

Security Guard Free on Bond

BOOK RAULT THEFT SUSPECT

A 27-year-old security guard has been booked with the theft of jewelry from the fire-ravaged Rault Center, where he was assigned. The loss included a \$5,000 diamond-studded watch.

Police said Jimmy Ray Gray, 5727 Tchoupitoulas St., was booked over the weekend.

Gray was released today on \$2,500 bond set by Magistrate Robert W. Collins.

Collins set Dec. 15 for a preliminary magistrate's hearing.

Last Friday, a resident of the Rault Center who was ordered to evacuate reported more than \$12,000 in jewelry was stolen from her apartment after she left the building. She said she locked the door to her apartment when she left and it was locked when she returned.

The investigation into the killer-fire was expected to intensify today after systematic ransacking of apartments was reported.

More than \$25,000 worth of merchandise — much of it jewelry — reportedly was taken from three apartments. Sources said the officials are considering questioning every person, including policemen and firemen, who entered the Rault Center last Wednesday.

In the tragic blaze, four persons died, including three women who leaped to the roof of a building seven stories below.

Sources said file cabinets in the building had been searched and desk drawers forced open. Hundreds of items are reported missing.

THE BUILDING was ordered evacuated when fire broke out on the top three floors.

The two women who survived the jump from the Lamplighter Beauty Salon remain in Charity Hospital.

A hospital spokesman said Mrs. Wilma Williams, 26, 1724 Caffin Ave., and Mrs. Natalie Smith, 39, 528 Aurora, still are in critical condition.

MRS. SMITH HAS regained a degree of consciousness, the spokesman said, apparently recognizing some members of her family. Mrs. Williams remains unconscious.

A third survivor, Loyd Caldwell, 26, 2704 Whitney Place, Metairie, is listed in fair condition. Caldwell suffered burns and smoke inhalation.

In another development, a man, sought by police after he warned a woman in the Rault Center to "get out of the building" before the fire, has



—States-Item photo.

Jimmy Ray Gray

been cleared.

DETECTIVE MAJ. Henry Morris, who is handling the police investigation of the fire, said the man came to

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the police and voluntarily took a lie detector test.

"He was completely cleared of any connection with the fire," Morris said. He said the man passed the lie test "with flying colors" and that his remarks to the woman employe "were nothing but small talk with a friend."

Morris also denied reports two kerosene cans had been found at the fire scene.

The shock of the women jumping from the fiery 15th-story window has caused fire-fighting experts to criticize current fire codes governing high-rise buildings.

State Fire Marshal Raymond Oliver said that "it has been one of my pet peeves for years that every building more than five or six stories high ought to have a sprinkler system on the upper floors."

OLIVER SAID he is drafting a proposed updating of the state fire code which would "require built-in sprinkler systems."

Such changes would have to be ratified by the state legislature.

Oliver said he also will propose a law to require every elevator to be

programmed so it automatically returns to the first floor when a fire alarm sounds in a high-rise building.

He said anyone who enters an elevator in a high-rise building trying to escape a fire is unlikely to make it.

"**SUPPOSE YOU** are coming down and one of the wires is burned in two," he said. "Where do you go? You shop right there, probably inbetween floors, and firemen can't get you down and you may roast. Yet that's the first impulse most people have—head for the elevators."

Oliver also said stairs should provide a safe way down and exits to stairways should have fireproof doors.

The catch comes, he said, when panic-stricken people leave the doors open, creating a chimney draft. Then the stairwell fills with smoke "and you might wind up like the man found asphyxiated on the 14th floor."

A geologist who saw the first puff of smoke said it looked to him as if it were fed by natural gas.

"Because of the intensity of the initial flame, it reminded me of a gas flare," Michael MacKenzie of New Orleans said. "If you've ever been in an oil field, you know what I mean."