

FINAL

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

139th Year

No. 232

Memphis, Tenn., Sunday

FINAL

Morning, August 20, 1978

238 Pages

Price 45 Cents Home Delivery
50 Cents Single Copy

Ray Story Crumbles Under

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From The Commercial Appeal
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The House Assassinations Committee believes it punched enough holes in the alibi of James Earl Ray last week to convince the American people he stalked Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. across the South to kill him.

The committee is further convinced the end of that trail put Ray where the shot was fired that killed King on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis 10 years ago.

The committee, which recessed public hearings Friday until November, is not saying Ray fired the fatal shot.

But it is saying implicitly through amassed testimony that evidence and contradictions in Ray's account of where he was just before the shooting on April 4,

1968, lead to that conclusion.

"I think it does show Ray did have the opportunity to be closed in that room (the bathroom of the rooming house where the shot was believed to have been fired) for one hour before King was killed," said Rep. Harold Ford of Memphis, a member of the committee. "The question is now, was it him?"

Ray testified for three days last week before he was returned to Brushy Mountain State Prison in Tennessee Friday night.

On Wednesday Ray had the stage much to himself when he read a statement detailing his story, but then committee members began picking away at it and by the end of the day Friday it lay in shambles from the testimony of other witnesses.

On Friday, witnesses were tearing apart Ray's testimony so badly that his attorney,



James Earl Ray

Analysis:

Alibi In Shambles

Mark Lane — no stranger to publicity — was left by way of rebuttal to sputtering that the committee was "grandstanding."

Though Ray denied it, investigators be-

lieve they showed clearly he was stalking King from Los Angeles to Memphis via Selma and Atlanta in March and early April, 1968.

Investigators believe he was prepared to

Questioning, Panel Believes

kill King at any of those Southern cities along the route.

Dramatic testimony from three Memphis men Friday disputed Ray's alibi that he was at a service station seven blocks north of the Lorraine about the time King was killed.

Coy Dean Cowden of Memphis, a former mental patient and commodity broker who said last fall he had seen Ray at the service station before King was killed, told the committee under oath that he lied when he made the statements that were later published and used in Ray's defense.

In fact, he said, he was not even in Memphis at the time, but was more than 400 miles away in Beaumont, Texas, where he managed a store.

Then, Larce McFall, 70, and his son, Phillip McFall, 35, who in 1968 were co-owners of the service station at Second Street and

Linden Avenue referred to in the stories, testified that neither Ray nor his white 1966 Mustang car was ever at the station that day.

Ray had said he thought he was involved only in a gun-smuggling operation when he purchased a rifle and rented a room in the rooming house believed to be the spot from which King was shot. The rifle was identified as the murder weapon. Pathologists testified that they were unable to show whether the shot that felled King was fired from the rooming house or from the bushes below.

Lane had told the committee that a man identified as Thomas I. Wilson, who died Aug. 5, also saw Ray at the gas station. But a committee investigator told the committee that a friend of Wilson's, Harvey S. Lock, now says Wilson was nearly a mile

away from the gas station at the time.

The testimony of the McFalls followed that of a former employe of a laundry in Atlanta who put Ray (under the alias Eric S. Galt) in Atlanta on April 1, 1968, when King was there.

Her sworn statement came after Ray had boasted that if the committee could show him in Atlanta on that date, he would take full responsibility for the King killing in front of the national television audience.

Ray later claimed the woman was mistaken, the laundry ticket date somehow inaccurate.

Furthermore, the committee produced evidence that while being held in London awaiting extradition to the United States, Ray boasted to a Scotland Yard inspector that he killed King and expected it would make him "a national hero." The inspector, Alexander Anthony Eist, told committee investigators, "There isn't any doubt from the conversation that he told me that he was admitting to me that he had done the murder."

Eist, who retired two years ago and since has been found innocent on charges related to jewel robberies, said Ray expressed a hatred of blacks. Ray said the evidence "... is probably the most damaging statement made against me. It is false."

Committee members are satisfied they built a solid foundation last week for the three weeks of public hearings in November.

Ford, like the other members, believes Americans can be proud of what the committee accomplished this week.

He thinks investigators proved that \$4 million and two years spent investigating were worth it.

Furthermore, Ford believes Memphians need feel no special guilt that King was murdered in their city. He says the record



Rep. Harold Ford



Rep. Louis Stokes

will show it could have happened anywhere.

"All can see now that the actors involved in this were not from Memphis, Tennessee," Ford said. "This could have happened anywhere."

Ford refers all Americans to a document he made a part of the committee record this week — the staff report of all statements Ray has made since his arrest in June, 1968, through June 30 of this year.

Ford says it will show beyond doubt glaring contradictions in Ray's testimony. Ford wants the public to write the U.S. Government Printing Office in Washington to get a copy.

Congress charged the committee with investigating three essential questions:

Who killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr? Did the killer act alone or was there a conspiracy? How did the federal and state investigating agencies perform their jobs?

November hearings will focus on the possible involvement of Ray's family in any conspiracy to kill King.

Last week the committee tried to show that Ray easily could have financed his stalking of King with loot from bank robberies after his escape from the Missouri State Penitentiary in 1967.

The committee did not prove that Ray robbed banks in the United States, only that he was near the scene of one at Alton, Ill., after his prison escape, and that his thumbprint was on a note given to a bank teller in a London robbery following King's murder.

The theory that Ray may have financed his travel with bank robbery money is an old one and one investigators will probe deeply in November.

Not only was testimony last week a key to that direction, but also statements made by committee chairman Louis Stokes (D-

Sleuth Tied To King Case *Comm. Minutes - Appeal 4/20/78* Sorry He Decided To Talk

SIX MILE BOTTOM, England (UPI) — The former Scotland Yard inspector who says James Earl Ray just about admitted to him killing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is finding his privacy disappearing — and wondering why he ever came forward.

"No, I won't talk," said former Detective Chief Inspector Alexander Eist, whose words already have been heard at a U.S. House committee hearing on the King murder and in a U.S. television network interview.

"If I'd had any idea what a bombshell this would be — but I thought all this was known," said Eist, who now owns the Green Man pub in Six Mile Bottom, a small farming community halfway between Cambridge and Newmarket.

Eist said Ray, while imprisoned in Britain awaiting extradition to the United States for the King slaying in 1968, admitted indirectly that he had shot the black leader.

"Everyone keeps asking why I didn't come forward with this 10 years ago when the original trial was on. Well, then Ray was pleading guilty. I felt he was guilty. There was no conflict. What did I have to offer?"

"I only came forward because I read somewhere that Ray had changed his plea

to innocent and was trying to implicate the FBI and I knew they'd done a damn good job with him — the agents I saw dealing with him in London, anyway, and I wanted to give my impression of his guilt."

Eist's testimony before the House Assassination Committee that Ray seemed "quite proud" of having killed King brought sharp recriminations from Ray's lawyer, Mark Lane, who charged Eist was a discredited policeman accused of crimes including perjury and inventing confessions.

Eist acknowledged some charges were once brought against him, but added, "There was never any question of my being dismissed from the force because of the charges. My retirement was honorable."

Scotland Yard Saturday issued a statement saying Eist "in July, 1976, was charged with conspiracy to commit corruption and two counts of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. Earlier this year he was acquitted."

Eist, mustachioed and dressed impeccably in a tweed jacket and brown pants in his two-room pub, was reticent to talk about almost everything except his impressions of Ray, about which there was no question.