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LONDON AP - James Earl Ray was transferred Tuesday to a maximum security cell in fortress-like Wandsworth Prison and Scotland Yard detectives scoured his London haunts to learn if he had contacts in Britain.

Legal moves were under way to extradite Ray to the United States to stand trial charged with the April 4 sniper slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Police on both sides of the Atlantic tried to untangle Ray's travels that took him to Canada, Britain and Portugal before his arrest Saturday at London Airport as he prepared to fly to Belgium.

Extradition could take up to two months if the 40-year-old Ray decides to fight it through the British courts. American authorities have obtained a provisional British warrant charging Ray with the murder of King in Memphis, Tenn.

Gov. Buford Ellington of Tennessee has signed "all necessary papers" required for the state's request that Ray be returned for trial, a spokesman for the governor said.

A State Department spokesman in Washington said documents to back up the extradition request had arrived there and "will be transmitted to London shortly." The documents are from Tennessee and from Missouri where Ray was convicted of armed robbery and escaped from prison in 1967 by hiding in a bread truck.

British police held Ray on charges of using a forged passport and carrying a gun. On Scotland Yard's records he is officially listed as Ramon George Sneyd, the name on his Canadian passport.

British detectives were using the passport charge as legal grounds to investigate his movements in London. Although he has been traced to two London hotels between May 28 and his arrest, there was an unexplained gap of about 10 days starting on May 17, when he left Lisbon for London.

FBI agents were understood to be working with Scotland Yard. The British police were doing the actual spadework since the FBI has no legal authority in foreign countries.

Scotland Yard was completely silent on where it was looking. But one officer said: "On the basis of this passport charge we can get a warrant if we want to search a place, and then go in and dab (fingerprint) it. If we find the print's we're looking for, we know we're on the right track."

Under British law, it is possible for police with a search warrant to enter a house without giving any explanation of their reasons. Therefore they can raid a home or hotel on Ray's trail without specifying the object of their search.

One of the objects was understood to be establishing if Ray made contact with anyone in London who might have aided him. Such information would be passed directly to the FBI.

Now that Ray has been charged under British law, there is no possibility of Scotland Yard's interrogating him outside a courtroom.

U.S. officials, fearful that prosecution of Ray might be jeopardized, are staying well away from him. They have not questioned Ray.

Fred M. Vinson Jr., an assistant U.S. attorney general, said he "got a glimpse" of Ray but did not speak to him.

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"It would be improper for any American official to interrogate him at this stage," Vinson said. But British authorities said Ray could refuse any attempt by American authorities to question him until he is in U.S. custody.

Britain could hasten Ray's extradition by deporting him as an undesirable alien and the gun charge would be sufficient to do it. But some legal experts said there is a strong tradition against using deportation procedures as a substitute for extradition.

Ray made a two-minute appearance in court Monday on the passport and gun charges. He was assigned a British lawyer at his own request and ordered held without bail for another hearing June 18.

In extradition proceedings, the court would require evidence of a case against Ray and he would then have 15 days to appeal to the High Court. A further appeal could also be made to the House of Lords, causing additional delay.

British authorities set up secure custody for Ray while the extradition proceedings move forward. Ray was first sent to Brixton Prison, a transit and holding jail on London's south side. Although shifts of detectives had him under guard around the clock, it was not felt secure enough.

Ray was then shifted to Wandsworth Prison, also on the south side, and put in an isolation cell under two-man guard.

Wandsworth, a huge brick and stone structure surrounded by walls, houses long-term prisoners.

Security at Wandsworth has been tightened considerably since Ronald Biggs, one of Britain's great train robbers, fled over the walls four years ago. Like most of the 14 men who have escaped from inside Wandsworth since 1962, Biggs made his getaway from the exercise yard.

Ray is not expected to be allowed out of his cell for exercise.

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