

Witness retracts his story

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WASHINGTON—James Earl Ray's so-called alibi witness admitted under oath yesterday that he had lied when he said he saw Ray at a gasoline station at the time the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot.

Coy Dean Cowden told the House-Select Committee on Assassinations that he was 400 miles away, in Beaumont, Tex., on April 4, 1968, when King was slain in Memphis, Tenn.

Cowden said his earlier statement that he saw Ray six blocks from the motel where King was shot was a "rehearsed" lie that he gave to an amateur investigator and to Ray's attorney, Mark Lane.

In his 1977 book on the King assassination, "Code Mark Zorro," Lane described Cowden as a longtime Memphis resident and quoted him as saying he had seen Ray at the gasoline station at the time of the shooting.

"This is completely false," Cowden

said yesterday under questioning by Rep. Robert Edgar (D., Pa.), a committee member.

Cowden said that his statement to Lane was rehearsed with Renfro Hays, a private investigator, who gave the same story to the National Enquirer last year.

Cowden said that he made the statement because he owed Hays a favor. He said Hays had supported him in 1974 when he was unemployed.

The committee also produced an affidavit from Cowden's ex-wife con-

of Ray's alibi

firming that Cowden had been in Beaumont at the time of the King murder.

Cowden's testimony was another blow to Ray's claim of innocence in the King assassination. He confessed to the shooting in 1969 but later recanted. He is serving a 99-year prison term.

Ray had contended that at the time of the shooting he had driven his white Mustang to a gasoline station in Memphis to have a tire repaired.

But in other testimony yesterday,

the owner of that station, Lawrence E. McFall, and his son, Philip, told the committee that they did not see or service a white Mustang that evening.

Earlier yesterday Lane succeeded in putting the committee on the defensive as he challenged the credibility of another surprise witness.

In the ensuing outburst, the committee abruptly called a halt to Ray's testimony and sent him back to Brushy Mountain penitentiary in (See RAY on 2-A)

RAY, From 1-A

Tennessee until November, when he will be asked to testify again.

Before the outburst, the committee produced a statement from a former London police officer, Alexander Anthony Eist, that Ray told him he had killed King and thought he would become rich and famous because of it.

Eist, who had custody over Ray after his 1968 arrest in London, gave his statement in an interview with committee investigators on Aug. 4.

Ray, who hopes that the committee's investigation will help him win a new trial, promptly said that Eist's statement was false. "I think that is probably the most damaging statement against me," he said. "It is false."

Ray charged that the Eist statement was evidence that the committee intended to "crucify" him.

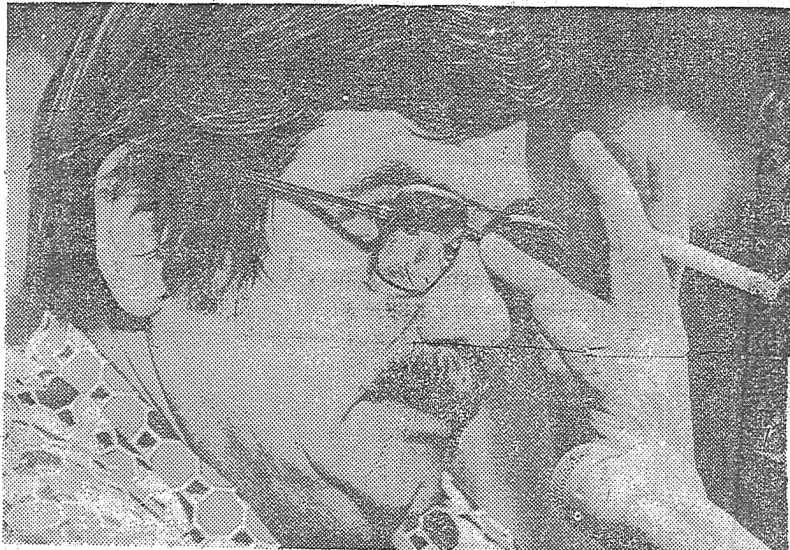
About that time, Lane, who had been out of the hearing room, returned to Ray's side and angrily denounced Eist as "a corrupt police official."

Lane said he had just placed a call to "an English barrister" who told him that Eist, now a pubkeeper, had been forced from his job as a police officer on charges of theft and corruption.



United Press International

Members of the House assassinations committee consider an objection by Ray's attorney, Mark Lane



United Press International

'Alibi' witness Cowden testifies yesterday at hearings

ing him that Eist "invented oral confessions and committed perjuries" to help convict prisoners who had been in his custody.

"This is the height of irresponsibility," Lane shouted. "I have never in 28 years of practicing law ever seen anything as outrageous as this."

Rep. Samuel L. Devine (R., Ohio), a former FBI agent, said, "This committee just recently received this in

Eist's credibility." testimony is not being offered as truth."

Rep. Richardson Preyer (D., N.C.), a former federal judge, unsuccessfully sought to assure Lane that "this