

Early Clue To Ray Identity Un

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — Within minutes after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated last April 4, authorities had in their hands a clue to the identity of James Earl Ray—but they failed to decipher it until after Ray was caught in London.

The clue was on a transistor pocket radio which was hand etched with the half-inch high numerals 00416.

00416 was the identification number of James Earl Ray in the Missouri State Penitentiary

at Jefferson City, Mo. He was serving a 20-year sentence when he escaped April 23, 1967.

The radio was among effects abandoned by Ray after he shot King. He dropped his rifle, a set of binoculars and a case which included the radio, at a doorway near the rooming house from which he fired the shot.

James Beasley of the Shelby County attorney general's staff said the radio had been turned over to the FBI with other physical evidence that same evening. The numerals, he said,

were discovered through tests at the FBI crime laboratory in Washington.

"You can see that someone had tried to file or sand them off the case," Beasley said.

"I couldn't see the numerals until they were pointed out to me, but the FBI found them within 24 hours by treating the case so the numerals showed up."

The six transistor radio is in a plastic case.

Ray bought the radio in the Missouri penitentiary canteen

on April 21, two days before he escaped. Prison practice is for inmates to etch their prison numbers on to the back of the case with an electric stylus to prevent theft or arguments over ownership.

Ray's prison number, 00416, was etched into the back of his radio. Ray paid \$9.75 for it.

There was some speculation that he bought the radio to carry with him on his escape, so that he could listen to news broadcasts to find out if they were looking for him.

explained For Months

But at Jefferson City, Warden Harold Swenson said he thought Ray took it because he was "too cheap to leave anything behind."

After Ray had fled the Memphis rooming house and police found the Remington Gamemaster rifle, binoculars and personal effects, the FBI was able to even trace laundry marks on underwear to a West Coast laundry.

A pair of pliers also was traced to its source.

But the transistor radio re-

mained a mystery so far as the meaning of the numbers.

Since secrecy surrounded the search for evidence which was being gathered there was no way for anyone at Missouri State Penitentiary to know that the radio contained Ray's inmate number. There were published reports of a radio, but none which mentioned the etched numerals.

Presumably, had this information been made public, someone at Jefferson City would

have connected the numbers with Ray.

"This would not have been because of Ray, because he was an innocuous, run-of-the-mill criminal," said Fred Wilkinson, director of the Missouri Department of Corrections.

"Perhaps because of the fact that it was connected with the King slaying, which was very prominent in people's minds, someone would have made an association between the two."

Warden Swenson said the FBI

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had not come to the prison in regard to the radio until about a month after Ray's capture.

"They took the electric stylus with them to determine under laboratory analysis if it was the exact one which was used to etch the numbers," Swenson said.

Ray is serving a 99-year term for the King murder.

While his lawyer, Percy Foreman of Houston, and the prosecution contended there was no evidence to suggest that Ray was involved in a conspiracy, the defendant shocked the court when he hinted that he did not act alone.

In Philadelphia, the Rev. James Bevel, a former aide to King who was with him when he was shot, said Memphis police had known about the assassination plot "a couple of days" in advance, but did nothing.

In Memphis, the city's top police officials were in conference and could not be reached immediately for comment.

Bevel, who claimed in January that Ray was innocent, said evidence had been suppressed that Ray had been persuaded to plead guilty to save him from execution.

"As a result Ray is out of the way and the real killers are walking around freely," Bevel said in an interview in the Philadelphia Bulletin.

Bevel said a letter outlining the assassination plot had accidentally fallen into the hands of a Negro woman and was turned over to the police. He also said FBI agents had held up King's plane bound from Atlanta to Memphis for a half an hour search because they also knew of the plot at least a day in advance.

The FBI declined any comment other than to say that all evidence it had gathered was turned over to the state.