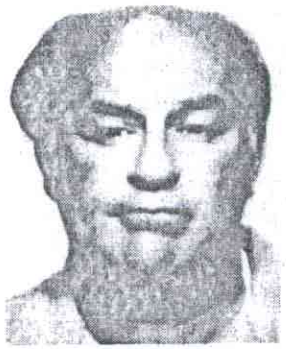

John Larry Ray
. . . suspect in bank robbery

FRONT PAGE

Alert officer finds, arrests Ray's brother

By TIM ONEIL
Globe-Democrat Staff Writer

In what police called a case of "pure luck," escaped bank robber John Larry Ray was arrested Monday as he walked along a highway near Alton.

Authorities gave this account of the arrest of the brother of convicted assassin James Earl Ray:

Conrad "Pete" Baetz said he couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the man wearing a leisure suit trudging along Illinois Route 140 near Alton.

The man looked like John Larry Ray, 47, who is wanted by federal and state authorities for bank robbery and escaping custody.

Baetz, who is a sergeant with the Madison County Sheriff's Department, was off-duty when he spotted the man about 5:45 p.m. Monday, but he knows John Ray.

BAETZ WAS an investigator for a U.S. House committee that studied the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and John Ray was a

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Alert officer catches John Ray in Illinois

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prominent figure in that investigation.

But even Baetz thought it unlikely that the man wearing a leisure suit and carrying a shopping bag was Ray.

But it was.

"I said to my wife, Madelyn, 'That looks like John Larry Ray,' " Baetz said.

Baetz kept Ray in sight while he called for assistance, and when Madison County Sheriff's Deputy Tom Bearce arrived, he helped make the arrest.

"I said, 'Hey, Jack, remember me?' and he said, 'Conrad, how you been doing?' "

Tom Bearce

"I DON'T think that would happen again if I live another 300 years," Baetz said.

Bearce said Ray told the officers he was "just roaming" when he was asked where he was going.

Maj. Fred Bright, of the Madison County Sheriff's Department, said Ray had a .38-caliber revolver in the shopping bag.

Authorities said Ray refused to make any statement, talk to jailers or make any telephone calls. He is being held for Adams County, Ill., authorities on the bank robbery charge.

In an exclusive interview with The Globe-Democrat in the waiting room at Madison County Jail, Ray said he did not know where he was going when he was arrested.

RAY SAID he has periodic memory lapses and that he does not remember why he failed to show up at a St. Louis halfway house after being released from a federal medical facility at Springfield, Mo., in February.

Even though Ray was considered "armed and dangerous," local police weren't notified of his escape until last week when a warrant was issued charging him with the $15,000 robbery of the Farmer's Bank of Liberty, Ill., May 30.

Ray said he did not know if he committed the bank robbery. "I actually don't know what happened. I can't say whether I did that."

Ray said he does not know what will happen to him now. "The federal government always locks me up anyway," he said.

He was sentenced in 1970 to 18 years in prison for the robbery of a St. Peters bank.

Baetz said the House committee had concluded that John and James Ray probably held up an Alton bank to finance the King assassination.

James Earl Ray is serving a 99-year prison sentence after pleading guilty to a charge of murdering Dr. King.

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