

Drunk, Blacked Out on Night Kennedy Was Slain, Sirhan Says

BY DAVE SMITH
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Sirhan Bishara Sirhan testified Thursday that he got drunk on at least three gin highballs last June 4, blacked out while trying to sober up, and "the next thing I remember, I was being choked."

He didn't learn for many hours that he had fatally shot Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and that he was being choked in a struggle to subdue him as his gun continued firing, wounding five others, he said.

It was the first time Sirhan has mentioned that he had been drinking the night Kennedy was killed.

Defense attorney Grant B. Cooper asked Sirhan if he knew that during the blackout, "You walked up to Sen. Kennedy, pointed a gun to his head, pulled the trigger . . . and he later died."

With a smile, a shrug and a palms-upward gesture of his hands, Sirhan answered, "Yes. So I learned."

But under both Cooper's questioning and cross-examination by Chief Dep. Dist. Atty. Lynn D. Compton, Sirhan steadily denied specific recollection of the shooting or of the rages that consumed him when he wrote in his notebooks that Kennedy must die.

Sirhan was smiling and at ease under Cooper's questioning, and as Compton began his cross-examination Sirhan remained affable and polite—but wary.

Compton's questioning sought to dispel in jurors' minds the impression Cooper had earlier aimed for in

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Continued from First Page characterizing Sirhan's notebook writings as the disjointed scribbles of a disordered mind.

Instead, Compton suggested, much of the writing was mere doodling reflecting Sirhan's daily interests—girls, horse racing, jockeys and snatches of Arabic songs.

Sirhan replied fliply as Compton asked if the numbers 5-10, and other number series weren't actually betting combinations at Caliente race track.

"That's conjecture, sir. I don't know," Sirhan answered with a mischievous grin.

Anger Flares

But he flared in anger when Compton asserted that Sirhan must have had more notebooks than the three introduced in evidence.

"Were you with me?" demanded Sirhan. "Ask me. Don't put words in my mouth!"

Compton asked if he had had more notebooks.

"I said I don't know,"

Sirhan snapped.

At another point, answering one of Compton's questions, Sirhan remarked, "That's stupid."

"I confess that I do sometimes ask stupid questions," Compton said pleasantly.

"Yes sir, you do," Sirhan snapped back.

Compton continued in a mild, pleasant tone of voice, but with a thinly veiled skepticism at Sirhan's invariable answer:

"I don't exactly remember."

Asked to Recall

That was the answer Compton got repeatedly as he asked Sirhan if he recalled the events immediately after his arrest: talking with police, drinking coffee, asking about the sensational Jack Kirschke murder case, the stock market, the high costs of having babies and his arraignment.

Earlier, prosecution witnesses described Sirhan as an unusually alert, intelligent person in their meetings with him. Compton, reciting detailed po-

lice reports of Sirhan's conversations with the witnesses, appeared unbelieving that Sirhan recalled so little of those hours.

Sirhan did admit to a faint recollection of discussing the Kirschke case with Dep. Dist. Atty. John E. Howard, but said he couldn't remember specific details of the conversation.

But a later question by Compton recalled one of the significant details of the Kirschke case. Kirschke, a deputy district attorney and a friend of both Compton and Howard, was convicted in 1967 of murdering his wife and her lover and sentenced to death. (The sentence was

dead?" asked Compton.

"No sir, I'm not glad."

"Are you sorry?"

"No sir, I'm not sorry, but I'm not proud of it either."

Compton then touched on an explosive courtroom scene that occurred last Friday, after the jury had been removed from the courtroom:

"Did you not say you killed Robert Kennedy wilfully, premeditatedly and with 20 years of malice aforethought?" Compton asked.

"Yes sir, I did," answered Sirhan.

Attorneys for both sides were called to Superior Judge Herbert V. Walk-

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later commuted to life imprisonment.)

Kirschke claimed he was in Las Vegas at the time of the merder, but one detail that helped convict him was the fact that when he was arrested there and charged with murder, he failed to ask whom he was accused of murdering.

Sirhan, who is reported to have followed that trial on television, was asked by Compton if Howard hadn't told him last June 5 that he probably would be tried. "You didn't ask 'tried for what?' did you?" asked Compton.

"I don't remember," replied Sirhan.

By Sirhan's account on the witness stand Thursday, this conversation with Howard would have occurred several hours before Sirhan learned he was accused of shooting Kennedy.

Compton asked Sirhan if he thought "killing Robert Kennedy helped the Arab cause."

Sirhan said he didn't know enough about politics to say.

"Are you glad he's

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er's bench for a moment, and then Compton asked his last questions:

"You said you were willing to fight for the Arab cause?"

"Yes sir," said Sirhan.

"Are you willing to die for it?"

"Yes sir. I'm willing to die for it."

Cooper then resumed questioning Sirhan, going line by line through the transcript of last Friday's blowup. Jurors then learned for the first time that Sirhan had tried to fire his three attorneys, change his plea to guilty and demand execution.

Cooper asked Sirhan if he hadn't done that because he was mad at the way his defense was going, and Sirhan admitted, "Sir, I was boiling."

Cooper revealed that Sirhan had exploded over defense plans to call about a dozen witnesses Sirhan didn't want to testify, including two girls, Gwendolyn Gum and Peggy Osterkamp, whose names appear repeatedly in his notebooks. Sirhan finally compromised when attorneys agreed not to call the girls, Cooper said.

Despite his wariness and obvious irritation at Compton's questioning, Sirhan remained composed. When angered, he did not appear confused, but more emphatic and vehement.

He insisted, as he did under defense questioning, that he was "an impulsive person, and what my reaction is is good for that time only." He said he believed disputes should be settled peacefully, admitted he hated Zionism and anyone who aided it, hated Kennedy for his support of Israel and loved him for his other views.

A string of conflicting statements tended to support the defense portrait of him as one whose hatreds turned on and off "like a water spigot":

—Sirhan quoted an Arabic proverb to explain why he hated Kennedy on the one hand: "A friend of my enemy is my enemy."

—But on the other hand, he didn't feel "all that much hate. I still liked him, sir. It was just when

he said he would support the state of Israel."

Whenever Kennedy talked about Israel, Sirhan "would have blasted him, and I still would . . ."

—But, "after the provocation is removed, I no longer respond."

It was after a day of provocations introduced and removed, Sirhan testified, that he found himself inside the Ambassador last June 4, wandering from one election party to another.

He testified Wednesday that after target practicing that day and going off in a furious but futile search for a Zionist parade he'd heard about, he began party-hopping the night of June 4, going from a Wilshire Blvd. party to the Ambassador without even knowing Kennedy would be there.

He said he had two Tom Collins and vaguely recalls buying a third Collins and drinking part of that, and then deciding "I was quite high. I was alone. If I got any more drunk, there was nobody with me to take care of me if I got more drunk."

He decided to go home, he said, and walked back to his locked car, where he said he had left his pistol lying on the seat after leaving the target range that afternoon.

He said he got into the car and began to start it, but then "I couldn't pic-

ture myself driving the car home . . . I was too afraid to drive," he said, for fear he'd have an accident or get a ticket.

He decided to go back to the Ambassador, find some coffee, sober up, and then go home, he said.

"Did you pick up your gun?" Cooper asked.

Sirhan said he didn't remember. "I must have, but I don't remember. I've sworn to tell the truth."

As Sirhan described it, the next few hours were a confused wandering in search of coffee in unfamiliar parts of the hotel.

The prosecution contends that Sirhan was not under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and that a brief test for intoxication showed so conclusively that he was not drunk that they didn't give more exhaustive tests.