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By LAWRENCE MALKIN

Associated Press Writer

LONDON AP - The British government started speedy official action on a formal U.S. request Wednesday for the extradition of James Earl Ray to stand trial in Tennessee for the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

By the end of the day the application had cleared its first legal hurdle at the British Foreign Office.

But court formalities and appeals, if the 40-year-old escaped convict chooses to use them, could delay Ray's return up to six weeks or even longer should the case take some unexpected turn.

U.S. officials, headed by Asst. Atty. Gen. Fred M. Vinson Jr., chief of the Justice Department's criminal division, beat their self-imposed deadline for handing in the petition by one day.

But parts of the petition, which was at least an inch thick when it was handed in to the Foreign Office by U.S. Consul General Jack Herfurt, apparently had been readied in advance of Ray's arrest last Saturday at London Airport as he tried to board a plane for Brussels.

The petition contained a summary of some of the evidence against Ray in King's murder at a Memphis motel April 4. It also contained information on his escape from the Missouri State Prison while serving an armed robbery charge.

The U.S. government is seeking extradition on both counts and must satisfy a British judge that both would also be crimes under British as well as U.S. law.

The petition also contains fingerprints and other material to identify Ray as the man now being held under round-the-clock guard in London's Wandsworth Prison. Officially he is being held here as Ramon George Sneyd, travelling under a Canadian passport issued in that name and charged with passport offenses as well as carrying a loaded gun.

Within hours after receiving the petition, the Foreign Office certified that the request fell within the terms of the 1931 extradition treaty between the two countries.

It then was sent to the Home Office, roughly comparable to the U.S. Justice Department. There lawyers started a preliminary screening to ensure it established a case against Ray, as required by British law.

The Home Office said that if the petition is in order it should be in the hands of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Frank Milton sometime Thursday.

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Under normal procedure Milton would study the petition and schedule a hearing about a week after receiving it.

If Milton grants extradition, Ray has 15 days to appeal to the High Court, and another 14 days to take the case to the House of Lords if his lawyers want to challenge the order on a point of law.

Ray's court-appointed British lawyer refused all comment on his case. The lawyer, Michael Dresden, specializes in police court cases and was picked to defend him on the passport and gun charges. Ray could request another lawyer for the extradition hearing, and that would delay the case.

So long as Ray is held here on passport charges, British police have legal authority to investigate his movements during his three weeks in London prior to his arrest. Scotland Yard is doing that.

Jane Nassau, receptionist at one hotel where Ray stayed, told a newsman that the police are looking for another receptionist who checked Ray into the hotel. The other girl now is on vacation, but Miss Nassau said Scotland Yard wants to find out if someone accompanied Ray when he arrived at the hotel.

The police investigation, carried out at the request and with the cooperation of the FBI, appears directed at determining whether evidence of a conspiracy to kill King can be turned up in London.

There was some suspicion here that Ray may have had an appointment to meet someone in London—perhaps a contact man who never turned up.

Miss Nassau said Ray had originally been booked to leave the hotel on June 3 and then extended his stay for two more days. When she asked him why, he said: "I'm having trouble with my visa."

Then he moved across town to a secluded hotel with a private telephone number and stayed in his room for four days trying to arrange a flight out of London. By that time, police apparently were on his trail and closing in.

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With Ray

ATLANTA, Ga. AP - An Atlanta apartment manager says a man using the name Eric Starvo Galt, a favorite alias of James Earl Ray, stayed in one of his units for a week prior to the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in April, the Atlanta Constitution reported.

Ray, who has been charged with murder in the April 4 sniper slaying of King in Memphis, was arrested in London Saturday.

The Constitution, in a copyright story Wednesday morning, quoted the apartment manager as saying "Galt" drove a white mustang, the same kind of car authorities say Ray abandoned in Atlanta the day after the assassination.

Requesting that he and his apartment building remain unidentified, the manager was quoted as saying the FBI came to him after King's death with information that a certain man may have stayed in his building, which is in Atlanta's hippie district.

The Constitution said the landlord was shown pictures of the man who called himself Galt and that he later learned he had identified Ray.

He said Ray stayed in a \$10.50 a week room, paying in advance, and then paid for seven more days but left sometime during the second week.

"I asked him what he did for a living," the landlord continued.

"He said he was a 'jack of all trades' and never did really answer. I didn't ask any further questions because he seemed like such a nice-looking, well-mannered person.

"He acted more like a preacher than a convict," the apartment manager said.

King conducted a number of news conferences in Atlanta in the weeks just before his trip to Memphis.

All the conferences were open to the public and it is conceivable Ray could have attended unnoticed.

The FBI asked about the Constitution's information, said,

"we can make no new statements concerning the case."

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Ray-Memphis 300

MEMPHIS, Tenn. AP - The American Civil Liberties Union urged Dist. Atty. Phil Canale Wednesday not to seek the death penalty for James Earl Ray, charged with murdering Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The ACLU request noted its traditional opposition to capital punishment but also pointed to "serious constitutional questions" raised by a recent Supreme Court decision.

The reference was to a ruling that the death penalty could not be handed down in cases where prospective jurors who do not believe in capital punishment are excluded from the panel.

Whitworth Stokes Jr., a Nashville lawyer who heads the Tennessee ACLU, said his organization "in no way wishes to impair your

Canale's efforts or those of any attorney representing Mr. Ray in seeing that he is tried fairly. . .

"However, in view of the serious constitutional questions involved, we urge that in any prosecution of Mr. Ray, punishment other than death by electrocution be sought," Stokes said.

Ray, accused of shooting King as the civil rights leader stood on a motel balcony here April 4, is being held by British authorities in London, pending action on a U.S. request for extradition.

Meanwhile, Boston attorney F. Lee Bailey expressed concern at a news conference here that the attorneys picked to defend Ray and Sirhan B. Sirhan will run a big risk of getting shot.

"Any good lawyer would be less than enthusiastic about the cases," Bailey said. "Odds are you'll be shot if you do it."

Nevertheless, he said the best attorneys should be sought for Ray and Sirhan, who is charged with killing Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in Los Angeles.

Unless the trials are as good as can be afforded, he said, people always will have doubts regardless of the outcome.

"Defending Ray would be hard because of my liking of Dr. King," Bailey said.

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Ray-fat man 240

TORONTO AP -- A Toronto taxi driver says he picked up a "big fat man" May 2 across the street from one of the two rooming houses where James Earl Ray lived, the Toronto Star reported Wednesday.

The Star said Manuel Reis, 35, drove the man and a friend three blocks west to a bank where they got out.

Earlier this week, Mrs. Sun Loo, landlady at one of the houses where Ray lived, said a tall fat man came to her door and asked for Mr. Sneyd, one of the aliases used by Ray. She said the man gave Ray an envelope.

Ray, accused of slaying civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was arrested in London Saturday. He arrived in Toronto April 8, four days after King was killed in Memphis, Tenn. Ray left Toronto by air May 6.

The newspaper said taxi cabs were called to 955 Dundas St. W. three times May 2. The address is directly across the street from No. 962 where Ray lived at the time.

Anthony Szczerura, a tenant at No. 955, was quoted as saying no one in his family called cabs that day.

The newspaper said Reis arrived at the Dundas Street location around noon and found two men waiting on the sidewalk in front of the house.

Reis also said he made a trip to pick up a fare at 922 Dundas St. W. on May 1 and the passenger looked like Ray. Reis found the fare standing on the sidewalk. No one at the address said a taxi was ordered that day, the newspaper said.

The Star said Reis took the passenger to a Westmount Avenue address.

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