladder to flee over the prison's back wall. Ray roamed the hills around the prison for just over two days before the state's largest manhunt recaptured him within five miles of Brushy.

Ray's latest attempt was in 1979 when he and a cellmate were stopped in the prison yard by shotgun fire. A female guard saw a green blanket in the grass just inside the prison wall and fired her shotgun into the air. Ray, dressed in a dark sweat shirt and fatigue pants, stood up and surrendered.

In an exclusive interview with The Oak Ridger in 1990, Ray said he is not a violent man.

"I've never been charged with assaulting anybody except for Martin Luther King," Ray said.

If granted the retrial he has sought for more than 20 years, Ray said he has no doubt about the outcome.

"I'm certain now I could be acquitted," he said.

Ray in solitary; escape plot alleged

PETROS, Tenn. — Convicted killer James Earl Ray and another inmate have been placed in solitary confinement at Brushy Mountain State Prison, reportedly for plotting an escape.

The Oak Ridger newspaper reported Tuesday that a friend of Ray's claims the 62-year-old inmate and two others were suspected of planning a breakout.

Corrections spokesman Brandon Maloney said Tuesday that Ray and fellow inmate Roger Dale Black were placed in "involuntary administrative segregation" on Friday. The segregation is temporary but indefinite, and subject to review in 30 days, Maloney said.

Ray was convicted of the 1968 slaying of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis. Black is serving a burglary sentence from Davidson County.



James Earl Ray

safe to fly

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Reporter

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