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Ray Clue 500

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. AP - Within minutes after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated last 1

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. AP - Within minutes after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated last April 4, authorities had in their hands a clue to the identity of James Earl Ray—but they failed to decipher it until after Ray was caught in London.

The clue was on a transistor pocket radio which was hand etched with the half-inch high numerals 00416.

00416 was the identification number of James Earl Ray in the Missouri State Penitentiary at Jefferson City, Mo. He was serving a 20-year sentence when he escaped April 23, 1967.

The radio was among effects abandoned by Ray after he shot King. He dropped his rifle, a set of binoculars and a case which included the radio, at a doorway near the rooming house from which he fired the shot.

James Beasley of the Shelby County attorney general's staff said the radio had been turned over to the FBI with other physical evidence that same evening. The numerals, he said, were discovered through tests at the FBI crime laboratory in Washington.

"You can see that someone had tried to file or sand them off he case," Beasley said.

"I couldn't see the numerals until they were pointed out to me, but the FBI found them within 24 hours by treating the case so the numerals showed up."

The six transistor radio is in a plastic case.

Ray bought the radio in the Missouri penitentiary canteen on April 21, 120 days before he escaped. PB,N:INFBOI,INN,N.I:IINN-1 o

with an electric stylus to prevent theft or arguments over ownership.

Ray's prison number, 00416, was etched into the back of his radio. Ray paid \$9.75 for it.

There was some speculation that he bought the radio to carry with him on his escape, so that he could listen to news broadcasts find out if they were looking for him.

But at Jefferson City, Warden Harold Swenson said he thought Ray took it because he was "too cheap to leave anything behind."

After Ray had fled the Memphis rooming house and police found the Remington Gamemaster rifle, binoculars and personal effects, the FBI was able to even trace laundry marks on underwear to a West Coast laundry.

A pair of pliers also was traced to its source.

But the transistor radio remained a mystery so far as the meaning of the numbers.

Since secrecy surrounded the search for evidence which was being gathered there was no way for anyone at Missouri State Penitentiary to know that the radio contained Ray's inmate number. There were published reports of a radio, but none which mentioned the etched numerals.

Presumably, had this information been made public, someone at Jefferson City would have connected the numbers with Ray.

"This would not have been because of Ray, because he was an innocuous, run-of-the-mill criminal," said Fred Wilkinson, director of the Missouri Department of Corrections.

"perhaps because of the fact that it was connected with the King slaying, which was very prominent in people's minds, someone would have made an association between the two."

Warden Swenson said the FBI had not come to the prison in regard to the radio until about a month after Ray's capture.

"They took the electric stylus with them to determine under laboratory analysis if it was the exact one which was used to etch the numbers," Swenson said.

Ray is serving a 99-year term for the King murder

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While his lawyer, Percy Foreman of Houston, and the prosecution contended there was no evidence THAT Ray was involved in a conspiracy, the defendant shocked the court when he hinted that he did not act alone.

In New York, Russell X. Thompson of Memphis, a lawyer who investigated King's assassination, met with attorneys of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. to present what he called new information about the slaying.

He declined to tell newsmen what information he provided. He said the meeting was held to evaluate his information and see if it "can be raised to the dignity of evidence."

He told newsmen the discussions with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People were "very meaningful, but I don't want to give undue emphasis to it at this time."

"I don't want this to be another. . .," he said, not finishing his sentence. Asked by newsmen if he was alluding to New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison's investigation of the murder of President John F. Kennedy, he replied:

"I didn't say that, you did."

In Philadelphia, the Rev. James Bevel, a former aide to King who was with him when he was shot, said Memphis police had known about the assassination plot "a couple of days" in advance, but did nothing.

In Memphis, the city's top police officials were in conference and could not be reached immediately for comment.

Bevel, who claimed in January that Ray was innocent, said evidence had been suppressed that Ray had been persuaded to plead guilty to save him from execution.

"As a result Ray is out of the way and the real killers are walking around freely," Bevel said in an interview in the Philadelphia Bulletin.

Bevel said a letter outlining the assassination plot had accidentally fallen into the hands of a Negro woman and was turned over to the police. He also said FBI agents had held up King's plane bound from Atlanta to Memphis for a half an hour search because they also knew of the plot at least a day in advance.

The FBI declined any comment other than to say that all evidence it had gathered was turned over to the state.

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In Washington, a group styling itself the Committee to Investigate Assassinations said there was not only a conspiracy behind the King murder but a possible link to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The committee supported Ray's conspiracy allegations. Richard Sprague of Hartsdale, N.Y., who said he had made detailed photographic studies of both assassinations said there is a "good likelihood" the person identified by Ray only as "Raoul" is a French-speaking Canadian.

"Ray has said privately that a man named Raoul not only planned the murder but also pulled the trigger on the fatal shot," the committee said in a news conference admittedly called for publicity in order to raise funds.

Executive director Bernard Fensterwald said the group hopes to hire a professional staff to make "a thorough, objective, and professional investigation."

Sprague said there was a close resemblance between a police sketch based on witnesses' immediate description of the King gunman and a man arrested in Dealey Plaza, Dallas, an hour after Kennedy was shot Nov. 22, 1963.

"I don't think anyone believes the Justice Department and the FBI have revealed everything they know about the (King) case," Fensterwald said.

The committee also is leaving open the possibility that the slaying last June of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy might be linked to the other two.

"There are a number of parallels in the cases which might indicate a common modus operandi which normally would be subject to official scrutiny," the committee said.

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