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By GODFREY ANDERSON

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LONDON AP - James Earl Ray seemed to be an easy going fugitive until something alarmed him three days before his arrest. Then, overnight, he was jumpy and sought to hide himself. The bars and restaurants of Lisbon and London saw him no more. He switched to an obscure back street hotel, locked himself in, changed his whole mode of life.

When he went out it was only to buy cold snacks from the shop around the corner. He ate them in his room. And his nervousness seemed to increase when he was twice informed that his planned flights out of England had been delayed.

The Pax Hotel in Pimlico, where Ray stayed and called himself Ramon George Sneyd, presents a blankly anonymous face to the outside world.

It is a cream-painted three-story building in a street filled with others just like it. A two-minute walk away is the British Overseas Airways terminal and the busy Victoria continental rail depot.

There's no name on the black-painted door and the electric sign above it only says "hotel." The push-button by the knocker is labeled "bell." The telephone number is unlisted. The Pax is discreet.

Taxi drivers have never heard of the Pax Hotel. Nor has the nearby milk depot. Nor the newsstand.

Anna Thomas, the Swedish-born 54-year-old wife of an Englishman, bought the place recently, redecorated it from top to bottom, and opened in April. She has seven rooms and can accommodate a total of 12 guests.

She saw little of Sneyd during the three days he was with her from last Wednesday to Saturday. He was already lying low.

"He arrived in the middle of a violent rainstorm Wednesday evening," Mrs. Thomas said Monday. "There was no one in the hotel because I'd only just returned from visiting my 86-year-old mother in Stockholm.

"He had only an airline bag as luggage, but I gave him No. 1 on the ground floor. We often get single gentlemen with only an airline bag, saying over between flights."

Mrs. Thomas said Sneyd didn't have much to say.

"He said he was from Toronto. I asked him about Toronto. He said there was a lot of unemployment there."

But she noticed how nervous and ill he seemed.

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"He hardly ever went out and then only to buy food, lots of newspapers and aspirins," Mrs. Thomas said.

"He seemed so ill and stayed in bed all day. He told me he had arrived on an early flight and was very tired. He seemed very, very nervous."

The room assigned to Ray was at the rear of the ground floor. It looks out on to a tiny backyard surrounded by a wall. The wallpaper is patterned with peacocks and there are yellow drapes at the lace-curtained window. A bathroom is in the corridor outside, next door and two steps down.

Mrs. Thomas said she only once got into the room while he was there. That was when he'd slipped out for aspirin. She found he'd made the bed and tidied up. And he'd washed his own shirts.

When she brought him breakfast the first morning he refused to open the door and told her to leave the tray outside. She asked him for the hotel register which she'd given him to sign. He put it out later with the tray. But she found he hadn't signed it.

Mrs. Thomas said Sneyd had no visitors and only two phone calls—both from a girl at British European Airways about postponed flight bookings to Germany.

"I didn't know who he was when she asked for Mr. Sneyd," said Mrs. Thomas. "I said: 'Do you mean the Canadian?' And that was it."

Bea telephoned Sneyd on Thursday and again on Friday. Mrs. Thomas pushed the messages under his door. He didn't open or answer.

"He said he would be leaving Saturday," she said, "and I said to myself: Good riddance."

But she moved him upstairs to No. 3 for his last night in the Pax Hotel, because No. 1 had been booked for someone else.

Sneyd paid his hotel check with a five-pound bill, the equivalent of \$12. Then he went out for the last time through that anonymous-looking street door. He was arrested at Heathrow Airport a few hours later.

He was booked on a flight for Brussels, not Germany. But there was no clear lead as to why he might go to either place.

Brussels airport police had Ray's name with a couple of aliases on their watch list, according to an informant at the Belgian state police. But they had no picture of the man.

Speculation in Brussels ranged from the suggestion that he might be seeking to enroll as a mercenary for Africa or Yemen, was en route to Eastern Europe, or just hoped to lose himself in the continental summer vacation crowds.

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There was mystery about some of Ray's earlier movements. London Airport officials first said he had been arrested upon flying in from Lisbon. Later they said he was outward bound for Brussels. Mrs. Thomas said he had been intending to fly to Germany.

Reports from Lisbon showed the man known as Sneyd had certainly been in Lisbon earlier. He was registered at the third category Hotel Portugal May 8 at 8 p.m. arriving from Lisbon Airport with a flight bag and a suitcase.

The hotel has only sleeping accommodations and no restaurant service.

He signed the register as Ramon George Sneya, 36, Canadian, without profession. The same spelling error in the surname also appeared on his passport and the Canadian Embassy in Lisbon said he noted this when he asked for a new passport there.

He stayed in room No. 2 on the first floor of the Hotel Portugal until May 17, when he left at 10 a.m. and paid 60.50 escudos or just over \$2 per day.

The hotel staff said he usually went out about 10 each morning, often returning 15 and 16 hours later.

He appeared to have plenty of Portuguese currency and possibly ate his meals in local restaurants or bars.

The general impression Sneyd gave the hotel staff was that of "a man of few words."

What he might have done in Portugal was not clear. But Ian Colvin, a reporter for the London Daily Telegraph who has close contacts with European groups recruiting foreign mercenaries in Africa, said he talked with a man calling himself Ramon Sneyd several times by telephone last Tuesday; the conversation gave a hint.

Colvin said: "When we first spoke, a Canadian or perhaps an American voice said to me: 'This is Raymond Sneyd. I want to join my brother who has been in Portuguese Angola.'"

Ray has 10 brothers and sisters. None is known to be outside the United States.

Colvin said Ray called him again last Thursday and said, "this time he was more explicit. He said his brother was not missing but that he had not seen him for four months. It was not so much that he wanted to start a search for his brother, but he wished to become a mercenary in Africa himself."

Reports have circulated that some of the white mercenaries who fought in the Congo have now joined Portuguese forces battling guerrilla armies in its African territories.

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There is a gap not yet explained in Sneyd's movements between May 17, when he left the hotel in Portugal and May 28 when he turned up at the New Earls Court Hotel in London.

This hotel is near the big Earls Court Stadium in West London, scene of Billy Graham's British crusades. It is in an area thickly dotted with hotels, large and small, charging moderate prices.

The population of Earls Court is cosmopolitan. Here Londoners rub shoulders with Australians and New Zealanders, Canadians, Indians and Pakistanis, Negroes from Africa or Jamaica. It is a shifting population of students and workers. No one stays very long. And everyone minds his own business.

The New Earls Court Hotel is where Sneyd from May 28 to last Wednesday, when something apparently alarmed him and he shifted a couple of miles east to the even greater anonymity of Pimlico's Pax Hotel.

At the New Earls Court, which is usually full, Sneyd had room No. 54, a third-floor single.

Jane Nassau, 21-year-old receptionist, remembers Sneyd as "very quiet, nervous, pathetically shy and unsure of himself."

She said he had no visitors at the hotel and no telephone messages. Because the hotel only serves breakfasts, he went out for his meals. He took breakfast in the hotel dining room with other guests.

Miss Nassau said Sneyd signed the hotel register but she could not show it because the police had taken it away.

The New Earls Court Hotel, like the Pax, is near an air terminal. Only a few minutes away is the big air terminal of British European Airways, departure and arrival point for all European flights.

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