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Ray's mission impossible

PETROS, Tenn. (UPI) — James Earl Ray, the convicted slayer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., has bungled another attempt to break out of prison, authorities said.

Warden Robert Moore said Ray had acquired a makeshift handsaw and was attempting to saw a hole thru the ceiling of a room.



Earl Ray

The lights came on too soon, Mr. Moore said, and the guards saw Ray slipping out of his secluded work area.

Last May Ray concocted an elaborate escape plan that would have led him thru a maze of steam pipeline tunnels to freedom.

But that attempt nearly ended in Ray's death; the tunnel he chose was heated to 400 degrees by the pipelines.

Mr. Moore said in addition to the saw, Ray had a hammer, a block and tackle, and some plastic wood that he used to conceal his work.

Mr. Moore said that even if Ray had been successful, he faced several more obstacles on his route to freedom. He would have had to punch a hole thru the roof of the building, Mr. Moore said, then there is a 40-foot drop to the

ground that would have deposited Ray near a guard tower.

Mr. Moore said Ray went before the prison's disciplinary board on Feb. 9 and was sentenced to 30 days in a disciplinary cell. That means Ray will have no privileges other than to receive his meals and mail.

"This is his own thing," Mr. Moore said. "I don't think he'll ever quit trying to figure a way out of here. You know he escaped four times from the Nebraska prison."

Meanwhile, attorney Arthur Hanes, first hired then fired by Ray, said Ray didn't fire the shot that killed Dr. King.

In the current issue of Esquire magazine, Mr. Hanes said the gun Ray bought was taken from him the Tuesday before the shooting of Dr. King when Ray was given instructions to "check in at the roominghouse, 422½ S. Main Street, in Memphis at 3 o'clock in the afternoon" by an unidentified "contact."

According to the article, Ray's present attorney, J. B. Stoner knew who that contact was.

"Ray was just a very small part of the overall plot," Mr. Hanes is quoted. "I think the man was duped; he was there as a decoy, a plant; and I think he was used by people a lot smarter than he is."

He said the bullet taken from Dr. King's body was as perfect as if it had been fired in a laboratory under controlled conditions. He said it could have been fired "from 6 million other six-guns." Even experts who traced the bullets which killed President Kennedy could not positively certify that Ray's rifle had fired the King death slug to the exclusion of all other weapons.