

Man Says He Was Approached To Kill Martin Luther King

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WASHINGTON (AP) — A St. Louis man testified under oath today that he rejected a \$50,000 offer from a St. Louis lawyer, now dead, to "either arrange or kill Martin Luther King."



Russell George Byers told the House Assassinations Committee that the late John Sutherland, a St. Louis patent lawyer, made the offer in late 1966 or early 1967 and indicated the money would come from "a secret Southern organization."

A committee was expected to hear a staff report later today which concludes that investigators have found no direct connection between the alleged offer and King's assassination but that such a connection is possible.

In testimony yesterday, former Atty.

Gen. Ramsey Clark said a "quality of racism" in the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's attitude toward King did not stop the bureau from carrying out a vigorous and thorough investigation into King's assassination.

"The FBI's reputation was on the line," Clark said. "Failure to perform would have had profound impact on public confidence in the FBI."

Clark said he gave the FBI a free hand in setting the direction of the investigation, except for making suggestions, and keeping himself informed. He added that the Justice Department declined to take over the investigation because it would have worsened relations between him and Hoover.

The panel has criticized both the FBI and Justice Department saying they failed to investigate adequately the possibility of a conspiracy in the April 4, 1968, assassination of King.

Committee investigators have said

there are indications the brothers of James Earl Ray may have played a part in the murder of the civil rights leader.

Ray is serving a 99-year prison term in Tennessee's Brushy Mountain Prison for the crime, although he has recanted a 1969 confession to the murder.

One of the brothers, John Larry Ray, is being held in St. Louis in connection with an apparent burglary attempt there. But Federal authorities are expected to bring him to Washington later this week to testify before the assassinations panel.

Meanwhile, Ray's other brother, Jerry Ray, said yesterday in Marietta, Ga., "There definitely was no conspiracy. I didn't even know why they (the FBI) were looking for him (James Earl Ray)." He also is scheduled to testify before the committee.

G. Robert Blakey, chief counsel to the House Assassinations Committee, indi-

cated in a statement Monday that the FBI may have become so preoccupied with the search for James Earl Ray that it ignored what he called the "possibility of a Ray family conspiracy."

That was an "almost inexplicable failure" on the part of the FBI, he said. "Family members of the suspected triggerman deserved at least some investigative attention."

But Jerry Ray said the FBI "talked to me every day until they caught him (James Earl Ray) in London."

He said the committee was told last August that the Rays robbed a bank at Alton, Ill., on July 13, 1967, to finance the assassination of King, who was killed April 4, 1968.

"I will tell them the same thing I told the secret hearings," he said. "I'm taking up the FBI file with me. It shows that James Earl Ray didn't rob that bank and it shows that I didn't rob that bank."