

RIGHTIST IS HIRED AS RAY'S LAWYER

Segregationist's Office Says
He Will Help With Plea

SAVANNAH Ga., March 21 (AP)—J. B. Stoner, a lawyer long associated with anti-Jewish and anti-Negro causes, has been retained by James Earl Ray in his effort to win a new trial in the slaying of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mr. Stoner's office announced today.

Edward R. Fields, director of the militantly segregationist National States Rights party, said Mr. Stoner would help Ray change his plea from guilty to not guilty and would ask for another trial. Mr. Stoner is a lawyer for the party, and his office is located in the party's headquarters here.

Ray was sentenced to 99 years in prison after he pleaded guilty in Memphis to the slaying of Dr. King last year.

Mr. Fields said Mr. Stoner was on his way to Nashville, where Ray was lodged in the Tennessee State Penitentiary. He said Mr. Stoner would confer with Ray tomorrow morning.

Lake Russell, the prison warden, said he did not yet know whether Mr. Stoner would be allowed to see Ray.

"We'll let him see him if he can present the proper credentials," Mr. Russell said. "He'll have to show that he [Ray] actually hired him as his lawyer."

In Memphis, court officials said there was nothing on file to indicate that Mr. Stoner had been designated as attorney of record by Ray.

Criminal Court Judge W. Preston Battle Jr., who presided in the Ray case, disclosed Wednesday that he had been notified by Ray that he wanted to withdraw his guilty plea and stand trial for first-degree murder.

The judge said Ray had written him that he had fired his attorney, Percy Foreman of Houston.

Ray pleaded guilty March 10. The 99-year sentence was pre-

arranged by the state and Mr. Foreman.

Ray Regretted Plea

Ray was reported to have told officers who accompanied him from Memphis to the Nashville prison that he wished he had gone on trial and had taken his chances of getting a life sentence rather than the electric chair.

Under a life sentence, Ray would be eligible for parole in 13 years. The 99-year term prevents him from seeking parole for 30 years.

Mr. Stoner would be Ray's third attorney. Arthur Hanes, a former Mayor of Birmingham, Ala., had also been dismissed.

Mr. Stoner, 44 years old, has been involved in Ku Klux Klan and anti-Jewish activities since boyhood. At 16, he was a Klan organizer and officer in Chattanooga, Tenn., and he once appeared as the Kleagle, or chief Klan officer, of Tennessee.

In 1945 he formed the Stoner Anti-Jewish party and mailed out pamphlets urging removal of the Jews. In 1952 he announced the formation of the Christian Anti-Jewish party and urged deportation of Jews and confiscation of their property for distribution to "Christian Americans."

He wrote a book entitled "The Gospel of Jesus Christ Versus the Jews."

Mr. Stoner was graduated from an Atlanta law school in 1952 after two years of study, passing a state bar examination while still a student.

In recent years, Mr. Stoner had been active in the National States Rights party and in litigation involving racial conflicts. He was the party's Vice Presidential candidate in 1964.

The party supported George C. Wallace for President last year.