

RFK summary sharpens

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LOS ANGELES — James Hoffa and Milton Berle were among the 4,810 persons interviewed. Links with the Mafia, the Communist Party and the Theosophical Society were investigated. Nearly 17 years after it was written, an edited 1,453 page summary of the Los Angeles Police Department's investigation into the 1968 shooting death of Robert F. Kennedy has been made public.

The investigative summary, which points out that the "department's reputation was quite literally on the line," supports the conclusions of the police that Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, acting alone, killed the New York senator in a premeditated act. Sirhan is serving time in prison.

But the release of the summary has done nothing to quiet the criticism of the police investigation. Nor has it quieted the critics who point to errors and unanswered questions in the summary, and who call for the release of the 50,000 pages of primary investigative files that have not been made public.

"It is a selective, sanitized version of the evidence that supports the official conclusion," said Gregory Stone, a political scientist and once an aide to Rep. Allard K. Lowenstein of New York. Lowenstein, a one-term member of Congress who was himself murdered, sought the release of the full investigative files in 1973 and 1974.

City and police officials had promised release of the investigative files since the early 1970s. But it was not until last summer, when archivists, historians and Kennedy associates began demanding it, that the city Board of Police Commissioners announced that the files would be edited and made public, beginning with the summary.

Last week, the commission released the summary and then washed its hands of the remaining 50,000 pages. It announced that it was recommending to the mayor that he appoint a special committee to handle the editing and disposition of the primary investigative files.

"The interesting aspects of the summary just point one to the primary materials," said Stone in frustration after looking at the summary.

"There was great criticism of the JFK investigation after the Warren Commission Report came out," he said, referring to the federal investigation into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. "But we don't have a Warren Commission Report here. We are deprived of weighing the official conclusion versus the original evidence."

He added that the summary was just 3



Robert and Ethel Kennedy at victory rally just before his assassination

percent of the total investigative file.

According to the summary, Sen. Kennedy arrived in Southern California on June 2, 1968, to begin his final two days of campaigning before the June 4 presidential primary.

He campaigned across the state before arriving at 8 p.m. on election night at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles to await the returns.

At 12:02 a.m., he gave a victory speech to about 2,000 people. Thirteen minutes later, while walking through the pantry and shaking hands with kitchen workers, he was shot three times. Five others were wounded.

Kennedy was pronounced dead at 1:44 a.m. June 6.

The summary contains six conclusions, five concerning Sirhan's guilt and the lack of any conspiracy, and one stating the police department's innocence.

"The Kennedy staff did not request any police protection from the Los Angeles Police Department nor was any offered by the department" is the summary's final conclusion.

Early in the summary, incidents in which Kennedy and his aides refuse police assistance are recounted. So are incidents when Kennedy aides "shout obscenities" and "highly inflammatory" remarks at police.

That, according to the summary, explains

why there were 2,000 people at the hotel for the Kennedy victory celebration and no police. There were also election night gatherings of Democratic Senate nominee Alan Cranston and Republican nominee Max Rafferty at the Ambassador Hotel.

According to the summary, the first police on the scene came from patrol cars nearby.

The summary, besides detailing the investigation of the crime by police, offers a glimpse of those who were near Kennedy in the pantry.

Five minutes before his victory speech was completed, Kennedy aides chose to have him exit the stage at the rear and go through the pantry to another room where a news conference would be held.

Because of the crush of people, Kennedy security man William Barry and staffer Fred Dutton, who usually walked at the senator's side, were about eight feet behind as he walked into the pantry. Kennedy's wife told Barry to "stay with the senator."

Suddenly, there were shots. Police said eight shots were fired, the last four while Sirhan was being apprehended. The summary describes the apprehension:

Karl Uecker, a hotel waiter captain, who was the closest to Kennedy, grabbed Sirhan by the neck and then struck his hand to dislodge the gun. But Sirhan kept shooting.

demands for all files

Two others tried to grab him, but Sirhan kept struggling. Barry and writer George Plimpton tried to help. Roosevelt Grier, a football player, ran into the kitchen and wrenched the gun from Sirhan and gave it to track star Rafer Johnson. Sirhan was finally subdued, and pinned to a serving table.

Jess Unruh, speaker of the California Assembly, joined the fray, shouting, "This one's going to stand trial. No one's going to kill him."

Kennedy was conscious. He recognized his wife, smiled and several times moaned "Oh, Ethel."

While being restrained in the pantry, Sirhan said either "I can explain" or "I will explain," according to Unruh and Johnson.

In the police car minutes later, Sirhan told Unruh, "I did it for my country."

"Why him?" Unruh asked.

"It's too late" was the reply.

The police interviewed everyone in the hotel and everyone who might have a motive to harm Kennedy. Among those at the Ambassador was comedian Milton Berle, a Kennedy supporter, who was in a suite when the shooting occurred.

They also interviewed James Hoffa, former Teamsters union president who began serving a prison sentence in 1967 on jury-tampering and mail-fraud charges. It was Kennedy, as U.S. attorney general, who had led the federal investigation of Hoffa.

Hoffa denied any part in the Kennedy slaying.

In Sirhan's Pasadena home, police found an envelope on which was written "RFK must be disposed of like his brother." In a notebook, the words "R.F.K. must be assassinated" were repeated over and over. Later, a handwriting expert would testify that the handwriting was Sirhan's.

Because Sirhan requested a Theosophical Society book while in jail, police investigated the organization to see if it had played any part in the Kennedy killing.

The organization, which has chapters throughout the world but only a few thousand members, believes in the brotherhood of man. Police concluded that Sirhan had attended a meeting, but was not a society member and that the organization had no role whatsoever in the shooting.

Similar investigations into allegations of links between Sirhan and Cuban and Arab groups, the Mafia, the Communist Party and mystical groups also did not show any connection.

Police did find evidence that Sirhan had attended other Kennedy functions in California, had purchased a gun, had practiced firing the gun and had spoken, at least once, of his enmity for Kennedy.

Neither Stone nor Paul Schrade, a Ken-

nedy staffer who was one of the five wounded, have any quarrel with naming Sirhan as the culprit.

But they do question how the summary was edited and a number of its conclusions. And they both wonder when the full investigative file will be made public.

Stone points out that most of the witnesses closest to Kennedy in the pantry testified in court that Sirhan's gun was never closer than one foot from Kennedy. The summary, he said, glosses over that fact and concludes, as the autopsy did, that the bullets that killed Kennedy were fired from an inch away.

The summary concludes that the bullet that struck Schrade in the head went through the shoulder pad of Kennedy's coat first.

"If it didn't go through his jacket first, then nine shots, not eight shots, were fired," Stone said. "Nine shots means a second gun."

Schrade demanded last week at the police commission meeting that Chief Daryl Gates explain to him how the bullet that struck him could have passed through Kennedy's jacket. He waved in front of him a police picture, which he said he had obtained by court order, of the jacket and the bullet hole.

Gates ignored Schrade's comments.

In an explanatory letter with the summary, it is stated that names of Secret Service and FBI agents have been edited out of the summary because it was the "policy" of such governmental agencies.

But Stone said both the Warren Commission and the investigators of the killing of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. listed the names of federal agents involved.

"If they called someone, we could have told them that," Stone said. "There's been no dialogue."

Deputy Mayor Tom Houston said it was not certain yet what would be done with the primary investigative files, but he noted that it was a "big cost item."

"It's hard for me to take a comment like that seriously," said Stone, angry that anyone could still be "fixated and immobilized by money."

Schrade, a former United Auto Workers official, said he and Stone were not alone in their quest to have all the Kennedy files opened up. "I just got a call from the doctor who operated on me in 1968," Schrade said. "He thought it was crazy to think that Sirhan acted alone."

Schrade does not know one way or the other. He is convinced of nothing, other than that he does not believe he was struck by the same bullet that hit Kennedy's jacket.

"I think there are a lot of people who are interested in finding out what happened," he said.