

Officials Open Files in '68 Kennedy Assassination

SACRAMENTO, Calif., April 19 (AP) — The police files of the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy were opened to the public for the first time today, and officials disclosed that more than 2,400 photographs from the file had been destroyed.

There was no explanation in the 50,000 pages of documents of why the pictures were burned. Nor was there an explanation of why such items as ceiling tiles and door jambs from the site of the shooting at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles were destroyed in the months after the June 1968 assassination.

The California Secretary of State, March Fong Eu, released the documents, including interviews with 4,000 witnesses and 2,500 photographs from the Los Angeles Police Department files.

The state's chief archivist, John Burns, said that because of the missing material, the documents were unlikely to answer numerous questions surrounding the 1968 assassination.

'Not Absolutely Satisfied'

"I've never seen a file quite this large," Mr. Burns said. "This is a very unusual murder file. I'm not absolutely satisfied that any questions are answered."

The release of the records follows years of demands for public access to the information. Among the persistent questions raised by conspiracy theorists and scholars are: Was Sirhan Bishara Sirhan the only gunman? Was Kennedy shot from in front or behind? Were there eight shots or more in the pantry of the hotel?

Mr. Burns said the biggest surprise was the amount of evidence destroyed, including the photographs, which were burned three months after the assassination. The subject matter of the photographs is unknown.

He said he had not had time to examine all the evidence, which he predicted will occupy researchers for years.

The gaps in the material drew immediate criticism.

"Someone should ask the police why they destroyed 2,400 photographs in the most important case they've ever examined," said Gregory Stone, a political scientist at the University of Wisconsin who is a longtime student of the case.

Diary Entry and a Dress

Among the material put on display was a polka dot dress, bullets taken from victims and an entry from Mr. Sirhan's diary saying, "R.F.K. must die."

The dress was one of many purchased by police in an effort to jog the memories of witnesses on a point of contention, that a girl in a polka dot dress was seen running from the hotel shouting, "We shot him." That report was never verified.

Also released was the police tape recording of a call reporting the Kennedy shooting. The caller did not immediately know who was shot but told

the officer who answered that the New York Senator was in the hotel, to which the unidentified officer replied, "Big deal."

Extensive videotape and audio recordings graphically depict the confusion at the scene. The videotape shows a fatally wounded Kennedy, who moments before had declared victory in California's Democratic Presidential primary, lying on the floor.

The day before the files were released, Mr. Sirhan's attorney, Luke McKissack, said Mr. Sirhan expected nothing to contradict his contention that he was a lone gunman.

The only things withheld from disclosure, Ms. Eu said, were autopsy photos, criminal records and fingerprint cards, juvenile case records, internal police personnel records and records that originated with the Federal Bureau of Investigation or police departments outside Los Angeles.

At First, Police Uncertainty

SACRAMENTO, Calif., April 19 (AP) — A Los Angeles Police Department radio log from the night Robert F. Kennedy was shot was released today. It showed that the officer who took the initial call was unsure at first whether the matter was important.

The voices on the tape were not identified.

The following is part of an exchange between a woman caller and a police officer:

Woman: "This is the Ambassador Hotel. They have an emergency."

Policeman: "What kind of emergency?"

Woman: "I don't know. Some kind of an emergency. You know we have Mr. Kennedy here."

Policeman: "Big deal!"

Woman (brief pause): "I think somebody was shot."

Policeman: "Oh great"

Woman: "You want me to find out more?"

Policeman: "Yes, ma'am."

Woman (longer pause): "Senator Kennedy has been shot."

Policeman: "He's been shot?"

Woman: "That's right. You'd better send someone here."

Policeman: "What's the address there?" (He apparently did not know the location of one of the largest hotels in Los Angeles.)

Even after officers arrived at the scene, one of them radioed, "Senator Kennedy has been shot at the Ambassador," and a dispatcher responded, "Senator who?"

It took about 20 minutes before the information was straightened out and a dispatcher announced to all cars: "The shooting was of Senator Bob Kennedy. The suspect is in custody."