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Assassin Ray Fails In Escape

Examiner News Services

PETROS (Tenn.) — (UPI) — James Earl Ray, the convicted killer of Dr. Martin Luther King, broke out of his cell today but was captured before he could get out of the Brushy Mountain State Prison.

Warden Robert Moore said Ray, serving 99 years for King's murder apparently used tools provided by another inmate to remove one concrete block and part of another and make his way from his cell into an air chamber.

Ray then removed a bar on a ventilation fan and entered the prison yard behind his cell block. Then, using a crowbar, he removed the cover on a manhole on a steam tunnel that went under the prison wall to a steam plant outside the prison.

The warden said Ray entered the tunnel, obviously

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hoping to make his way to the unguarded steam plant outside the prison, but "apparently he found it too hot in there for comfort — that steam tunnel is about 400 degrees fahrenheit."

The warden said Ray then climbed out of the tunnel and retreated to the prison yard.

Guards noticed the broken bars on the fan and the cover off the manhole and started a prisoner count. They found a dummy in Ray's bunk and started looking for him.

Ray was found hiding in the shadows of a building in the prison yard at about 3:15 a.m., which Moore said was probably about 15 or 20 minutes after he left his cell. He made no attempt to resist. The warden said Ray had a crowbar and two chisels with him.

No Escape Try

Moore said Roy Morelock, a prisoner who works in the prison as a plumber, had provided Ray the tools but did not try to escape with him.

"I believe Ray had been working on this escape plan for several months," said Moore. "He's a pro at this escape business. He recently lost an appeal for a new trial, and that probably set him off."

State Correction Commissioner Mark Luttrell said Ray would be kept under "closer surveillance" from now on. He said he didn't know how he would be punished for the escape attempt.