

Question of RFK Death

By DAVE SMITH

Los Angeles Times Service

LOS ANGELES — The persistent question of whether Sirhan Bishara Sirhan acted alone in the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy — or whether an overlooked second gunman also was involved — was reopened Monday by County Supervisor Baxter Ward.

In a three-hour public hearing, Ward, now running for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, summoned eight scientific experts and county officials to testify on their remaining doubts about the quality of the investigation into Kennedy's 1968 murder in Los Angeles.

Criminologist Herbert Leon MacDonnell, director of the Laboratory of Forensic Science in New York, testified that two bullets taken from

the Ambassador Hotel pantry in the early hours of June 5, 1968, did not come from the same gun.

One bullet, marked with the initials of County Coroner Thomas T. Noguchi, was taken from the body of Sen. Kennedy. The other, marked with the initial of DeWayne Wolfer, head of the Los Angeles Police Department crime lab, came from the stomach of ABC newsman William Wiesel, since recovered.

No Match

The bullets, MacDonnell testified, do not match each other, either in their manufacture or in the manner in which they were marked by passage through a gun barrel.

His testimony agreed with that of Lowell Bradford, a firearms identification expert from Campbell, Calif., who

said he also concluded that the two bullets could "not be identified as coming from the same gun."

Both men agreed that a re-firing of Sirhan's .22-caliber weapon was the essential first step in laying the question to rest.

The testimony of both men was based on their examination of the findings of Pasadena criminologist William W. Harper, who for 35 years served as a forensic expert for both prosecution and defense in local trials.

Noguchi, testifying Monday, revealed that he began two days after Kennedy's assassination to expose the possibilities of neutron activation analysis of all bullets and bullet fragments taken from the pantry to insure that all lead particles could be identified as coming from the same weapon.

'Improper Forum'

But later, Noguchi said, he sought the advice of Wolfer and was told not to subject the bullets to such a test because analysis in an atomic reactor would change the chemical composition of the slugs.

District Attorney Joseph Busch, who declined Ward's invitation to testify at the hearing, also declined to comment Monday, but earlier he had criticized the supervisor's proceeding as an "im-

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proper forum."

Following the hearing, the district attorney's office deferred to Lynn Compton for a response. He was chief prosecutor in the Sirhan case and is now an associate justice on

the State Court of Appeal.

Compton described Monday's hearing as "a sideshow performance involving persons whose motives appear to be other than to simply determine the truth."