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By DON MCLEOD
Associated Press Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. AP — Prison doors closed on James Earl Ray Tuesday but not on the controversy over whether he killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., alone or acted in concert with conspirators.

Ray pleaded guilty in Memphis Monday to a first-degree murder. He was transferred to the state penitentiary here at dawn Tuesday.

The 200-mile drive up Interstate 40 was Ray's first glimpse of daylight since he entered the Shelby County Jail in Memphis last July 19.

Ray's cell in the maximum security block of the prison will be considerably more comfortable and less confining than his supersecurity accommodations in Memphis.

Ray ducked his head and held shackled hands to his face as he walked from his motorcade into the prison. He was expressionless and did not speak.

A highway patrol official who made the trip said Ray seemed in good humor, but chatted only briefly. One topic was the rolling countryside, he said.

Ray, who turned 41 Monday, will not be eligible for parole under his 99-year sentence for another 30 years, and then it will be at the discretion of the parole board.

The only way he could get out of prison earlier would be for the governor to commute his sentence or grant a pardon.

In his confinement, Ray will have a private cell in the maximum security section. He will be allowed out in the sunshine for exercise. From his cell he cannot see other prisoners, but he can hear them and talk to them.

Initially, Ray will be quarantined while he goes through a series of medical, dental and psychological examinations. Because these will be conducted in the maximum security ward instead of the usual classification area, they will take longer than usual—up to two months.

Warden Lake Russell said the data gathered will be used "to help us outline a program of treatment for him and to make a job assignment."

Russell said he expected Ray to be assigned eventually to a regular prison job.

Russell said he did not anticipate any danger to Ray from other prisoners, but added, "We will be watching out for that."

Ray's sudden guilty plea and sentence, with only a brief formality of a trial, only served to stir the dispute over the conspiracy theory in connection with the slaying of Dr. King in Memphis last April 4.

The prosecution, the judge, and Ray's lawyer said there was no evidence of a conspiracy. But Ray, despite his plea, was among those speaking of a conspiracy.

Memphis, which was hit by riots after the assassination, was calm, even relieved, at the outcome.

But the city's morning newspaper echoed a rising call for more information on the case.

"The fact that we now have Ray's admission that he killed Dr. King, and will be punished, is not enough," said an editorial in The Commercial Appeal. "The nation, indeed the world, deserves to be given answers to many things which remain mysteries."

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Ray assured that the controversy would continue when he stood during his brief trial and without elaboration declared he did not agree with the theory that there was no conspiracy.

Foreman interrupted to say Ray was pleading guilty to the murder charge and "not to anything about a conspiracy." Ray said nothing further about it.

Defense Attorney Percy Foreman said he never asked Ray point-blank if he was part of a conspiracy but added that he did ask enough other questions to convince himself that Ray "was not a hired gun."

Ray escaped from the Missouri State Penitentiary at Jefferson City, Mo., on April 23, 1967. King was killed in Memphis April 4, 1968, while in the city to help striking garbage collectors.

Before his capture in London on June 8, 1968, Ray traveled to Toronto, Montreal, Atlanta, Birmingham, New Orleans, Mexico, Los Angeles, Memphis, Portugal and London.

In his travels ray spent some \$10,000. Foreman said Ray was able to account for virtually every dollar.

Dist. Atty. Philip M. Canale, who prosecuted the case, said the money probably came from the assassin's own efforts as a smuggler and holdup man. Canale said Ray also saved some money while in the Missouri prison.

Supporters of the conspiracy theory say the large sum of money is suspicious and may have come from an outside source.

King's widow said the guilty plea "cannot be allowed to close the case, to end the search for the many fingers who helped pull the trigger."

Not "until all who are responsible for this crime are apprehended," said Mrs. King, "can the conscience of the nation rest."

The Rev. Ralph Abernathy, who succeeded King as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, said Ray's guilty plea and sentencing without a full trial strengthened his opinion that the slaying was the outcome of a conspiracy. He did not elaborate, however.

William Bradford Huie, Ray's biographer, said, "There are the unanswered questions."

Newspapers across the nation joined the Memphis papers in calling editorially for a full investigation and disclosure of evidence which otherwise would have been aired in court.

A spokesman for the Justice Department said the investigations into the original allegations of a conspiracy is still open.

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