

TIGHT SIRHAN SECURITY

Officers Search One Another Before Trial

BY ROBERT RAWITCH

Times Staff Writer

Security precautions at the Sirhan Bishara Sirhan trial Tuesday reached the point where deputy sheriffs were searching each other before entering an auxiliary courtroom where the proceedings were shown on closed circuit television to newsmen.

The newsmen were astounded by the extraordinary security precautions in a room four floors below where the trial was taking place on the eighth floor of the Hall of Justice.

A Sheriff's Department spokesman said the practice of deputies searching each other was a part of the "total security" program for the trial to assure that no unauthorized weapons, cameras, or recording devices were brought into restricted areas.

"If anything should happen, we want to make sure none of our men are responsible for smuggling anything in and giving it to a spectator," the spokesman said.

Newsman Also Searched

About 40 newsmen were thoroughly searched for hidden recording equipment or cameras before being allowed to enter the specially equipped room with its three closed circuit television receivers. The room is being used to accommodate the overflow of newsmen who cannot get in the relatively small courtroom.

Forty more newsmen were admitted to the eighth-floor courtroom while television cameramen and photographers waited in the halls.

Newsman without special credentials were not even admitted to the auxiliary room.

Those entering the courtroom were searched even more thoroughly. Men were searched in a hallway and checked for concealed weapons

with a metal detector, while the women were taken into a separate room and searched by female deputies.

No one was allowed to leave or enter the courtroom once the proceedings started.

By Superior Judge Herbert V. Walker's order officially extending the courtroom to include the fourth-floor room, numerous corridors were ruled as "restricted areas" where photographers were prohibited.

But photographers and television cameramen shadowed Sirhan's attorneys—Grant Cooper, Russell E. Parsons and Emil Zola Berman—as they entered the courtroom area. The same was true for his mother, Mrs. Mary Sirhan.

Five From Public at Trial

Despite the tight security precautions five members of the general public were allowed to witness the trial of the man accused of killing Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

After filling out a detailed form with identifying information and being searched like everyone else, the five were allowed to enter the courtroom.

Mrs. Beth Peck, of 122 Mountain View Ave., said she visits the Hall of Justice daily to view trials and regularly attended the widely-publicized 1959 trial of Dr. Bernard Finch, who, along with his girlfriend Carole Tregoff, were accused of slaying Finch's estranged wife.

All five said their primary motivation for attending the trial was general curiosity to see what Sirhan is like.

One woman when asked upon leaving the courtroom if she was bored with the highly technical nature of the proceedings answered:

"How can you be bored when a man's life is at stake?"



IN THE CORRIDOR — Defense attorney Grant B. Cooper meets newsmen after first session of Sirhan trial.
Times Photo by Jack Carrick