

# Sirhan's Trial Highlighted by Courtroom Drama, Bomb Scare

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Although the defense admits Sirhan Bishara Sirhan killed Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, the prosecution continued its methodical proving of the point Tuesday, with unexpectedly lively courtroom exchanges and a brief bomb scare.

The clearing up of an old mystery, and a hostile tug-of-wills between two other witnesses and defense counsel were the highlights in the court of Superior Judge Herbert V. Walker.

One brief flurry of excitement interrupted the trial when Judge Walker ordered the courtroom cleared after Bailiff Willard Polhemus reported a ticking noise in his desk.

After a short search it was discovered that telephone repairs in the building were causing a solenoid in Polhemus' desk phone to click at regular intervals.

The cross-examination of witnesses helped dismiss for a while the underlying fact that the outcome of this phase of Sirhan's trial—now seven weeks old—is a foregone conclusion: Sirhan did kill Sen. Kennedy and will not be acquitted; the only point at issue is determining the penalty.

En route to that point, the prosecution is laying out its entire case in an effort to show that Sirhan's act was sufficiently premeditated to warrant a conviction of first-degree murder.

The defense is bearing with the testimony on the uncontested point in order to undermine whatever evidence of premeditation they can and, if necessary, discredit witnesses who could strengthen the prosecution claim of malice aforethought.

Defense attorney Grant B. Cooper employed this tactic on Everett C. Buckner, rangemaster of the San Gabriel Valley Gun Club where Sirhan went target-practicing June 4, the eve of the assassination.

In attacking Buckner's credibility as a witness, Cooper also wrote the finish to a statement that months ago provided slight fuel to speculation that Sirhan might have been part of a conspiracy.

After repeated and pointed questioning of Buckner about when and how long Sirhan was at the Duarte rifle and pistol range—and evident disbelief at Buckner's answers—Cooper asked suddenly:

"You have a kind of vivid imagination, don't you, sir?"

"No," said Buckner.

Citing Buckner's statements to investigators last summer, Cooper shot back: "Didn't you say that a lady was with him?"

"No," Buckner replied. "I said a lady came up and he showed her how to shoot."

"Did you or did you not say at that time that the lady told Sirhan, 'Get out of here, God damn you. Somebody will recognize us?'"

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Buckner denied making the statement, then said he had told police "it sounded that way," and that "I couldn't hear them that well."

Cooper asked Buckner if he had not taken a lie detector test and flunked it, and Buckner answered he had "just flunked on that question."

Dep. Dist. Atty. David N. Fitts objected that reference to lie detector tests was inadmissible and the exchange was stricken from the record.

But in further question-

ing about the alleged exchange between Sirhan and the woman, Buckner himself referred repeatedly to "the day I took the lie detector test."

Asked if he had admitted to police that he never overheard such a remark, Buckner said, "I didn't admit it wasn't made. I admitted that I could have misunderstood."

Still another, and more celebrated, mystery presumably was laid to rest Tuesday, with the testimony of Valerie Schulte, former manager of Sen. Kennedy's campaign office in Goleta, where she was a UC Santa Barbara coed.

## Identified Earlier

Miss Schulte, 22, was earlier identified from photographs as the girl Vincent DiPierro, a witness Monday, thought he saw near the scene of the shooting at the Ambassador.

DiPierro and Sandra Serano, a witness yet to be called, told investigators last summer they had seen a girl in a black and white polka dot dress, talking to Sirhan and that she later ran from the scene shouting, "We shot him."

That story was later

admitted to be a fabrication, and Tuesday Miss Schulte testified that:

—She couldn't have run at all last June 4. She was on crutches as a result of a skiing accident, and still wears a brace on her right leg.

—She never even noticed Sirhan until the first shot was fired.

—She was wearing a polka dot dress, but not black and white. She exhibited the garment she wore that night. It was a lime green mini-dress with canary yellow polka dots.

The mood of the courtroom was somber as William Barry, chief of security for the slain senator, described in a subdued and halting voice how he got separated from Kennedy in the exuberance of the election victory celebra-





**SIRHAN TRIAL WITNESS** — Valerie Schulte arrives to testify she couldn't have been mystery girl who ran from shooting—she was on crutches then, still wears brace. Right, investigator Carmon Balentine. Times photo by Frank Q. Brown

tion.

Barry said that after Kennedy finished a victory statement, the senator jumped from the back of the stage instead of returning in Barry's direction and then headed toward the kitchen corridor where he was shot.

Barry said he was back in the crowd, assisting Mrs. Kennedy and trying to catch up when the first shot was fired.

#### Johnson Story

Former Olympics decathlon champion Rafer Johnson also took the stand to tell of his part in the struggle to subdue Sirhan after the first shot was fired.

Johnson told Dep. Dist. Atty. John E. Howard that it was he who took possession of Sirhan's gun, after former Los Angeles Rams tackle Roosevelt Grier disarmed the suspect.

Author George Plimpton is scheduled as a prosecution witness today. *2/27/68*