

The FBI and the Physical Evidence
of the Robert F. Kennedy Assassination Crime Scene

Currently available evidence suggests a rebuttable presumption that nine to fifteen bullets were fired in the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy. Because Sirhan's gun could hold only eight bullets, such a finding in turn implies that more than one gun was fired during the assassination. Other evidence consistent with this possibility has been ignored or unsatisfactorily addressed by Los Angeles law enforcement officials. An effective inquiry into the FBI role in the crime scene investigation could possibly be decisive to the central issue of whether or not the murder was the work of a single "lone assassin."

The evidence presently available from FBI documents and personnel powerfully corroborates the nine-bullet hypothesis. Much more may be learned, however, by an impartial inquiry into FBI involvement with crime scene aspects of the case on the morning of the shooting. No such review is known to have taken place, although the need for one has been clear for several years.

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Within hours of the assassination, FBI agents were at the scene of the crime and were involved in examining the layout and physical damage in the Ambassador Hotel pantry, among other duties. Of the bullets fired during the shooting, seven were removed from victims at various hospitals and one is described by Los Angeles police as being lost in the "interspace" between the ceiling and the acoustical tile of the hotel pantry. The official police bullet inventory, in spite of deficiencies elsewhere, is clear on these points.²

Eight bullets being thus accounted for, any bullets or bullet holes beyond the above (excluding the trivial possibility of a prior shootout in the same hotel location) establish the firing of more than one weapon. In fact, strong evidence of additional bullets and bullet damage exists, including official records and comments, and statements by shooting eyewitnesses, Ambassador Hotel personnel and the then (1968) coroner of Los Angeles County.

Present FBI-related evidence in connection with the disposition of the crime scene may be summarized as follows:

- 1.) The official FBI report on the "area where the shooting occurred" asserts the existence of four "bullet holes" and two "reported"³ bullet holes at the west end of the Ambassador pantry. Any one of these six bullets would constitute a ninth bullet fired during the shooting.

- 2.) A former FBI agent (now a university professor of criminalistics) who was on the scene shortly after the shooting has asserted unequivocally that two undoubted bullet holes existed in one of the locations identified in the FBI report. This agent was not himself the author of the FBI report; his observations provide independent corroboration of its conclusions.
- 3.) FBI documents on the RFK case were released in the late 1970s pursuant to Freedom of Information Act requests. Beyond the bare but unambiguous observations in the "shooting area" section of the documents, there is no evidence that its information was evaluated by the FBI or its significance ever appreciated.
- 4.) The FBI has never been exposed to significant pressure to account for its findings concerning its shooting area investigation. Bureau replies to citizen inquiries on the matter have been unresponsive.

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Current FBI information on the assassination (leaving aside other evidence) diametrically contradicts the one-gun, "lone assassin" theory of the shooting. A careful, impartial investigation of FBI work relating to this question is, therefore, clearly needed.

Such an inquiry would, as a minimum:

- 1.) Identify all FBI agents involved in the crime scene examination, including the photographer who took the pictures of the crime scene and the official who captioned them, and identify any other sources. Produce records or notes in existence from the examination.
- 2.) Interview all relevant FBI personnel (past and present) with respect to their full information and recollections concerning physical layout and bullet damage at the crime scene.

Additional useful steps would be to:

- 1.) Relate FBI crime scene activities to information on the matter of bullet damage received from Los Angeles authorities. This includes both direct comment, official documentation, and relevant portions of the formal LAPD ten-volume report on the case, reportedly in Justice Department possession.
- 2.) Determine how the crime scene information was processed and evaluated within the bureau.
- 3.) Review and clarify FBI material and investigative work concerning the security arrangements at the Ambassador Hotel on the night of the shooting and on armed individuals besides Sirhan inside or near the pantry.

Such an internal inquiry should avoid outside publicity and would require detailed and meticulous record-keeping. Above all, in view of the general history of this case, complete objectivity is imperative, with no other goal at stake but the impartial determination of the truth.

The resources required for an effort such as the above are slight. Its results would be valuable, and might be critical, in resolving the central unanswered questions of Senator Kennedy's assassination.