

F.B.I. HUNT FOR RAY IN DR. KING KILLING STUNS PRISON OFFICIALS AND OTHERS WHO KNEW HIM

By DOUGLAS E. KNEELAND

Special to The New York Times

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo., April 22 — Prison officials and inmates at the state penitentiary here are still stunned that James Earl Ray, a convict who escaped a year ago, has been accused of conspiring in the slaying of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Last Wednesday the Federal Bureau of Investigation named Eric Starvo Galt, described as a 36-year-old "loner," a neat dresser and avid dancer, as a conspirator in the assassination April 4 of Dr. King in Memphis, Tenn.

Newspapers with pictures and sketches of Galt circulated behind the gray walls of the old penitentiary on the Missouri River, but no word of recognition was heard along the prison grapevine.

On Friday, the F.B.I. said Galt was Ray, a 40-year-old habitual criminal who escaped from the penitentiary here April 23, 1967, after having served seven years of a 20-year sentence for armed robbery.

Warden Harold R. Swenson said in an interview last night that the F.B.I. had not notified officials here before the announcement. Nor, he added, has any representative of the agency come to Jefferson City to look at Ray's record or interview prisoners who knew him.

Doesn't Shape Up

"I was floored," the white-haired warden said. "This guy's penny-ante. It doesn't shape up, does it?"

Thumbing through Ray's records, noting that his work reports in food service here were "pretty good," Mr. Swenson, who has been in prison work nearly 30 years, mostly in the Federal system, shook his head. "He's innocuous," he said. "Pennyante."

Noting that the pictures of Galt had meant nothing to the staff and that there had been no reaction from the inmates, the warden added: "If there's anyone who'd talk, it's the prisoners. Once a guy's gone they'll talk."

An aide strolled into the warden's office and interrupted.

"We've got 2,000 prisoners in here," he said, "and none of them recognized him."

Continuing with Ray's file, Mr. Swenson said that the prisoner had received permission for four persons to visit him, two brothers, Jerry and John, his mother, Mrs. Lucille Ryan, and his grandmother, Mrs. Mary Maher. All were listed at the same address, 1913 Hickory Street, St. Louis. But the warden said the file did not show whether any of them had visited Ray.

Aside from escape attempts in 1961 and 1966 the warden said, Ray was not a trouble-maker in prison. His file showed only two minor disciplinary reports—one for trying to smuggle cigarettes and other contraband to a hospitalized prisoner and another for refusing to work. That is a highly unusual record, Mr. Swenson explained.

"He wasn't a big dealer," the warden went on. "We know these people. I've got 125 pictures here—he wasn't in that group. I was shocked. It didn't make any sense to me."

Prisoner Nervous

Another prison official, who asked not to be identified, came into the warden's second-floor office.

"This would seem foreign to the nature of the man up to this point," the official said.

Although it is against his policy, Warden Swenson agreed because of national interest in the case, to allow an interview with the prisoner who had been closest to Ray, who was known as a close-mouthed loner without real friends or enemies. A condition of the interview was that the inmate would not be identified.

The prisoner, the work shirt of his faded green uniform open over a stained white T-shirt, entered the warden's office hesitantly. The other prisoners were wondering, he explained nervously, why he was being questioned.

Seated at a table in front of the warden's desk, dragging deeply on a cigarette, he slowly relaxed.

Shown a picture of Galt and asked if that was his friend, Ray, he shook his head vigorously.

"No, sir, not this," he insisted. "I guess I knew him about as well as anybody. He was here when I came here, in 1960. I knew him from about 1962, well, I associated with him right up to 1966 when he tried to escape."

Just Couldn't Believe It

Struggled for words as he tried to capture Ray's personality, the prisoner started to talk:

"I just don't know how to explain it," he said. "He was just the type of guy who took a long time, well, if you didn't know anybody he knew, well..."

"The picture with the bow tie on [the F.B.I. photo of Galt], nobody thinks it's him. They think it's a different guy altogether. We think it's two different people altogether."

"Now they [the prisoners] say they're just trying to pin it on him because he escaped from here. They think they've got to lay it on somebody, so they're trying to lay it on him."

"I just couldn't believe it myself. If the man did kill that man, it had to be for money. That would be the onliest thing. He didn't seem like the kind

of guy who would kill anybody. He was the type of guy, you didn't fool with him, but he didn't fool with anybody.

"He wasn't the type of guy to tell you anything about himself. He never actually did come out and tell you what he did when he was outside. Anytime you'd get in a conversation with him it would be about money. A dollar here and a dollar there."

"He talked about money all the time. Trying to figure a way to make a dollar. Just little things. Maybe he'd buy

something for a little bit and sell it for a little bit more. If a guy owed him anything, he'd bug him all the time. He didn't get into fights with them, but he'd hound them."

Ray did not smoke, the prisoner said, and "didn't say anything about girls," although he liked to read "sex magazines." Neither, he added, did Ray show any interest in dancing or Western and country music, which the F. B. I. said were favorites of Galt.

In addition to "sex magazines," the prisoner added, Ray

liked to read secret agent books.

Puzzling for a minute, thinking, he went on:

"I think the President even liked that book—James Bond—he liked James Bond." [President Kennedy was known as a reader of the late Ian Fleming's spy novels.]

As for politics, the prisoner said:

"He just didn't seem to be interested in it."

Negroes? "He didn't dislike them. He didn't associate with them one

way or the other. Although I think he did talk with them."

Ray did have another interest. Body building.

"He has a lot better build than a lot of people think he has. He did a lot of physical exercising, a lot of weight lifting and pull-ups and things like that."

Did Ray ever talk about what he would do when he got out?

"Actually, he never talked much about outside anyway," the prisoner said. "He just talked about getting outside. Everyone talks about getting

out. He wanted out any way he could get out."

"I think he did say something once about getting in the maritime union," the prisoner added.

The man known as Galt is said to have identified himself at times as an unemployed merchant seaman.

Physically, Ray could fit some descriptions given of the man sought in the slaying of Dr. King. Records show him to be about 5 feet 11 inches tall, weighing between 160 and 170 pounds.

Some questions have been raised about his age, since the suspect described by some persons in Memphis was said to be younger than 40.

"I don't believe he'd look 40," his prisoner friend said. "I don't believe he'd go for the 20's either. I'd say somewhere right around 30."

Warden Swenson agreed. But taking issue with another description of the man called Galt, the prisoner added: "He wasn't what you'd call a neat dresser in here."