

Agents: King Monitored

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Memphis, Tenn. — Army intelligence agents monitored Martin Luther King Jr.'s public appearances in Memphis in the days before his 1968 murder, say retired agents speaking publicly for the first time.

The agents said that they had no foreknowledge of the assassination and that conspiracy theorists have misinterpreted and twisted the purpose of their Memphis mission.

They watched for outbreaks of violence during the city's volatile garbage workers' strike, the agents said, and the information was used to decide whether to send armed troops to Memphis.

"We were never given any mission to keep King under surveillance. Never," said retired Col. Edward

McBride, who oversaw the 111th Military Intelligence Group's Memphis operations from Fort McPherson in Atlanta.

Newly declassified reports show at least four agents were in Memphis on April 4, 1968, when King was shot by a sniper at the Lorraine Motel.

The 111th sent as many as 10 undercover agents to Memphis after a March 28, 1968, riot that erupted during a protest march King led in support of striking workers, according to reports obtained by the Memphis Commercial Appeal under the Freedom of Information Act. Some of the 111th's Memphis visits in March and April, 1968, coincided with King's arrivals and departures, the documents show.

"We [took note] when he was in Memphis in his

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public moves. We knew he was speaking at [Mason Temple the evening of April 3], we knew he was going to march in the parade," said Jimmie Locke, who led the Memphis operation and was in Memphis when King was shot.

"We weren't particularly concerned except that he might be the catalyst for an event of some kind," Locke said from his home in San Antonio.

James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to King's murder in 1969, but recanted days later and has since been seeking a new trial. His efforts have given new life to conspiracy theories about the assassination.

Speculation has swirled for years about the possible presence of Army intelligence agents and Special Forces troops in Memphis when King died.

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