

Assassin-for-Hire Idea Discounted By King Inquiry

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The House Assassinations Committee said yesterday it can find no evidence that James Earl Ray was paid to assassinate civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Ray probably financed his flight from the assassination scene in Memphis, Tenn., with cash obtained from an Illinois bank robbery, committee investigators have concluded.

"If there is a conspiracy, then there is no evidence that he (Ray) received payment," said G. Robert Blakey, the committee's chief counsel.

Following the assassination on April 4, 1968, Ray fled to Atlanta, took a bus to Detroit, crossed into Canada, flew to England, went to Portugal and then returned to London, where he was arrested on June 8, 1968.

He had also traveled extensively in Mexico and Canada from the time of his escape from the Missouri State Penitentiary on April 23, 1967, until the assassination.

Those who believe there was a conspiracy to kill King have always cited the apparent lack of income that Ray could have used to pay travel and other expenses, including phony documentation used to mask his identity.

In testimony yesterday, investigator Edward M. Evans reviewed the committee's detailed examination of Ray's finances from the time of his escape from prison to his capture at London's Heathrow Airport.

Evans estimated that Ray spent \$9,607.94, and took in \$1,238.54 from known sources during the period. When he was arrested, Ray had \$144 in his pocket.

That leaves \$8,369.40 unaccounted for, most of which Ray has insisted came from a mysterious figure named Raoul who enlisted him in an illegal drug and gun-smuggling scheme.

Evans said committee investigators believe that the July 13, 1967, robbery of \$27,000 from a bank in Alton, Ill., is "the most probable alternative to Ray's Raoul version of his finances."

He said it is probable that one or both of Ray's brothers, John and Jerry, took part in the holdup.

James Earl Ray, currently serving a 99-year prison term for the King assassination, has denied any part in the bank robbery. John Ray is to testify before the committee later.

Evans said, "The Alton robbery is virtually identical in modus operandi to five other bank robberies in which John Ray was involved, with Jerry Ray participating in at least one of these robberies."

He said four of the five robberies were within an hour's drive of Alton and noted that evidence from the holdup was disposed of very close to the house of one of Ray's relatives.

Shortly after the bank robbery, Evans said, James Earl Ray rented an apartment with an advance of \$150, bought \$250 in new clothes and vacationed at a fashionable ski resort in Canada.

A three-way split of the \$27,000 would have given James Earl Ray \$9,000, more than enough to account for the cash he spent in his travels.

In examining Ray's finances, the committee revealed that Ray spent an average \$3 a day on food, mostly hamburgers and beer, and \$4 daily on lodging, mostly in rooming houses.

Ray also spent \$412 on camera equipment, \$561 on dance lessons, \$90 on a locksmith's course, \$125 in bartending school, \$150 on psychological treatment and about \$370 on clothes.

When his money began running out in London after the assassination, Ray robbed another bank of \$45 shortly before his arrest, Blakey said.

If Ray had funds from a payoff by co-conspirators in the King assassination, Blakey asked, why would he commit still another crime in another country and risk capture.