

Ray, Starting 99-Year Term, Is Assigned to Maximum Security Section



Associated Press

James Earl Ray trying to shield his face from photographers as he entered Tennessee State Prison in Nashville under heavy guard. Flanking Ray are State Safety Commissioner Greg O'Rear, at left, and Maj. Mickey McGuire of the Tennessee State Highway Patrol.

By MARTIN WALDRON

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MEMPHIS, March 11—James Earl Ray was taken to the state prison at Nashville before dawn today to begin serving a 99-year sentence for the murder of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

When the 41-year-old convict left Memphis at 80 miles an hour in an eight-car caravan shortly after 5 A.M., he left behind in the Mississippi River city a growing dispute over whether he had been part of a conspiracy to assassinate Dr. King or whether he had acted alone.

Officials have said there is no evidence of a conspiracy and that Ray killed the civil rights leader for "racist" motives. But the Federal Bureau of Investigation continued to classify the case as "open," an indication that F.B.I. agents may continue to check the possibility of a conspiracy.

The transfer of Ray was made without public announcement. Photographers had maintained a watch outside the county jail most of the night.

However, Ray had been secretly removed from the jail shortly after 1 A.M. and taken to a sheriff's substation on the outskirts. Shortly after 5 A.M., he was taken by deputies to a highway patrol station on the outskirts of Memphis, and was turned over at that point to the Tennessee state police.

When Ray left the jail at 1 A.M., Sheriff William N. Morris Jr. said, he was wearing a deputy's uniform.

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phis to Nashville took about three hours. Ray was seated in the back seat of a state police car, which was escorted by seven other carloads of state police.

Ray was to be installed, after processing, in Cell No. 4 in the maximum security section of the prison. Troublemakers and prisoners under death sentences are kept in this section.

Ray apparently was to be kept in this section—even while undergoing a six-week period of orientation and classification—for his own safety.

Cell No. 4, where Ray will live by himself, is six feet wide and nine feet long. The only furniture in it are a bed, a toilet and a washstand. The cell walls are of eight-inch-thick reinforced concrete, painted green.

Warden Lake Russell said that as far as possible, Ray would be treated like any other convict in the prison. But because of the publicity, for the time being Ray will get extra security.

Ray will not be eligible for parole from the prison until he has served half of the 99-year sentence imposed on him yesterday when his plea of guilty to Dr. King's murder was accepted by Circuit Judge W. Preston Battle.

Although the prosecutor, Memphis Attorney General P. M. Canale, and Percy Foreman, defense attorney, voiced the

opinion that there was no conspiracy in Dr. King's death, speculation would not die.

The speculation was fed by many questions either unanswered or answered only by further speculation.

Among these questions were: Where did Ray get the money to live on in the months after he escaped from the Missouri state penitentiary on April 23, 1967, until he shot Dr. King in Memphis on April 4, 1968?

Where was Ray between Mar 24, 1968 and April 3, 1968?

Who filled up the ash trays in Ray's car? Ray does not smoke and did not smoke at the time?

Who got the duplicate driver's license for Ray in Alabama in February, 1968?

Mr. Canale offered two suggestions about Ray's finances yesterday when he was interviewed after Ray had entered his guilty plea.

He said that Ray had "saved" quite a bit of money while he was serving a sentence for robbery in the Missouri penitentiary at Jefferson City.

The Memphis prosecutor said that Ray may have made some money after his prison escape by smuggling contraband, probably narcotics of some sort, into the United States from Canada, and smuggling jewelry either into or from Mexico.

Ray went to Montreal after escaping from the Missouri prison. He returned to the United States in August, 1967, and used the name Eric Starvo

Galt. The alias was the name of a resident of Toronto.

Mr. Canale said that from his savings and such activities as smuggling, Ray could have made enough money to support himself in the style in which he lived.

William Bradford Huie, an Alabama authro, has written in Look magazine that Ray told him that a blond Cuan "Raoul," had hired him in Montreal to smuggle "a contraband" into the United States from Canada. Ray also said, Mr. Huie wrote, that "Raoul" kept him supplied

with money for many months in the United States while planning a "big" job for the escaped convict.

Although Ray's whereabouts during the two weeks preceding Dr. King's death are generally known, hundreds of investigators have not yet found out where he was on March 23, the night of March 29 and the night of April 2, 1968.

Ray had checked into the Flamingo Motel in Selma, Ala., on March 22 while driving from Los Angeles to Atlanta. Mr. Canale, the Memphis

prosecutor, said he thought there was some significance in Ray's staying in Selma on that night while Dr. King was making a scheduled appearance at a civil rights rally 35 miles away.

He said he thought that Ray may have been trailing the civil rights leader. Ray was carrying a .38-caliber revolver at the time, he said.

Ray checked into an Atlanta rooming house on March 24. Where he spent March 23 has not been ascertained, but he apparently spent it in Alabama.