

Assassinations Panel Not Certain Bullet From Ray's

By Jeremiah O'Leary

Washington Star Staff Writer

The House Assassinations Committee has had no more success than the FBI in determining absolutely if Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was slain by a bullet from James Earl Ray's rifle.

A panel of ballistics experts retained by the committee testified yesterday that it could not conclude that the fatal bullet and subsequent test-fired bullets came from the Remington rifle owned by Ray.

Panel members said they could not even make scientific matches of the bullets fired from the rifle in a series

of isolated tests because there is always a variation in the markings on hard-jacketed bullets.

The committee said it was not possible to establish a positive link between the bullet that killed King and the cartridge case fired from Ray's rifle.

D.C. Delegate Walter Fauntroy noted that the committee had shed what light it could on the origin of the shot. This data suggested, he said, that the fatal shot probably was fired from the direction of the rooming house in Memphis where Ray had a room. But he said the panel could not

determine from the medical evidence that the shot was fired from the second-floor bathroom window or from the shrubbery below the window.

THE BALLISTICS experts had no more luck yesterday than the medical experts. Each of the specialists conducted their own tests with the Ray rifle and each found that they could neither match the test bullets with one another nor with the shattered remnants of the bullet that killed King 10 years ago.

Chairman Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, indicated some of the committee's frustration about the inadequacy of the physical evidence.

"Let me say that while we may not always know what we might wish to know with the degree and certitude that we might like," Stokes said, "the committee is still obligated to make public what it has learned. This obligation stems from the nature of legislative proceedings as opposed to a judicial trial."

His comments seemed to relate to the fact that there is much less physical evidence available in the King case than there was in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Stokes said in the King case there were no photos, for example, taken at the instant of the murder. In the King case, he said, the panel must rely more on documents and human memories.

IN ITS PREVIOUS hearings the committee demonstrated that Ray probably had stalked King to Memphis, that his self-styled mastermind "Raoul" probably did not exist and that Ray lied when he said he never went back to Atlanta after purchasing the rifle in Birmingham.

Rifle Killed King

Yesterday Committee Counsel G. Robert Blakey said the committee abandoned the idea of a psychological study of Ray but did establish that the geometric data is consistent with the theory that the assassin fired the fatal shot from the bathroom window of the rooming house near King's motel.

Today the committee will take up the motivations for the slaying of King, including some of the 21 reported but unproven assassination plots and the security provisions made in Memphis for King's safety.