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ARE THEY THE SAME?—Photo of Eric Starvo Galt, hunted in the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., is shown at right with eyes painted in by FBI artist.

Three photos at left are James Earl Ray, a prison escapee. FBI says Galt and Ray are same man. Ray photos (from left) were taken in 1959, '60, '66.

Lawmen Ponder Eric Galt Riddle

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — A ranking Memphis police officer acknowledges there are "a whole lot of discrepancies" in official descriptions of the man sought as the sniper slayer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Asst. Chief Bill Price referred to statements that James Earl Ray, 40, an escaped Missouri convict, and Eric Starvo Galt, first sought for King's April 4 assassination in Memphis, are the same person.

"You don't know what to look for," Price said yesterday as officers here and elsewhere continued their investigation of the slaying. The nationwide manhunt continues.

The FBI issued a conspiracy warrant Wednesday for Galt, then updated their case Friday by saying a fingerprint comparison showed Galt was really Ray.

The naming of Ray in the

case caused confusion, primarily because earlier official statements indicate that Galt and Ray were in different places at the same time.

When Galt was charged as a conspirator in King's death by rifle bullet, the FBI said the man had taken dancing lessons in New Orleans in 1964-65. The FBI said later the earlier description should have said Galt reportedly took dancing lessons rather than stating it flatly.

During that time, Ray was in the Missouri State Prison at Jefferson City, serving a 20-year sentence for a 1959 supermarket robbery.

The age of the man also was in conflict.

Witnesses who saw a man in a Memphis rooming house from where the fatal bullet was fired estimated his age as in the late 20s. The FBI, in issuing its warrant for Galt, said he had given his birthdate July 20, 1931. That would make him 36. The FBI said Friday Ray is 40.

The personalities of the two men are sometimes at odds. A prison pal described Ray as virtually a nondrinker. The FBI describes Galt as a fancier of beer and vodka.

There were other differences:

Galt: neat appearance.
Ray: careless appearance.

Galt: Southern accent. Ray: born in Alton, Ill. No Southern accent.

Atty Gen. Ramsey Clark who came to Memphis after King was slain, at first ruled out a conspiracy, but then the FBI issued its warrant for Galt on a conspiracy charge.

Police here have their own investigation of the slaying under way, and officials say detectives are working hard on the case.

One theory within the Memphis department is that Eric Starvo Galt is a myth, painstakingly created by the conspirators as a smoke screen.

"Somebody has muddied the waters," Price said.