

Sirhan Takes Witness Stand, Admits He Killed Kennedy

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BY DAVE SMITH
Times Staff Writer

Sirhan Bishara Sirhan admitted from the witness stand at his murder trial Monday that he killed Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and had "no doubt" he shot and wounded five other persons June 5.

"Did you, on or about the 5th of June, 1968, shoot Sen. Robert F. Kennedy?" asked defense attorney Grant B. Cooper.

"Yes, sir," the 24-year-old defendant replied firmly.

Asked if he also shot and wounded Paul Shrade, a United Auto Workers official and Kennedy supporter, Sirhan answered with a shrug and a grin:

"If that's what the indictment reads, I must have."

Did he know who Schrade was?

"Never heard of him."

Under Cooper's questioning, Sirhan denied any knowledge of, or malice toward, Irwin Stroll, William Weisel, Elizabeth Evans or Ira Goldstein, who were also wounded.

"I was not aware of anything," Sirhan added.

The pale, slim defendant seemed almost to relish his turn on the witness stand. His answers came clearly and quickly, sometimes even before Cooper's questions were complete. At one point, Sirhan even supplied a word when Cooper groped for another term for bombing noises.

"Cannon sounds — how's that?" Sirhan offered with a smile.

After emotional blowups last week when he demanded to fire his three-man defense team, plead guilty and be executed, Sirhan's demeanor Monday was almost sunny—particularly in early testimony on his controversial notebooks.

Sirhan's first temper tantrums last

week came when the prosecution began introducing into evidence the notebook pages on which Sirhan had written "Robert F. Kennedy must be assassinated."

The defendant told Superior Judge Herbert V. Walker that if the notebooks were admitted, he wouldn't be getting a fair

trial.

But Monday, Cooper read that very page, with Sirhan following eagerly line-by-line, as Cooper intoned: "May 18, 9:45 a.m. '68. My determination to eliminate RFK is becoming more the more (sic) of an unshakable obsession."

The handwriting was all his, Sirhan confirmed: the repeated phrase "Port Wine" was the name of a race horse; yes, he had written "please pay to the order of . . ." several times; and the repeated injunction "RFK must be assassinated" was his.

Then Cooper shifted backward in time to the Sirhan family's life in war-torn Jerusalem, where Sirhan was born March 19, 1944.

Recalls Death

Sirhan testified that he recalled "quite vividly" the death of an Arab soldier who was blown up by dynamite one day when Sirhan was 3 or 4. Sirhan said he recalled the soldier's leg blown so high in the air it caught in the belfry of a church and was hanging there the next day, recognizable from the military boot.

The family fled during the 1948 Israeli-Arab hostilities from the new part of Jerusalem to the former Jewish quarter of the old Walled City, and Sirhan said he was told by family and friends of the reason for the flight:

"The Jews kicked us out of our homes. The Zionists kicked us out. We were terrorized out of leaving our homes."

As an example of the terror, Sirhan testified that after the April 9, 1948, massacre at the village of Dair Yasin, Arab

girls with mutilated breasts "were paraded in front of us, to terrorize us and get us out of our homes."

Tells of Panic

Sirhan said the reasons he had been told, and subsequently read of in history books, were that "the West wanted to bring the persecuted Jews from Germany in and expel the indigenous Palestinian Arabs from their homes."

Sirhan said he faintly recalled the family's flight to the old Walled City. "I was naked," he said, and the family was "in a state of panic."

After settling there, he

said, he heard bombings on an average of once a week from 1948 until the family left Jerusalem for the United States in 1956. Bombings were "so routine," he said, that when his mother began to make little balls of cotton for the children's ears, they knew another bombing was on the way and took refuge in the basement.

The Sirhans subsisted on United Nations Relief and Works Agency rations, he said—mostly brown sugar, margarine, flour, beans "and a gallon of kerosene, in the winter."

"How cold does it get there?" asked Cooper.

"Pretty damn' cold, sir," Sirhan said with a grin.

"Pardon me," said Cooper. "You watch your language, Sirhan."

The defendant looked abashed for a moment.

Sirhan said he didn't recall "any starvation pangs . . . We always had enough, but we always cleaned up what we had before us. We could have eaten more, had we had it. We were actually among the luckier people, because we had ration cards.

That's why we shared what we had to spare with other people," Sirhan said. He added, however, that he saw many people die of starvation.

Sirhan also told of seeing

a "neighborhood shopkeeper's body after a bombing, and of being sickened by the sight of a human hand in a bucket of well water he drew one day.

Earlier testimony by his mother and a childhood friend described Sirhan as going into a shaking fit after the experience at the well and being sick for days.

Sirhan also told of one time when he was 11, playing with some friends near Zion's Gate in the

south wall of the old Walled City.

Sirhan said the Arab wall guard let the boys up onto the wall with him to look down at the No Man's Land separating the Old Walled City from the Zionist sector.

"I could see the feelings and emotions of this man," said Sirhan. "He said 'That's our land out there, that's our property.' I couldn't understand what he meant then, but now I understand the import of what he said."

An older brother, Adel Sirhan, 30, testified earlier to many of the same incidents related by Sirhan and his mother. But Adel also told of a change

in Sirhan after the latter fell from a horse in September, 1966, while working as an exercise boy on a race horse ranch near Corona.

Adel described his younger brother before the fall as friendly, ambitious and "doing well in school except when our sister (Ayda, who died in 1965 of leukemia) was sick."

After the fall, Adel testified, Sirhan became irritable, nervous, stayed

home more and read a great deal. He once had a

fight with his younger brother, Munir, 21, and sometimes argued with his family when they watched television newscasts of

Middle East conflicts, demanding:

"How can you sit there and watch these things being done to people?"

Adel also told of hearing Sirhan talking to himself in his bedroom. Dep. Dist. Atty. David N. Fitts asked if Sirhan couldn't have been reading aloud or studying his German or Russian courses. Adel said he might have.

But Adel also told of finding Sirhan sitting in his room with a lighted candle on the desk before a mirror as he read from literature he got from the Rosicrucians, an order which espouses the development of one's mental powers over matter.

Mystical Tests

"He would be staring at (the candle) and trying some experiment," Adel said. "And he would say 'I'm staring at the light. It's supposed to turn green or yellow, or I'm going to see a cross in it, or whatever my mind decides.'"

Adel said his brother sometimes told him, "If you think something, it will actually happen." He said he and Sirhan frequently talked in this vein about Sirhan's mystical experiments.

The defense has claimed that Sirhan was in a virtual trance when he killed Sen. Kennedy—a

trance similar to those he suffered at traumatic scenes in his childhood. They also claim he later induced such trances through his obsessive personality and his mystical experiments with self-hypnosis.

Monday morning, Mrs. Mary Sirhan, 55, related a series of grisly incidents she said Sirhan witnessed as a child. Each time, she said, he was seized by a fit of shaking, the color would drain from his face, his lips would go dry and he would sometimes "black out" remaining ill for days.

The 4-foot, 11-inch Mrs.

Sirhan remained composed throughout her testimony. She burst into tears last

Friday, after Sirhan exploded in court and demanded to fire his lawyers, plead guilty and be executed.

Mrs. Sirhan spoke with evident pride of the family's life up until 1948, when they had to flee a comfortable, large apartment and ultimately seek refuge in one room of a crowded building in the Walled City of Jerusalem.

Expresses Regrets

Describing the dirt and poverty of that life, she was obviously embarrassed. In admitting the building had only one toilet for 11 families, she turned to the jury and said, "I'm sorry to speak this way."

She said the water supply was so filthy they would go without drinking for days at a time, and that when the family moved to the United States in 1957, Ayda "went into the toilet and flushed and flushed and flushed and then sprinkled water all around and said 'God bless America!'"

"We are lucky in this country," Mrs. Sirhan continued emotionally. "I want you to know this. Everybody is blessed in the United States."

The defendant sat with his head bowed in his

hands during this outburst, which Judge Walker ended by asking Mrs. Sirhan to restrict her testimony to answering questions directly.

She described one incident at the Damascus Gate in 1947 when several people were killed by a bomb. Sirhan, on a postoffice errand with his father, came home shaking and crying, she said, and wouldn't leave the house

for two weeks.

A few months later, she said, Sirhan's elder brother, Munir, then about 8, was run over by a car. A shout from Adel brought her and Sirhan running, she said, and when he saw the bloody body of his brother, she said, "it was hard for him. He was shaking and said 'Is it the same bomb, mama?'"

"He never forgot the Damascus Gate. He never forgot his brother. He used to cry and ask me, 'Why does he stay away so long? When can he come and play with me?' When I got another boy, I had to call him Munir."