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DALTON, Ga. AP - A convicted murderer who was in prison with the mysterious James Earl Ray, now hunted in the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., said Tuesday he heard Ray say he would be willing to try to collect \$1 million for killing the civil rights leader.

Raymond Curtis, 40, the same age as Ray, is in the Whitfield County jail awaiting action on appeal of a murder conviction. Curtis said he and Ray were prisoners at the Missouri State Penitentiary when John F. Kennedy was assassinated Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas, Tex.

"Another boy said, 'Well, there's a million-dollar bounty to get King.' King was running his mouth pretty good then. Ray said, 'If there is a million-dollar bounty on King, I believe I can collect it,' " Curtis said in an interview.

Curtis said he met Ray in 1955 when both were prisoners in Jackson County jail at Kansas City, Mo. He said they shared a cell for seven months.

Then, Curtis said, Ray was transferred to the Leavenworth federal prison to serve a term for forging postal money orders. Curtis said that two weeks later he also was sent to Leavenworth.

Curtis said he and Ray were in the same 281-cell building at Leavenworth and at one point were in adjoining cells.

He said after about six months he was transferred to the Atlanta prison and did not see Ray again until late 1961 or early 1962, when Curtis went to the Missouri State Penitentiary on a 10-year armed robbery sentence.

Ray was there, Curtis said, serving a 20-year armed robbery sentence. Prison records confirm that Curtis and Ray were inmates at the same time.

The two saw each other "almost daily," Curtis said.

It was in the prison yard, Curtis said, that he and Ray saw television news reports of Kennedy's assassination. A few days later, he said, a new prisoner came in and said that a \$1 million bounty had been put on King by a "K-K businessman's association."

Curtis said Ray did not associate freely with other inmates. "You could pick him out of a crowd of 2,000 men in the prison yard. He would be off to himself walking and his mind would be somewhere else."

"The only thing he would make a long conversation out of was when he was planning something and you were a part of it," Curtis said.

"Anything he did was thoroughly planned. He never went off half-cocked."

Curtis said he heard Ray mention a King bounty several times. At one point, Curtis said, Ray referred to the Kennedy assassination by saying, "Boy, probably somebody made a nice little penny off of that. I sure wish it was me."

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Curtis, who was born in Dalton, said Ray had a soft southern Illinois accent, not a southern drawl.

Curtis, who was convicted in January 1967, of a robbery murder, is awaiting a decision on a new trial motion. FBI agents questioned Curtis Sunday and Monday.

To his knowledge, Curtis said, only one person visited Ray during their prison time together.

Curtis talked to reporters from his individual 4- by 10-foot cell at the Whitfield County jail. A bare light bulb illuminated the cell. He wore a torn white T-shirt, and raspberry colored pajama trousers.

Curtis said Ray made the statements about King to Curtis personally and not in a group.

The FBI said the man they are hunting has a liking for beer and vodka and water. "He liked beer, I know that, because he talked about it," Curtis said.

Curtis said Ray talked a great deal in prison about New Zealand, Brazil and Argentina and Curtis speculated that he would have left the United States for one of those countries within hours after the slaying if he were responsible.

"If you talk to him 15 minutes you'd like him," Curtis said.

"He was a likeable sort of person. But if this was a plot to assassinate King, Ray would go to his grave with the secret."

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