

# STRANGE ROLE OF THANE CESAR, GUARD WITH A GUN WHO STOOD NEAR RFK JUST BEFORE HE WAS SHOT

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The role of Thane Eugene (Gene) Cesar in the investigation of Robert Kennedy's death has been marked controversy growing out of contradictions in this eyewitness's story of the assassination.

Cesar, a plumber by trade, was moonlighting as a security guard hired by the Ambassador Hotel the night Kennedy was shot.

The guard was interviewed by the police and the FBI in the days following Kennedy's assassination.

As the shooting began in the kitchen-pantry area of the hotel, he said, he was knocked down backward, against an ice machine. He said he never saw the gunman's face — only an arm and a pistol attached and spouting red flame.

His accounts differed slightly each time he was interviewed on whether or not he went for his gun or actually got it out of his holster. Once he said he drew his gun and moved toward the wounded senator.

Another time, he said, "I reached for mine but it was too late."

**ONE POLICE OFFICIAL SAID** Cesar told conflicting accounts and it appeared obvious he hadn't really seen anything and had nothing to tell the authorities.

The guard, because of the variations in his story, was questioned no further by officials, who felt he was trying to interject himself into a case he knew little about.

But on Oct. 7, 1969, about 16 months after the assassination, Cesar was interviewed by Theodore Charach, a broadcast journalist who produced the documentary film strongly asserting police had bungled the investigation and that a second gun was involved in Kennedy's death.

Charach found Cesar living and working in the San Fernando Valley.

"He was friendly and affable," Charach

told TATTLER. But the new interview brought out even more contradictions, all of which remain unresolved.

**FOR EXAMPLE**, Robert A. Houghton, the Los Angeles chief of detectives who wrote a book called "Special Unit Senator," detailing the police investigation of the assassination, wrote:

"On July 16, 1969, I held a final Special Unit Senator meeting asking 10 last questions ... to the absolute possibility of any person with right-wing connections being in the kitchen or pantry on the night of June 4-5, 1968 ... Within a week, all of them had been answered satisfactorily."

Less than three months later, Cesar told Charach:

"I definitely wouldn't have voted for Bobby Kennedy because he had the same ideas that John did, and I think John sold the country down the road. He ... he gave it to the Commies, he gave it to everyone else who wanted to, he gave it, he literally gave it to the minority."

Cesar said he had worked actively in the American Party, passing out handbills and getting donations for George Wallace.

**THE PLUMBER-GUARD PREDICTED** a race war in America.

"The black man, now, for the last four to eight years, has been cranking this integrated idea down our throat and so you've learned to hate him.

"And one of these days, at the rate they're going, there is going to be civil war in this country. It's going to be white against the black, and the only thing I'd say is the black will never win."

Later in the interview, Cesar said, "First of all, I think the white man is going to try and do it (fight back) with his voting power, and if they can't do it by getting the right person to straighten the thing out, then he's going to take it in his own hands. I can't see any other

way to go."

Cesar then told Charach that he was escorting Kennedy, holding onto the Senator's right arm, when Kennedy turned his head to shake hands with a busboy.

"... He started to shake hands with him, and when he did, that's when the shots were fired, and the thing I saw first, wasn't so much the noise, but was the flash. I got powder in my eyes from the flash. And I was a little behind Bobby, so I would say I was about three feet from the flash, cause I looked up and seen a red gun flash, and, like I say, I got a little bit of powder in my eyes.

**"WHEN THE SHOTS** were fired, that's when I reached for my gun, and this is when I got knocked down."

He told Charach he got his gun out of the holster, "but it didn't do me no good, because I'm on the floor. But anyways, I got back up and I had my gun out, but they already had him restrained."

Cesar had told police he pulled his gun after getting up from the floor.

(Don Schulman, a television station employee, insists that he saw a security guard pull his gun and fire after Sirhan Sirhan started firing his pistol.)

Conflicting stories were given by Cesar about his ownership of a .22-caliber pistol like the one that killed Kennedy. Cesar said he was wearing a .38-caliber pistol when he was on duty when Kennedy was shot.

Cesar told Charach in October, 1969, that he had owned a .22 pistol but had sold it about a year before — three months after the assassination.

**LOS ANGELES** County District Attorney Joseph Busch told a reporter that Cesar had admitted owning a .22-caliber pistol, but he had sold it before the assassination.

"He said that he sold the revolver that he had similar to the one that was used in the murder in February before the shooting occurred," Busch declared.



**THANE EUGENE CESAR:** His story is hard to follow...

Charach contacted Jim Yoder, a friend of Cesar's then living in Blue Mountain, Ark., who said he bought the .22-caliber pistol from Cesar on Sept. 6, 1968 — after Kennedy was killed.

Yoder provided a receipt from Cesar showing he had paid \$15 for the weapon.

Yoder said Cesar wanted to sell his gun because "he seemed a little worried, and he said that there might be repercussions."

After Yoder bought Cesar's pistol for his gun collection, it was stolen in a burglary of Yoder's home in Arkansas.

The burglary was never solved — the gun has vanished.