

Ray brother wants it known: He had no part in killing

By DWIGHT LEWIS

Staff Writer

Jerry Ray wants to clear his name. "I am not 'Raoul,'" he says with a straight face.

"Raoul" is key to claims by Jerry Ray's older brother, James Earl Ray, that he did not assassinate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The elder Ray contends that the mysterious Raoul, who has never been further identified, paid him money to smuggle narcotics across the U.S. border and later came to Birmingham and gave him \$3,000 to buy the Mustang that was the "get-away" car used following King's slaying.

"If I had any connection to the King assassination, I would be doing 99 years," Jerry Ray says during an interview at the state's Lois DeBerry Special Needs Facility, where his older brother is serving 99-years for murdering the nation's most prominent civil rights leader.

"I can prove beyond a doubt that I had no involvement," Jerry Ray says.

About three weeks ago, Birmingham lawyer William J. Baxley suggested to a journalist that he might look into whether Jerry Ray had any involvement in the King assassination. Baxley made the suggestion after pointing out that Jerry Ray once was associated with J.B. Stoner, an avowed racist from Georgia.

Others have also questioned whether Jerry Ray played any part in helping to finance James Earl Ray's movement shortly before the King assassination took place April 4, 1968 in Memphis. At the time of the assassination, James Earl Ray was an escapee from the Missouri State Penitentiary in Jefferson City, Mo.

"They tried to bring that up when I went before the House Assassination Committee in the late 1970s," Jerry Ray tells a reporter. "They tried to accuse me of robbing the Bank of Alton in Illinois. But I didn't do it."

As for his involvement with Stoner, Jerry Ray says it was only after the King assassination that he did any work for him.

"J.B. Stoner had run an article in the *Thunderbolt* magazine, a racist newspaper, that he would represent James for free," Jerry Ray says. "Attorney Arthur Hanes said he would quit the case if Stoner came on board."

"But after the guilty plea [James Earl Ray's initial plea in the King case], James told Stoner I was having problems finding a job. So, I went down to Savannah, Ga., sometime in 1970 and worked as a handyman and guard."

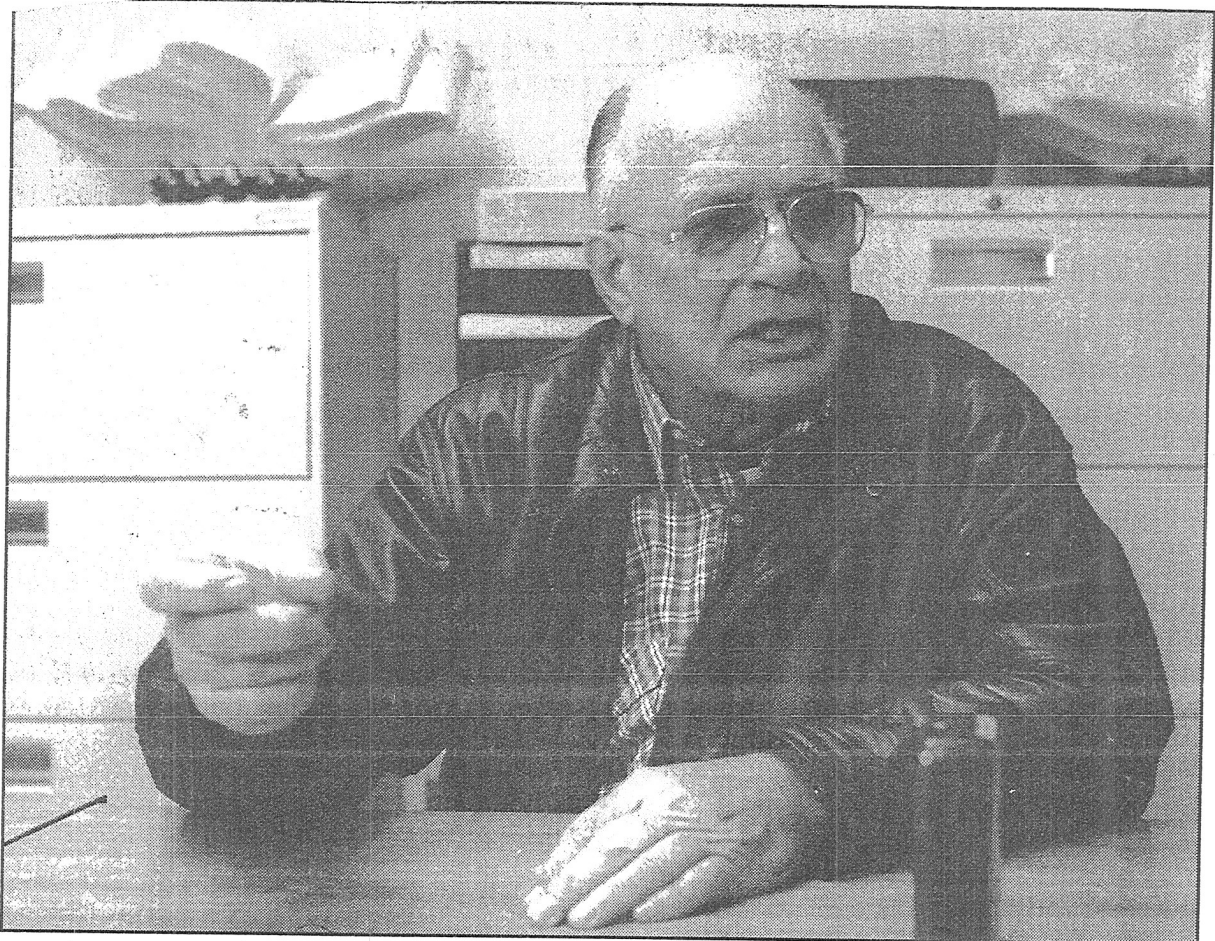
"I told Stoner when I went down there that I wouldn't go to any Klan rallies or do anything like that."

After being in Savannah for a short time, Jerry Ray says "a young guy by the name of Don Black came around."

"Stoner was running for governor of Georgia, and he wanted Black to deliver some literature for him. Black wouldn't do it, nor would he do any other work, so Stoner asked him to leave."

Jerry Ray, who now lives in Smartt, Tenn., in Warren County, says one day Black went into a room where some records were kept at the Stoner complex and threw them out a window.

"When I saw what he had done, I looked out the window and he was



DELORES DELVIN / STAFF

Jerry Ray talks about his brother, James Earl Ray, and about his own association with racist J.B. Stoner

driving around to pick them up. I yelled at him that if he took one more step I would shoot him.

"He pulled a gun out, and I shot him. He almost died but he recovered. I got indicted in the shooting but was later acquitted because Don Black testified that he was a member of the American Nazi Party and was trying to steal the records."

Concerning his brother, Jerry Rays says: "I am 99% sure that James is not guilty.

"I can't be 100% sure because I wasn't there. I didn't want him to plead guilty but his lawyer, Percy Foreman, talked him into it.

"James wants to clear his name, too. That's why a trial is so important. There is nothing else he can tell. He doesn't know anything else."

Asked why his brother took off running on the night of the assassination, Jerry Ray says:

"He was wanted for escape in Missouri and didn't want to go back to prison."

As to a deathbed confession from his brother concerning King's death, Jerry Rays asks, "How can you confess to something you didn't do?"

He has this to say about Dr. King's son, Dexter, who was in Tennessee last year to voice support for James Earl Ray's bid for a new trial: "I really took a liking to Dexter King, but I told him some people are going to say that you were conned into coming to meet James last spring and speaking out on his behalf."

Jerry Ray claims that Dexter King told him:

"We're both victims. I lost a father, and you lost a brother."

Since December 1966, James Earl Ray has been seriously ill suffering from liver failure.

"He's not in pain right now, but he's weak," Jerry Ray says. "When he went into a coma that first time out to the hospital, we didn't think he was going to live.

"Sometimes his mind is not all there because of the lack of chemicals in his liver, but he seems to be doing better.

"If he would die before he's proven innocent, I think Dexter King and his attorney, William Pepper, will call for a special prosecutor to look into the King assassination.

"We really want to clear his name." ■