

'Did It for My Country,' Sirhan Quoted in Slaying

J.P.
2/14/69
Version of Comments Is
Offered in Court

By ARTHUR EVERETT

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Sirhan Bishara Sirhan was quoted by the state Thursday as saying moments after the shooting of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, "I did it for my country."

When pressed to enlarge on his reasons the young Jordanian, who has been pictured as an ardent Arab nationalist, was said to have replied, "Do you think I'm crazy, so you can use it in evidence against me?"

This version of Sirhan's comments came as the state outlined in its opening statement the case it will offer to try to convince a jury that Kennedy's assassination last June was premeditation and planned.

'ALONE RESPONSIBLE'

"The evidence will show," said Deputy Dist. Atty. David N. Fitts, "that the defendant, Sirhan Sirhan, alone was responsible for this tragedy . . . that he acted alone without concert with anyone."

Fitts said Sirhan's "did it for my country," remark was made to Jesse M. Unruh, Democratic leader of the California state assembly who was at Kennedy's side when he was mortally wounded, and who accompanied Sirhan to jail.

"Why him? He's trying to help," Unruh was quoted.

"It's too late. It's too late," Fitts said Sirhan replied.

MISTRIAL DENIED

Trial of Sirhan, on a charge he murdered Kennedy, got

down to business after five weeks of preliminaries following a defense motion for a mistrial. It was denied.

The defense contended jurors may have been influenced by a news story that said Sirhan might plead guilty in hope of winning life imprisonment instead of the death penalty. The jurors, questioned in the judge's chambers, said they weren't. Fitts, 46, dapper and gray-haired, outlined the case chronologically in an effort to show planning. After his hour-long statement, the trial recessed for the night. The defense was scheduled to make its opening remarks Friday.

Fitts said the state contends that Sirhan armed himself, practiced marksmanship and then two full days before the shooting began stalking the 42-year-old Kennedy.

The day before the slaying, Fitts said, Sirhan practiced at a pistol range and told a bystander his gun "would kill a dog."