

Anatomy of a Murder: Who Shot King?

By DENNIS MONTGOMERY

PETROS, Tenn. (AP) — The dreamer is dead a decade today. But the doubts endure: Did James Earl Ray fire the bullet that killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.?
"No," Ray told The Associated Press in an interview. But who did?



King in 1964

"That's difficult to say. But I think that all could be resolved fairly simply at some type of hearing or trial," Ray said. "Possibly the committee will be able to resolve it."

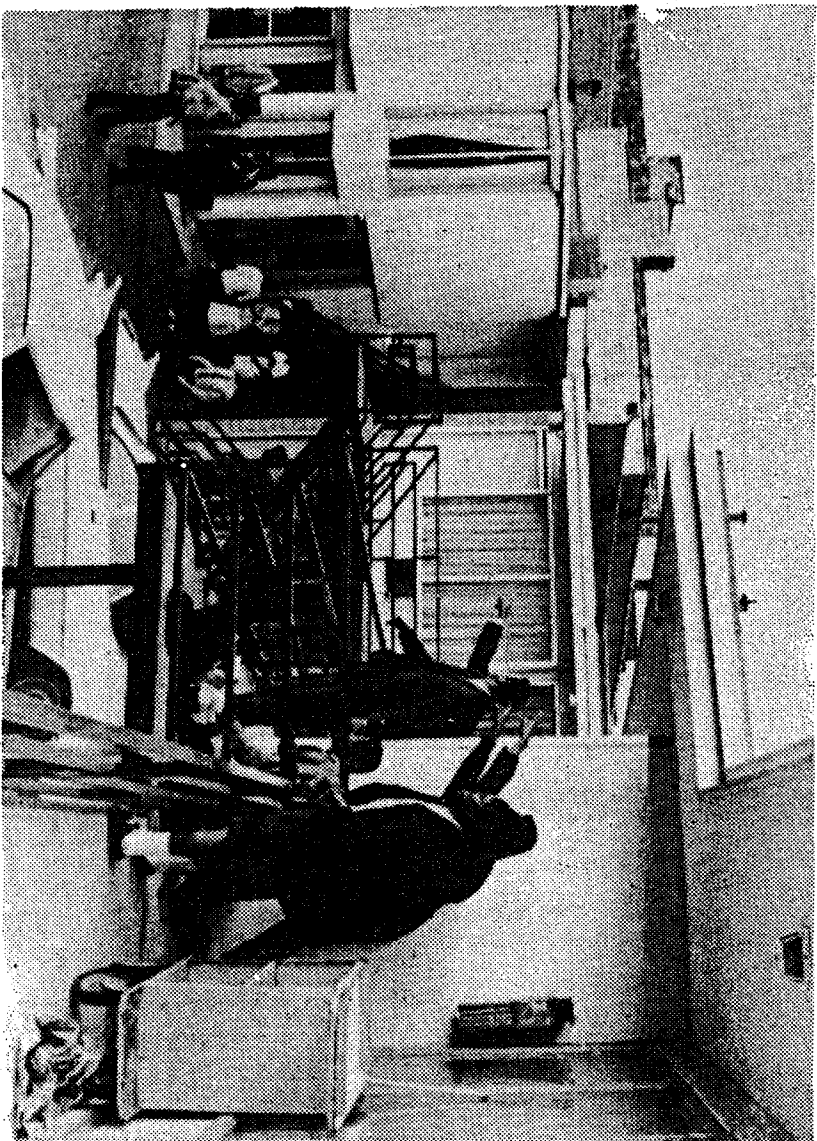
He referred to a House committee conducting a new investigation. The first began April 4, 1968, in Memphis when a .30-06 caliber bullet blasted 205 feet, 3 inches from a boarding house bathroom window to the Lorraine Motel's balcony. King, 39, fell with a severed spinal cord and died 59 minutes later.

The first investigation involved 3,000 FBI agents and 30,000 interviews. On the 700th of 53,000 fingerprint cards, a clerk linked Ray to the rifle found after the sniping.

On June 8, 1968, Ray was arrested in London carrying a Canadian passport and a pistol. Investigators concluded he had acted alone.

"The FBI made an investigation and they were in a hurry to get it," Ray said, "and I think they was sort of slipshod in a way because they wanted to extradite me from London and they had to use some evidence that was fraudulent ... For instance, Charles Stephens, he's supposed to be the eyewitness, he made three or four differ-

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Fatally wounded by an assassin's bullet at a Memphis motel, Martin Luther King Jr. lies at the feet of frantically gesturing aides

who point to where they think the sniper hid.

AP Time, Inc. Photo

ent statements. He has an arrest record of 200 drunks"

A fellow boarder, Stephens said he heard a shot and saw a man who resembled Ray rush past in the hall. Police put Stephens in protective custody, later to be embarrassed by disclosure that squad cars had ferried him to liquor stores.

On March 10, 1969, Ray's 41st birthday, he pleaded guilty to murder in a 144-minute trial that fed coverup suspicions. A lawyer mentioned the solo-assassin theory; Ray objected. He would not say he acted alone. Judge Preston Battle decreed 99 years imprisonment.

King's widow believed in a conspiracy. So did the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, who inherited King's direction of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and his plans for the last great civil rights march on Washington — where King once said, "I have a dream

On March 13, Ray recanted, blaming his plea on conflict of interest, his jailing, Judge Battle, suppressed evidence and publicity.

To defray legal expenses, and with Ray's approval, defense lawyer Percy Foreman had sold author William Bradford Huie access to information for a book. Now Ray thinks he was kept off the witness stand to preserve Huie's edge on the story and the profits.

Huie scoffs; Foreman says his only objective was to avoid Ray's execution. Ray could not make his claims stick. Five appeals for a new trial failed; the last was refused Dec. 13, 1976, by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Interviewed at Brushy Mountain Prison last week, Ray spoke softly, by turns shy and sure. He shifted in a chair, resting head on hand. Graying hair accented bright blue eyes. He said a man named Raoul duped him.

Inmate 65477 began his story with his 1967 escape from an armed robbery sentence in Missouri. He went to a job in Chicago, then to Montreal to get a passport. But he needed to prove residence there.

"So I gave up on that and started hanging around these merchant seamen's clubs and I was going to try to roll or rob some seaman and get his seaman's papers and get out of the country on those," he said. "And that's where I met this individual called Raoul, although that's an alias ... It was the Neptune Bar ..."

"I discussed with him, I think first it was some type of passport or merchant seaman's papers.



AP Wirephoto

A 24-hour vigil began last midnight outside the Memphis motel where Martin Luther King Jr. was slain 10 years ago today.

And then one thing led to another and he said that if possibly we could take some merchandise across the border ... he would help me with a passport and a small amount of money. I suppose it was narcotics."

Raoul's schemes and his, Ray said, took him to Detroit, Birmingham, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Mexico, Atlanta and Memphis.

Raoul, a man with a Spanish accent, on occasion gave him up to \$2,000, Ray said, but no passport. When they reached Birmingham in March 1968, Ray said, Raoul had a gun-running plan.

"He told me to purchase some type of military rifle," Ray said. "... I got it and took it back to Raoul and he said, 'Well, it's the wrong kind.' I said, 'Well, what kind do you want?' and he looked at the brochure and he said, 'Get this kind here.'"

So Ray bought the rifle that tied him to King's murder. He said he thought it was a sample for Raoul to show buyers. "He gave me an address to take it to in Memphis, the New Rebel Motel." Ray said.

Raoul met him there April 3, took the gun and gave him "an address he wanted me to rent a room in by the docks," Ray said. "That gave me the impression he might want to send some weapons down the river or something."

Next day, Ray went to 422½ South Main and rented the room. Raoul, he said, met him downstairs in Jim's Bar.

"And then I started running errands ... during the two or three hours I was in the area, I wasn't in the rooming house more than 10 or 15 minutes ... about three or four times altogether.

"At about 5:30 Raoul said he wanted to use the car that night. But the day before that I had a slow leak, a flat tire, and so I decided to go ... get the tire fixed.

Alone

Evening Journal, Wilmington, Del., Tuesday, April 4, 1978

And I must of went back out. Just reconstruction, I guess it would be about quarter to six."

About three blocks away, he said, he stopped at a service station, "and they told me they didn't have time to fix it. ...

"I was going to come back and park where I'd been previously but I ran into a police roadblock and they waved me off. I seen various people running around in that area. That's when I turned and went."

King was shot at 6:01. Ray said he heard it on the radio, put the pieces together and fled, first to Atlanta, then Canada. Five weeks later he got a passport and left for London.

Why not surrender to explain? "I was a fugitive," he said, "and I had transported a rifle. The assassinations committee asked me about that: 'How come you decided it was you?' There is enough circumstantial evidence. I'm sort of cautious anyway ... I just wouldn't rush back in and say, 'Well, what's going on here?'"

No investigation confirms Raoul's existence. Ray says he now has a photograph of Raoul to show the committee or a court. He plans new appeals and does not think the state's case can withstand a new trial.

Ray wants out. Last year he made an unsuccessful prison escape.

"I'm not planning on spending the rest of my life in prison," he said. "I did not shoot Martin Luther King."