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Ray Paid After King Killing, FBI Was Told

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WASHINGTON — The Federal Bureau of Investigation received a report in March 1974 that an Imperial, Mo., businessman was “the individual who made the payoff to James Earl Ray after the killing” of Dr. Martin Luther King, according to FBI documents made public yesterday.

The documents, released under the Freedom of Information Act to Harold Weissberg, a private investigator of assassination matters, and The New York Times, included a control agent’s account in 1974 of an informer’s report in late 1973.

It was based on the informant’s conversation with Russell G. Byers, a one-time St. Louis auto-parts dealer who is now a witness before the House Select Committee on Assassinations. Although the censored document did not specify who Byers said had made the payoff to Ray, government sources said he had identified the man as John Kauffmann, a former stockbroker who died in 1974. Byers last week confirmed to the New York Times that he had told the committee Kauffmann and a Missouri lawyer had offered him \$50,000 to arrange the assassination of King, and that he turned the offer down.

But the documents released yesterday showed that in 1973, Byers told an FBI informant that one of these two men was the person who paid off Ray after King’s murder on April 4, 1968. Ray is serving a 99-year sentence in Tennessee for the killing. He has said, after pleading guilty, that he did not shoot the black leader.

The FBI memorandum noted: “During the fall of 1973 (lengthy deletion), Beyers (the name was misspelled) talked freely about himself and his business, and they later went to (short deletion) where Beyers told a story about

visiting a lawyer in St. Louis County, now deceased, not further identified, who had offered to give him a contract to kill Martin Luther King.”

The memorandum continued: “He said that also present was a short stocky man, who walked with a limp. Later, with regard to the actual individual, Beyers commented that this man was actually the individual who made the pay-

off of James Earl Ray after the killing.”

According to the memorandum, “Beyers said he had declined to accept this contract. He did remark that this lawyer had Confederate flags and other items about the house that might indicate he was ‘a real rebel.’ Beyers also commented that he had been offered either \$10,000 or \$20,00 to kill King.”

There is no indication that Byers presented any corroboration for the charge that Kauffmann paid Ray. The FBI memorandum notes: “Sometime later (lengthy deletion) this individual advised (short deletion) that Beyers truly is a ‘very treacherous guy,’ cautioning him to stay away from him if he wanted to stay out of trouble.”

In an interview with a New York Times reporter on July 18, Byers said that he met with John Sutherland, a patent lawyer from Imperial, Mo., and Kauffmann, the one-time stockbroker, in late 1966 or early 1967 and they offered him \$50,000 for the King murder. He did not disclose in the interview that he believed Kauffmann actually paid Ray after the crime. He said he turned down the offer.

Both Sutherland and Kauffmann are dead and their widows have said they did not believe their late husbands would have become involved in such a plot. Byers told this story to persons in 1968 and

again in 1973.

The FBI did not investigate the report or even interview Kauffmann about it. Bureau spokesmen have said the allegation did not receive proper dissemination within the bureau.

An inquiry by New York Times reporters has uncovered court

testimony that Kauffmann was smuggling amphetamine powder into the Missouri State Penitentiary, where Ray was serving a robbery sentence, in 1966. According to some accounts of Ray’s activities, he was receiving money from the sale of drugs in prison. It is from this penitentiary that Ray escaped a year before King’s death.

The House assassination committee staff is now concentrating its investigation on the direct connections, if any, between Kauffmann and Ray or members of his family.