

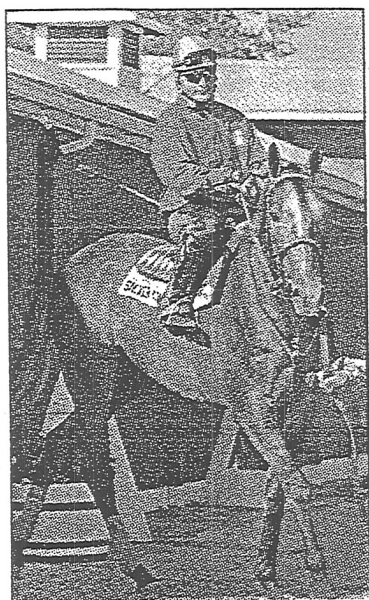
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The Courier

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LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

METRO
EDITION



Weapons experts fire rifle

Criminalist says tests may not be conclusive as to murder weapon

Associated Press

SOUTH KINGSTOWN, R.I. — James Earl Ray's rifle, locked in an evidence box for nearly 20 years, was fired yesterday in tests that Ray hopes will clear him in the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

Ray, 69, imprisoned in Tennessee and gravely ill with liver disease, pleaded guilty in 1969 to killing the civil-rights leader but almost immediately recanted. He has asked for a trial ever since.

Ray has acknowledged owning the rifle but said a gunrunner he knew as "Raoul"

dropped the gun — with his fingerprints on it — near the scene to frame him.

The tests, which will use an electron microscope, were not available when Ray went to prison. He hopes they will show the bullet that killed King came from another weapon.

A report should be released next month, said Robert Hathaway, the criminalist leading the testing team. He also said it is possible that the markings on the bullets being tested will not be distinct enough to lead to a definitive conclusion.

Ray's Remington .30-06 rifle was retrieved yesterday from a padlocked, black case marked "evidence," and the three fragments of the bullet taken from King's body were displayed in a clear plastic container. Later, researchers fired six shots into a tank of water.

The first to pull the trigger, George Reich of the Suffolk County Crime Lab on

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Journal

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of King's confessed assassin

Long Island, N.Y., fired two shots and was drenched when water splashed onto him.

"I felt this strong sense of history," he said. "It's been a highlight in my career to be involved in this."

The slugs will be compared to the bullet from King's body to look at the marks left by the gun barrel. Each gun barrel has different markings that are transferred onto the bullet to create an imprint as unique as a fingerprint.

The marks will get a preliminary examination at the University of Rhode Island before going to a private lab, CamScan USA Inc. in Pennsylvania, where the electron microscope will be used.

Hathaway and Marshall Robinson, an independent contractor who examines firearms for the Waterbury and Bridgeport police departments in Connecticut, also fired two shots each.

The tests continue today and tomorrow.



MEMPHIS COMMERCIAL APPEAL
Firearms expert George Reich fired the rifle believed used in the King assassination as part of ballistics tests.