

ATTORNEY, PARTNER DIFFER

Ray Plea Change, Retrial Report Called 'Confused'

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP)—An associate of J. B. Stoner, James Earl Ray's new attorney, said today Ray definitely will change his plea to innocent in the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and will seek a new trial.

Stoner later said his associate, Edward R. Fields, head of the National States Rights Party, was "confused."

Asked whether a motion had been filed with Tennessee court authorities to allow Ray to change his plea from guilty to innocent and stand trial for first degree murder, Stoner said:

"I have some information on the subject but at the present time I'd rather not comment on it."

Stoner, 44, announced last Saturday he would handle a libel suit for Ray against several national magazines. He conferred with Ray in the Tennessee State Penitentiary at Nashville but declined to comment on a possible new trial.

Fields, who shares an office with Stoner, said the attorney "will not be giving any more interviews" until after the first-degree murder trial.

He said Stoner would be assisted by two unidentified attorneys.

Ray pleaded guilty March

10 to last year's sniper slaying of King in Memphis, Tenn. He was sentenced to 99 years in prison.