

MILLION DOLLAR

KING BOUNTY ?

New Clue From Ray's Prison Pal

DALTON, Ga. (UPI) — A prison buddy of James Earl Ray said today that when Ray heard there was a "million-dollar bounty" on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., he smiled and said, "I'll collect it."

Ray, a 40-year-old fugitive from the Missouri State Prison, is accused by the FBI of assassinating King in Memphis on April 4.

In the Dalton jail, Raymond Curtis, 40, awaiting appeal on a murder sentence, said he had known Ray in the Kansas City jail, in federal prison at Leavenworth, Kan., and in the state prison at Jefferson City, Mo.

He described Ray as likeable, addicted to "dope," a "loner" and a man concerned only with money.

On the day President Kennedy was assassinated — Nov. 23, 1963 — Curtis said he, Ray, and about 150 other prisoners were in an exercise yard when they heard the news.

He said Ray remarked, "Well, somebody made a pretty penny on that."

About a week later, Curtis said, he and Ray were in the yard when "a new man just in off the street" told them "the businessmen's association has a million dollar bounty out for Martin Luther King."

Ray smiled, Curtis recalled, and said "if there's a million dollars out for King, I believe if I ever get out I'll collect it."

Curtis said he never figured out what the "new man" meant by the "businessmen's association." He said he couldn't remember who the man was.

Authorities in Jefferson City confirmed that Curtis and Ray were in prison at the same time.

Curtis said Ray told him "he always carried a gun. He was always interested in money," Curtis said, but never mentioned racial matters.

Ray couldn't "make a long

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conversation unless he was planning something," said Curtis. "If he was planning something, you could bet they'd be thorough plans." Ray, he said, masterminded things "that would be small things outside, but were pretty big jobs in prison" — such as the theft of eggs and drugs and cigarettes.

He said Ray told him that if he ever wanted to kill someone, he would buy a gun under a false name, and have everything ready for an escape. "He used to talk a lot about escaping to New Zealand, Brazil and Argentina," Curtis said.

"I wouldn't consider him dangerous," Curtis said. "He didn't look for trouble."

"Of course, I'm not saying he wouldn't shoot if you ran up on him now."