

A226

Ray BJT NL 500

By BILL JOHNSON

Associated Press Writer

MEMPHIS, Tenn. AP - James Earl Ray pleaded guilty on his 41st birthday Monday to a first-degree murder charge and was sentenced to 99 years in state prison in the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. But he said he disagreed with the theory that there was no conspiracy in King's death.

A241WX

lbylulvWX

Insert, Tucson NL, Scotus

Ray Insert

MEMPHIS-Ray Bjt NL A226, to cover developments, insert after first graf: death.

In Washington, a spokesman for the Justice Department said the investigation into the original allegations of a conspiracy is still open.

The guilty, 2nd graf A226NS

WL502pes March 10

A231

lbylzyyzt

Ray NL Correction

MEMPHIS Ray BJT NL A226 2nd graf read: plea means Ray will be eligible for parole on his 71st birthday or earlier, if time served in the jail here is taken into account. His lawyer, etc.

The AP

db+10pes Mar 10

The guilty plea means Ray will be eligible for parole on his 74th birthday. His lawyer, Percy Foreman of Houston, Tex., said he agreed to the plea "to save this man's life."

First-degree murder is punishable in Tennessee by sentences ranging from 20 years to death in the electric chair. No one has been executed in the chair since 1961.

The whole proceeding took less than 3 1/2 hours from guilty plea to sentence at 12:12 p.m. The 12-man jury which formally fixed the sentence included two Negroes.

A227

lbyllbylee

Insert Ray NL

MEMPHIS Ray NL A226 insert after 4th graf:

The jury had agreed in advance to the state-defense arrangement for the guilty plea and 99-year sentence.

*Are you: 5th graf

db329pes Mar 10

"Are you pleading guilty because you killed Dr. Martin Luther King in such a manner that you would be found guilty of first-degree murder under the laws of this state?" Criminal Court Judge Preston Battle asked Ray.

"Yes, I'm pleading guilty," Ray replied. One way or another, he repeated this answer four times.

King was shot once with a rifle bullet, fired from a rooming house across the street from the Lorraine Motel last April 4. The civil rights leader had come here to lead a demonstration in behalf of the city's 1,200 garbage collectors, most of them Negroes, who were on strike.

That walkout, over demands for a union contract and a pay increase, was settled soon after King was slain. On June 8, Ray was arrested in London by Scotland Yard detectives—climaxing what has been described as one of the world's biggest manhunts.

Returned to Memphis under tight security after British extradition hearings, Ray has been held in a specially armored, air-conditioned cell at the Shelby County Jail.

His trial, first set for November, was postponed twice and had been scheduled to begin April 7.

King's father, the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr., had no comment on the guilty plea and 99-year sentence.

A258

lbylwyyfryyr

Sub Ray Bjt

MEMPHIS Ray Bjt A226 sub for 12th graf: 99-year sentence.

King's widow, Coretta, said in Atlanta that "there is a sense of emotional relief" in Ray's sentence, but added that this "cannot be allowed . . . to end the search for the many fingers which helped pull the trigger."

The guilty 12th graf.

AS636pes March 10

King's widow, Coretta, was reported en route to Boston and could not be reached immediately.

The guilty plea itself was entered while the jury, selected two weeks ago and at work in other Criminal Court cases since then, was not yet in the courtroom.

Ray, attired in a checked blue sport coat and dark pants, was questioned by Judge Battle at length over his decision to plead guilty.

"Has your lawyer explained all your rights to you?" the judge asked. Battle said these rights include trial by jury, with appeals. "Do you understand these?"

"Yes, sir," replied Ray.

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