

More polka-dots, more perfidy: from from eyewitnesses to non-witnesses

by John G. Christian

In his book *Special Unit Senator* the LAPD investigation team's head, Chief Detective Robert Houghton revealed why so much effort was put into brow-beating Sandy Serrano into recanting her claim that she had heard a girl in a polka-dot dress run from the Ambassador shouting, "We shot him. We shot him."

"Manny Pena knew that as long as Miss Serrano stuck to her story no amount of independent evidence would, in itself, serve to dispel the "polka-dot dress girl" fever, which had by now, in the press and public mind, reached a high point on the thermometer of intrigue. She alone could put that spotted ghost to rest," Houghton wrote.

Serrano was the only person who had told the press that she had seen a "girl in the polka-dot dress." So SUS Lt. Manuel Pena and SUS polygrapher Lt. Enrique

"Hank" Hernandez did what Houghton said they had to do. (See accompanying article about the silencing of Sandy Serrano).

But SUS reports recently released by the State Archives reveal that Serrano was far from alone in claiming to have seen a

speech he (Houston) followed Kennedy party toward kitchen area. Subject was a few feet away from double doors that lead into the kitchen when he heard the shots... (a) woman who had been shot came running out Another woman wearing a black/white polka-dot dress with ruf-

'No amount of independent evidence would, in itself, serve to dispel the "polka-dot dress girl" fever. . .,' wrote LAPD chief of detectives Robert A. Houghton in his 1970 book Special Unit Senator.

girl in a polka-dot dress. At least 23 other witness gave SUS investigators statements that corroborated Serrano's claim.

Among them:

Richard James Houston, a 19-year-old college student from Alhambra. His September 22, 1968 interview with SUS investigators contains the following: "After

fles around the neck & front of dress came running out; this woman was saying 'We killed him.' The woman then ran out onto a terrace area outside. This person described as female, caucasian, 22 to 24, 5-foot 6-inches, 120 pounds, long blond hair, brown eyes, thin face . . ."

Ace Security guard Jack J. Mer-

ritt, who was outside the kitchen pantry where Kennedy was shot. His June 21 interview with SUS investigators reads as follows: "Merritt stated: 'When I entered the kitchen area just after the shooting (I saw) a woman and 2 men leaving area where the shooting occurred. They seemed to be smiling... the female was blond wearing (a) white dress with dark polka dots. They went out of sight into the kitchen.'"

Student for Kennedy volunteer Katie Keir. Her June 5, 1968 report states, "Witness observed the girl in the white dress with black polka-dot dress running down the stairs. She was yelling out, 'We shot Senator Kennedy.'"

Keir was interviewed again three months later, at which time, according to the September 7, 1968 SUS report, "(Keir) did, however retract her previous statement that she saw a female caucasian approximately 23, 5-8, slightly heavy set with dark brown hair fixed in love locks, and wearing a black and white polka-dot dress.

Fellow Student for Kennedy volunteers Irene Gizzi, Terri Trivelli and Jeanie Prudhomme also said that they had seen a girl in a polka-dot dress, though only Keir

heard this suspect yell out "We shot Kennedy," according to SUS's reports.

Judith Groves, an Ambassador Hotel employee on the night of the assassination. Her SUS report, dated June 10, 1968, states that she observed a "female caucasian, 22 to 24 years of age, 5-foot, 7-inches. This woman was wearing a white dress with large polka dots... talked to the unknown man in a foreign tongue, similar to Spanish, but not Spanish."

Thomas Vincent DiPierro, a college student and part-time waiter at the Ambassador. DiPierro testified on June 7, 1968 at Sirhan's grand jury hearing, that he "noticed there was a girl and the accused person standing on what is - what we call a tray stacker... I would never forget what she looked like because she had a very good figure, and the dress was kind of lousy... it looked like it was white and it had either black or dark-purple polka dots on it."

Like Serrano, and others, DiPierro was subsequently convinced by Lt. Enrique "Hank" Hernandez to recant his statement that he had seen a girl in a polka-dot dress.