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Ray-Stoner Lead A020

By JOHN VAN MOL

Associated Press Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. AP - James Eearl Ray's new lawyer entered the maximum security section of Tennessee's state penitentiary today to talk about Ray's bid for a new trial in the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

J. B. Stoner, a Savannah, Ga., attorney long associated with the Ku Klux Klan, entered the prison with Warden Lake Russell.

Stoner, who said he had new information which convinced him Ray did not assassinate King, said he has been retained by Ray in his bid to have the case reviewed.

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Nashville Ray-Stoner 2nd Lead A212 add: King Jr.

Stoner, who visited Ray in his maximum security cell at the Tennessee State Penitentiary for 2 hours and 20 minutes, said he would represent Ray only in libel action.

The Savannah, Ga., attorney, dressed in a brown suit with a bow tie and puffing on a cigar, told newsmen gathered outside the prison he would file liberal actions against "Live Magazine and others" and anyone else who interfered with Ray getting a fair trial.

Asked if he would represent Ray in his bid for a new trial, Stoner refused comment. Stoner earlier said he had been retained to help Ray win the review of his guilty plea and 99-year sentence.

He declined today to say who is paying his fee or how much it is.

His past associations with Ku Klux Klan members would not harm his case, Stoner said.

"I have represented klansemen and other white men in the past. I don't think that will hurt," Stoner said.

Asked who in addition to Life magazine would be involved in libel action, Stoner replied, "So many have libeled him Ray, it would be impossible to include them all."

But he said "Life magazine and other" could "count on it."

Stoner said Ray appeared in good spirits for a man "in a hotel like this." He said Ray gave him permission for him to make the statement about his being pressured into a guilty plea. Stoner did not elaborate.

Stoner's statements to newsmen as he left the prison failed to spell out when or how Ray will carry through his announced intention of seeking review of his case.

Warden Lake Russell said he conferred with Ray after Stoner's visit and Ray "advised me that Mr. Stoner is to be his attorney in a civil matter."

Ray pleaded: 4th graf A020 as before.

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. AP - James Earl Ray's new lawyer arrived today to visit Ray at the state prison and said he had new information which convinced him that Ray did not assassinate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

J. B. Stoner, a Savannah, Ga., attorney long associated with the Ku Klux Klan, said he had been retained by Ray in his effort to win a new trial.

Warden Lake Thompson of the Tennessee State Penitentiary said he had not been contacted by Stoner but that the attorney would have no trouble seeing Ray if the prisoner wished it.

Ray pleaded guilty March 10 to a first-degree murder charge that he shot King in Memphis last April 4. Ray was brought here the next day to begin a 99-year prison sentence.

In Chattanooga Friday night, Stoner, 44, said he would be aided in the case by a Chattanooga lawyer, Robert W. Hill.

"I have some independent information about the Ray case from Memphis," Stoner said. "And from the information I have, I believe it would have been impossible for Ray to have been guilty of having shot King."

Stoner said he thought Ray had been pressured into entering the guilty plea because of national publicity which made it impossible for Ray to get a fair trial.

* "Certain magazines are part of a conspiracy to libel Ray and deny him a free trial," cOaa\$

b. "This pressured him into pleading guilty."

"I am representing Ray in a libel suit against some national magazines . . . which have accused him of a crime of which he is not guilty."

He did not name any magazines.

Stoner's entry into the case was announced by Edward R. Fields, director of the militantly segregationist National States Rights party, who said Ray first contacted Stoner after his arrest in London last year.

Stoner, an NSRP attorney whose office is located in the party's headquarters in Savannah, Ga., ran for vice president under the party's banner in 1964.

Criminal Court Judge W. Preston Battle Jr., of Memphis, who presided in the Ray case, disclosed Wednesday* that Ray had written him saying he wanted to withdraw the guilty plea and stand trial.

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Battle said Ray also wrote that he had fired his attorney, Percy Foreman of Houston, Tex. Stoner is Ray's third lawyer. He earlier had dismissed Arthur Hanes, a former Birmingham, Ala., lawyer.

The 99-year prison sentence was prearranged by the state and Foreman, who said he never had hopes of anything more than saving Ray's life.

The sentence prevents Ray from seeking parole for 30 years. Under a life sentence, he would have been eligible for parole in 13 years.

Ray was reported to have told officers who accompanied him here from Memphis that he wished he had taken his chances of getting a life sentence rather than the electric chair.

Stoner grew up on a Walker County, Ga., farm just outside Chattanooga, Tenn. Since boyhood he had been involved in Ku Klux Klan.

At 16, Stoner was an organizer and an officer of a Chattanooga Klan and was once shown as the klansman of Tennessee. He has called himself imperial wizard of the Christian Knights of the Klan and published a Klan newspaper in Louisville, Ky., and Atlanta.

In 1952, Stoner announced formation of the Christian Anti-Jewish party and urged deportation of Jews and confiscation of their property for distribution to "Christian Americans." The same year he polled 924 votes as a candidate for Congress in the 3rd Congressional District of Tennessee.

Stoner has been active in litigation involving racial conflicts including representation of Klan elements involved in