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Investigator Is Sure Sirhan Acted Alone

Attorney Who Headed Review of Slaying Will Report Findings to DA

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No matter what some skeptics say, the special counsel appointed to review the Robert F. Kennedy assassination thinks that Sirhan B. Sirhan acted alone.

"I'm totally convinced from the scientific evidence, from eyewitnesses, from circumstantial evidence, from inferences, as well as the reality of common sense, there was no second gunman," Thomas Kranz said in an interview.

The 37-year-old private attorney, appointed last August by then acting Dist. Atty. John Howard, one of Sirhan's prosecutors, is preparing a report for Dist. Atty. John van De Kamp.

Aside from concluding there was no second gunman, the report will recommend creation of an independent crime laboratory outside the Los Angeles Police Department and adoption of a policy for preserving potential evidence.

Kranz also will suggest that Van De Kamp's office investigate a mystery: How did the barrel of Sirhan's gun become severely coated with lead after it was originally test-fired in 1968?

Implicit in that unexplained anomaly, Kranz thinks, is whether Sirhan's .22-caliber Iver-Johnson Cadet was tampered with while in the care of the Los Angeles County clerk's office.

To what end? In an entirely different suggestion of possible conspiracy, Kranz speculates that someone may have tried to discredit the LAPD or intelligence agencies by creating doubt about the case.

Whatever the reason for the lead barrel, Kranz does not think it bears on whether Sirhan acted alone when Kennedy and five others were shot in the Ambassador pantry on June 5, 1968.

In Kranz' view, a hearing before Los Angeles Superior Judge Robert

Wenke answered the "second man" question to all but die-hard doubters, conspiracy lovers, publicity seekers or the uninformed.

A panel of seven experts refired Sirhan's gun last Sept. 26, exhaustively examined bullet evidence introduced at Sirhan's trial and jointly responded on Oct. 5 that:

"There is no substantive or demonstrable evidence to indicate that more than one gun was used to fire any of the bullets examined."

Although some experts came close to positive identification, none found unequivocally that bullets taken from Kennedy and two other victims, Ira Goldstein and William Weisel, came from Sirhan's gun and "no other gun in the world."

Their difficulty, the experts said, was a lack of sufficient individual characteristics—tiny scratches called striae—on the bullets to permit a positive identification.

In press conferences afterward, Please Turn to Page 3, Col. 1

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Skeptics argued that since Sirhan's revolver had not been positively identified as the murder weapon the question of a second gunman in the pantry remained entirely open.

They accused the media of misinterpreting what the experts had found, and they again raised questions about how many shots had been fired, calling for further investigation.

Publicly ignored at the time, however, were other expert conclusions, which, in Kranz' opinion, reduce the probability of a second gunman to nonsense and nearly a "mathematical impossibility."

The experts discovered that Sirhan's revolver had been damaged—either accidentally or in manufacture—in a way that left "gross imperfections" on test bullets fired through it.

Damaged spots in the gun's muzzle marked bullets with a double furrow.

That "gross imperfection" was discovered on the Kennedy, Goldstein and Weisel bullets and on test bullets fired by the LAPD in 1968 and by the expert panel last fall.



Thomas Kranz
Times photo

To the experts, the identifying gouge indicated that the evidence bullets had been fired by Sirhan's damaged Iver-Johnson, but they stopped short of positive identification.

It was not their task as firearms identification experts to go beyond

what they saw in their comparison microscopes or what they could testify to with absolute certainty.

Any other implications—if any—were up to others, such as Kranz, who relates the double-gouge signature of Sirhan's gun with the possibility that there was a second gunman firing at Kennedy.

For a second assassin to have shot the senator, Kranz reasons, the unseen gunman would have had to have a weapon exactly like Sirhan's, down to the damaged barrel.

If that were not so, he said, how is it possible for the Kennedy, Goldstein and Weisel bullets and the old and new test bullets fired by Sirhan's gun to have that identifying double-furrow gouge?

What are the chances, Kranz asks, that two identically damaged .22 caliber Iver-Johnson Cadet models were firing the same copper-jacketed, mini-mag, hollow-tipped ammunition at the same time?

Then, Kranz adds a further complicating factor: Sirhan bought his gun second-hand. How did a second gunman acquire a weapon exactly like it?

That defies mathematical proba-

bility," he said. "It's totally illogical."

Kranz follows similar reasoning in considering another expert finding.

In individual reports, five of the seven experts positively found—directly or inferentially—that bullets recovered from Kennedy, Goldstein and Weisel were fired from the same gun.

Again, the experts did not pursue possible implications of that key conclusion, and again, Kranz does. He relates the point to the question of where a second gunman could have stood in the pantry.

Almost from the beginning, "second gun" theorists have suggested that a second assassin stood at Kennedy's right rear and fired point-blank into the senator.

Citing expert testimony at Sirhan's 1969 trial, they point out that bullets which struck Kennedy behind the right ear and twice beneath the right arm traveled right to left and upward.

Coroner Thomas Noguchi's findings then are related by the skeptics to eyewitness accounts of where Sirhan was standing. They insist Sirhan fired eight shots from a distance while facing the senator.

If it then follows that Sirhan was not in a position to fire right to left at point-blank range, the doubters ask, who did? It must have been someone standing to Kennedy's right rear, they suggest.

And, who was there? In that spot was a private security guard hired by the Ambassador, a guard who la-

He said the police did a good job in probing a conspiracy theory.

ter told police he had pulled his gun but did not fire when Sirhan opened up.

To Kranz, however, the suggested position of the phantom gunman to Kennedy's right rear makes absolutely no sense, if—as most of the experts say—the Kennedy, Goldstein and Weisel bullets came from the same gun.

To make his point, the attorney relates the relative positions of Kennedy, Goldstein and Weisel, all in Sir-

han's line of fire west to east in the pantry.

Weisel was standing about 27 feet east of Kennedy near the pantry's entrance. Goldstein was closer, about 8 feet from the senator in the same eastward direction.

Under those circumstances—and considering what the experts found—Kranz said, a second gunman would have had to shoot Kennedy, close up, from the right rear, and then turn and fire behind the senator, hitting Goldstein and Weisel—without being seen by anyone in the crowded pantry.

Aside from why a second assassin might want to do such a thing, Kranz concludes that "it's logically impossible."

As part of his reinvestigation of the Kennedy case, Kranz interviewed Thane Cesar, the private guard for Ace Guard Service who was standing near Kennedy.

"Well, why didn't you fire your gun?" Kranz said he asked Cesar. "You were there to protect Kennedy." The attorney said that Cesar replied that he was "a coward."

"He said he fell down, was getting

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"Legally," Kranz said, "it was not evidence that was destroyed. The panels were not introduced as evidence at the trial. I just think that it was lack of judgment. It was a lack of common sense and inexcusable because the case had worldwide magnitude."

"More importantly, Sirhan had been convicted and his appeal was not even in prospect yet. Potential evidence should never be destroyed until the entire case has run out."

"What the hell were these things destroyed for? That borders on Catch 22 insanity. It was just like they were opening up the doors to total criticism and doubt. There's no way it can be explained."

Kranz thinks the same thing about the destruction of a substitute revolver used for muzzle-distance tests because Sirhan's gun had been introduced as evidence in a grand jury hearing.

He believes the substitute Iver-Johnson should not have been used in the first place, but since it was, it should have been saved from routine LAPD destruction, even if a court order was required to do it.

"It was wrong," Kranz said. "It was just idiotic. There's no excuse or explanation that justifies why it was done, especially in the aftermath of the lack of faith in government institutions these last several years."

"You can't go into a supermarket without reading about conspiracy. Every talk show in town has orchestrated this into the new entertainment—assassination fever."

"Public agencies that refuse to use good judgment and sense in giving rational explanations are just undermining their own credibility."

In that respect, Kranz plans to recommend in his final report that the LAPD release a 10-volume summary of

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up and had his gun out, when someone came up to him and said, 'Put it away. It's no use.'

Cesar told him, Kranz said, that a few hours after Kennedy was shot a police officer at Rampart Station examined his .38-caliber revolver, but the LAPD did not keep it to be test-fired.

That was a mistake, Kranz thinks, although he admits he and others are profiting from hindsight. Nevertheless, he believes it is important to examine the Kennedy investigation closely.

"I think you have to separate the fact that the evidence shows conclusively that Sirhan acted as the one gunman from the problems that developed after the shooting and Sirhan's apprehension," he said.

In Kranz' view, the LAPD did an "excellent job" in probing whether Sirhan might have been part of a conspiracy but "sloppy" scientific work, mistakes and poor judgment led to questions about the entire investigation.

Kranz is specifically critical of LAPD criminalist DeWayne A. Wolfer, who mismarked bullet evidence introduced at Sirhan's trial and who used a substitute for Sirhan's gun to conduct muzzle-distant tests.

He also criticizes what he considers to be a lack of sufficient written reports showing what Wolfer did in evaluating physical evidence in the Kennedy case.

The "second gun" hearing before Wenke produced testimony that a search of LAPD files failed to disclose analyzed evidence reports on bullets taken from the five victims other than Kennedy.

It also was reported that there were no reports on X rays of ceiling panels taken from the pantry or spectrographic analysis of evidence bullets, both of which Wolfer testified he might have made.

"Here you have a major aspect of the prosecution's case which isn't substantially documented," Kranz said.

In Kranz' opinion, the lack of records made even worse the LAPD's destruction of bullet-punctured ceiling panels taken from the Ambassador pantry.

Asst. Police Chief Daryl Gates told the Los Angeles City Council last August that the panels had been routinely destroyed in 1969, within weeks after Sirhan's trial had ended.

the Kennedy investigation, with personal histories edited out.

"It again makes no sense to keep these things private because all they do is undermine people's faith in law enforcement and public agencies," he said.

"If you're going to have secret reports issued to representatives of the people, then why shouldn't they be made public?"

"I understand that files on terrorism, sabotage and threats to lives and property need to remain secret, but these 10 volumes are not that.

"This secret report and the unexplained timing of the destruction of those ceiling panels just continue to fan the fires of doubt."

Kranz still asks questions himself about at least one aspect brought out at the "second gun" inquiry, estimated to have cost Los Angeles County taxpayers about \$150,000.

Studying Sirhan's revolver before firing it, the experts found that its barrel had been severely coated with lead. After firing copper-jacketed bullets through it, the barrel was free of lead.

The mystery is how did the barrel become leaded, if copper-jacketed bullets of the type fired by Sirhan had the effect of cleaning the barrel.

It is known that Sirhan fired eight copper-jacketed bullets in the pantry. LAPD Criminalist Wolfer fired eight similar bullets into a water tank, recovering seven, which were introduced as evidence.

No other shots were supposedly fired from Sirhan's gun until the experts examined it.

Where then did the lead in the barrel come from?

Under cross-examination, the chairman of the panel of experts, Patrick V. Garland, was asked whether he thought someone fired uncoated lead bullets through Sirhan's gun sometime between Wolfer's test-firing and when the experts examined it.

"Yes, sir," Garland replied.

For Kranz, his final report to the district attorney will mark a closing of a chapter of his life which began more than seven years ago when he first heard balloon-popping sounds from the Ambassador pantry.

Kranz, a volunteer worker for Kennedy's California campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination, was

in the Embassy Room where Kennedy had just spoken. He had a transistor radio.

"My first reaction was, 'Well, it's just a celebration or something.' And, then I heard screaming, and the screaming was like cheers and several seconds later, more.

"Then, more cheers that I felt sounded strange, and I realized they were screams. They were really screams of panic.

"The next thing was someone up there on the microphone saying, 'Is there a doctor in the house? Is there a doctor?' It just kept going over and over.

"Within maybe a minute, the radio came on and the agony was knowing he had been shot. I sensed then that he was dead.

"What I hope is that my final report will cut through all of that and provide a realistic picture for the public."

Investigator Convinced There Was No Second Gun in Kennedy Assassination

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