

House Probers Talk With James Earl Ray

Petros, Tenn.

Staff members of the House assassinations committee listened to James Earl Ray tell his story on his role in the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Ray, serving a 99-year murder sentence at Brushy Mountain State Prison for the King assassination, freely answered all questions put to him by the investigators in a two-hour interview, his attorney, Jack Kershaw, said.

"He was essentially giving information about his own actions, and this is not an attempt to involve anyone else," Kershaw said. "These interviews are entirely aimed at getting him his day in court, which he has been deprived of to this date."

Ray claims he is innocent. He went to prison after pleading guilty of murder but later tried to change the plea to innocent and demanded a new trial. His appeals have been turned down.

Chief counsel Richard Sprague and four other committee members who flew to Tennessee from Washington to interview Ray refused to answer reporters' questions on leaving the prison. Sprague is to report to the committee in Washington today.

Yesterday's meeting, which Kershaw described as the first of several Ray plans with the investigators, was held in a small office used by the captain of the prison guards.

Kershaw said Ray may testify later before the full committee in Washington concerning what he knows about the killing of King, who was felled by a bullet from a high-powered rifle as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel at Memphis.

"This meeting was purely exploratory and was confidential as to substance," said Kershaw.

Ray claims an unidentified person he knew as "Raoul" involved him in the conspiracy to murder King. Kershaw said "Raoul" was mentioned during yesterday's discussions. Kershaw earlier had denied a report that Ray's brother Jerry was in fact Raoul.

Kershaw said that "it is not likely that there will be any surprise information until later and that will be the result of hard investigative work" to verify the information that Ray gives the committee.

Ray was not under oath during the interview.