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A MISTAKE BY RAY AIDED IN CAPTURE

Was Ahead of Pursuers but
Doubled Back on Trail

By FRED P. GRAHAM
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 11 — James Earl Ray had succeeded in leaving a cold trail for pursuing agents but was caught last week in London largely because he doubled back on his trail.

Sources here disclosed today that American officials did not learn until about June 1 that the man sought in the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had fled to Canada on April 8, and from there on May 6 to London.

Agents immediately began a search of airline records in London, and about two days later they learned that Ray, using the alias Ramon George Sneyd, had flown from London to Lisbon on May 7.

The focus of the search shifted to Lisbon, and checks were being made there on June 8 when Ray was apprehended in London when he appeared at Heathrow Airport to catch a flight to Brussels.

Unknown to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Scotland Yard, Ray left Lisbon on May 17 — well ahead of his pursuers — and had doubled back to London, where he fell into the hands of the investigators following his trial.

Announcement Corrected

This belief on the part of the F.B.I. that Ray was in Lisbon led to the agency's mistaken announcement last Saturday that he had been picked up at the London Airport when he disembarked from a Lisbon flight, on his way to Brussels.

Spokesmen for the agency corrected this today. They confirmed reports from London that Ray returned there on May 17.

Government sources insist that the recent disclosures of Ray's international travels and passport manipulations do not

Ray Remembered in Lisbon as Quiet and Frugal

Special to The New York Times

LISBON, June 11 — James Earl Ray led a frugal, solitary life while he was in Lisbon for nine days last month, according to various persons who came into contact with him.

Ray, who called himself Ramon George Sneyd here, spent little and talked little in the third class hotel where he stayed from May 7 to 17 and in the various seamen's bars he frequented.

He kept late hours, leaving his room in the Hotel Portugal at about noon and returning at around 4 or 5 A.M. and occasionally not at all, according to employees of the hotel, which is in downtown Lisbon.

The Portuguese International Police, in cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, are checking Lisbon's many bars to see where Ray spent his time and what contacts he made here.

Investigators are working on the theory that Ray, who is accused of killing the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., may have come to Lisbon to collect a payoff.

Another possible motive for Ray's visit to Lisbon under in-

Hotel Workers and Bar Girls Tell of Meeting Suspect — Reason for Stay Sought

vestigation was an attempt to get in touch with some clandestine international organization for recruiting mercenaries for Africa.

However, sources close to the investigation generally rule out this theory. "That's no way to get lost," said one source who has been in contact with these secret organizations. "Mercenaries are too much in the spotlight now."

"He never talked to us, nothing more than good morning and good night," said Luis, night clerk of the Hotel Portugal. "He never made any phone calls or talked to any of the other guests."

The day clerk, Joao, said: "He was a timid guy, always walked around with his face down. He never had any guests and I never saw him with anybody except the local bar girls."

A chambermaid, Maria Celeste, said that Ray was a quiet customer and did not make any trouble. "He never said any-

thing to me, never even rang for room service," she said.

None of the hotel employees ever saw Ray with much money. They all remember well that he left no tips on checking out.

Remembered by Girls

In the rough seamen's bars, several girls identified Ray from pictures published in the local press as "a tourist who hung around here about one month ago."

"He sat over there, alone, drinking beer I think," said Esmeralda, who frequents the Boemia Bar, around the corner from the Hotel Portugal.

"I saw him watching the floorshow here at the Ritz Club," Luisa said, adding: "But he didn't want to talk."

One pretty, dark-haired girl named Maria in a waterfront bar admitted having gone to bed with Ray. "He didn't have much money on him," she said.

"He paid me only 300 escudos [about \$10]. He didn't talk about himself . . . wouldn't even tell me what ship he came from. He asked whether I had any children, and that was all. I hope he's not in any big trouble?"

prove that others were helping the former small-time holdup man, who had a long record of bungled crimes.

"Maybe he wasn't smart at all—maybe he was just lucky to get as far as he did," an official said today. "It wasn't so smart of him to double back to London when he was three weeks ahead of the chase."

Computer Found Prints

The official also pointed out that the man believed to have killed Dr. King in Memphis April 4 left a rifle and other evidence behind him, and also abandoned his white Mustang automobile in Atlanta. The F.B.I. has declined to list all of the evidence that has been found, but there have been hints that it is voluminous.

An F.B.I. spokesman did confirm today that a computer had been used to identify Eric Starvo Galt as Ray. Galt was the alias Ray had been using

at the time of Dr. King's murder.

When the agency announced on April 19 that it had identified Galt as Ray, the announcement said that this had been done by means of "a systematic and exhaustive search" of latent fingerprints uncovered in the Dr. King case against the fingerprints of more than 53,000 wanted fugitives. The agency did not give details of this fingerprint check.

Today a spokesman explained that most of the search had been done by the agency's computer, which contains in its memory cells the fingerprints of 25,000 of the 53,000 fugitives.

This was possible because a technician of the agency had

been able to identify three prints found among Galt's possessions as coming from the left thumb. This was determined by the position of the prints, in relation to the other prints left by the hand.

With this information, the computer singled out about 2,400 sets of prints of wanted men. By adding the known information about the suspect's age and race, the computer was able to narrow the choice down further to about 1700 prints. When F.B.I. agents began checking these by hand, they found Ray's prints from among the first 100 they examined.