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NATION

Search for Mysterious 'Raoul'

Prosecutors probe claims by Ray's lawyers about King assassin

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Memphis prosecutors are investigating claims by James Earl Ray's attorneys that they have identified the long-sought mystery figure called "Raoul" — the man Ray contends masterminded the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination and actually fired the fatal shot.

The prosecutors are also investigating claims by Ray's lawyers that a witness once saw "Raoul" meeting with Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby in Ruby's Dallas strip joint. Moreover, they are checking claims by the defense that Ruby — pronounced dead of a blood clot in 1967 while jailed for Oswald's murder — actually is alive and living in Chicago.

This is not to say the prosecutors are swallowing these claims, but they say they are checking them out for the record.

"Some of this stuff is getting a little far from reality," said John Campbell, the chief prosecutor in the King case. "It's bizarre. But we have investigators checking out all the leads we get."

The renewed investigation followed repeated court

actions and efforts by King's family to overturn Ray's 1969 guilty plea and 99-year sentence in the murder. Prosecutors have launched a put-up-or-shut-up attempt to try to bring some resolution to the case. They took the major claims by Ray's lawyers one by one and sent investigators to check them.

Ray's chief lawyer, William Pepper, has accused a New York man — not publicly identified — of being "Raoul." Campbell assigned four investigators from a task force to travel to New York recently and check out the claim. They reported finding that employment records showed the man identified as "Raoul," whose first name actually is Raul, was working in a New York factory on April 4, 1968, the day King was killed in Memphis. The man, a retired wine importer, has said he never knew Ray.

Some of the leads were prompted by information Ray's lawyers said they received from the self-described "babushka lady" from the investigation of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. Pictures at the Kennedy assassination scene showed a woman in a kerchief standing on the grassy knoll and appearing to be shooting motion pictures. A woman named

Beverly Oliver, who said she had been a strip-club dancer since age 14, claimed she was the "babushka lady" — but no firm identification was ever made.

Oliver made sundry claims about the assassination — among them that her movie camera had been confiscated by the FBI or Secret Service, she couldn't remember which. Investigation revealed that the camera she claimed to have used did not come on the market until two years after the Kennedy assassination. The House Select Committee on Assassinations interviewed her but decided against calling her as a witness.

She previously had claimed she had seen Oswald with Ruby in Ruby's club. Now she says "Raoul" was also there. Both the House committee and the Warren Commission concluded there was no evidence Oswald and Ruby knew each other.

As for the claim that Ruby is living in Chicago, the Memphis investigators are checking it, but all evidence reflects that Ruby died behind bars after a long fight with cancer.

Campbell said his office expects to act on the investigation early next year, either by taking evidence before a grand jury or by issuing a public report.