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King Panel Investigator Flew to City to Retrieve Three Trading Stamps

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Most of the multi-million dollar investigation into the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis has been shrouded in secrecy, but it was learned today that one Washington-based investigator flew into Memphis to take possession of three S & H Green Stamps found in the glove compartment of James Earl Ray's car.

Four or five investigators for the House Committee on Assassinations spent several hours photographing the stamps in Ray's car last November before the investigator, Ralph Locke, flew into the city to receive them from John L. Carlisle, chief investigator for the Shelby County attorney general.

Carlisle, when questioned about the investigators' work, confirmed the report that he gave the stamps to Locke. Carlisle also said that the stamps did not belong to Ray, the convicted slayer of King, but to two Memphis homicide detectives who drove Ray's abandoned car in Atlanta back to Memphis before Ray's trial.

A homicide detective, who declined to be identified, said the four or five investigators who found the S & H Green Stamps were told at the time that the stamps probably were left in the car by the detectives returning Ray's car, but Locke still decided to come to Memphis to pick up the stamps as part of the investigation.

"They got real excited about finding the stamps because they were not included in our report (on the contents of Ray's belongings in the car)," the detective said.

"I guess they wanted to check them (the stamps) out," Carlisle said. "I think they ought to get credit for finding them. After all, they are liable to be able to get enough of them to fill a book. Then they could redeem them for a gift or put them on display in the (National) Archives where everyone could look at them."

Carlisle said he did not know if the committee's investigators found anything in the car besides the stamps to warrant Locke's trip to Memphis. But a source in the homicide squad said nothing else was found in Ray's car, which about 10 years ago was emptied of all of its contents except for the police officers' stamps.

All of the files and evidence relating to the King assassination were taken to Washington last year after the renewed investigation into King's death was approved by the U. S. House of Representatives with a \$2.5-million budget.

Spokesmen for the House Committee on Assassinations, when contacted in Washington, D.C., refused to discuss the green stamps, Locke's trip to Memphis Nov. 14 or any aspect of the investigation.

"Under the rules of the committee, as you may know, we're not allowed to discuss the details of the investigation," Locke said in answer to a question about

two Memphis homicide detectives who drove Ray's abandoned car in Atlanta back to Memphis before Ray's trial.

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G. Robert Blakey, chief counsel of the

committee, could not be reached for comment, but his special counsel was located. When asked about the green stamps the special counsel, Charles Mathews, said: "I couldn't comment one way or the other."

Elakey, who succeeded Richard Sprague after he resigned over a public feud with Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez, D-Texas, the former committee chairman, took over direction of the investigation into King's slaying last June by ordering a news blackout on the committee's investigation.

Carlisle, when questioned about the green stamps, spoke rather sarcastically about the worth of the stamps to the investigation.

"I think the taxpayers ought to know about this discovery. It's really important. I hope they find something. I don't know if Dick Tracy wants to come out of retirement or not on this one," Carlisle said.

One of the homicide squad officers who returned Ray's car to Memphis 10 years ago told Carlisle that he got the green stamps because of a purchase he had made at a store while driving between Atlanta and Memphis. The officer said he considered turning the stamps in with his expense account, but decided against it because of the paperwork and left the

car back to Memphis."

"If they found three stamps with the first \$2.5-million (the House approved as their budget for the investigation), maybe they can finish the book (used by savers of green stamps for redemptions for gifts) with the other \$2.5 million (expected to be spent by the end of the year)," he said.

With the turning over of the green stamps, Carlisle said, "We have turned over to them every piece of evidence in that case. They have all the evidence. I know of nothing else that could be turned over to them."

A spokesman for the S & H Green Stamps Redemption Center at 1104 E. Brooks Road said green stamps now are available only to such agencies as car dealerships where employees gain them in sales incentive programs. However, about 10 years ago, when the three green stamps were received by the homicide detectives driving Ray's car to Memphis, the stamps could have been given to them at a grocery store for a purchase as small as 30 cents, the spokesman said.

~~Green stamps have no numbers or codes on them, the spokesman said, to identify the store which gave them out as a bonus after a purchase.~~

The green stamps were found the second time investigators came to Memphis to view Ray's car, which remains impounded at an undisclosed location. During the first trip, the investigators viewed only the outside of the car, a homicide detective said.

Only about a month ago investigators again came to the city to inspect the car, the detective said.

"I don't know what else they can find. They've milked this thing dry," the detective said.

Part of the reason for the numerous visits to the city by the committee's investigators, the Memphis detective said, is the frequent turnover of employees on the investigation.

"Every few weeks some new investigators come out here and look at the same things that other ones did earlier," the detective said. "They can't seem to keep anybody."