

'I Like Politics,' Said Bobby, 'It's an Honorable Adventure'

By JACK V. FOX
United Press International

LOS ANGELES — It was nearing midnight in the suite on the fifth floor of the Ambassador Hotel and Bobby Kennedy was slumped down in a chair with his feet propped up on a bed watching television and sipping from a glass of ginger ale.

The returns showed he had beaten Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy in the California Democratic presidential primary and Pierre Salinger was urging him to go down to the Embassy Ballroom below and speak to the jubilant crowd assembled in a victory celebration.

The senator seemed reluctant. Someone asked him if he had information about the returns other than the figures on the TV tube.

"No," he said. "I used to get all sorts of reports but now television gets it all first. It's getting to be an awful bore."

Mrs. Ethel Kennedy was sitting on the other side of the bed and someone said the vote showed that not everybody disliked her husband. She took a playful poke at the speaker.

"I wonder if we should take Freckles down," Kennedy said. "You know they say I used a dog and an astronaut to win."

JOHN GLENN, who was on the other side of the room, chuckled.

Kennedy still seemed in no mood to move. He had been surfing all afternoon at the beach at Malibu and took one good spill. He rubbed his hand over the goose egg over his right eye and reminded a news reporter that he wanted him to come to the party at The Factory, a discotheque, later that night.

Bill Barry, Kennedy's bodyguard, was off in a corner chatting. The senator had declined any police protection and Barry had the responsibility for his safety although pro football player Roosevelt Grier and decathlon champion Rafer Johnson often helped in crowds.

"I get mixed up with the crowds and I can't see," Barry was saying. "And I get tired. Maybe I won't be able to react quickly enough. I wish somebody would talk to him."

It was midnight now and finally Bobby got up and put on his coat jacket and straightened his tie and walked out the door toward a service elevator.

Someone asked if he ever wondered

if it was all worth it. Implicit in the question was the tragic death of his brother in Dallas four and one-half years before.

"I like politics," Kennedy said. "It's an honorable adventure. Lord Tweedsmuir said that: 'It's an honorable adventure.'"

THEN KENNEDY, his wife, Barry and Jess Unruh and a few others got into a service elevator and went down to the second floor. They walked through a kitchen area and out onto a small stage overlooking the Embassy Room. The room was filled to bursting with a crowd perspiring under the brilliant television lights and buoyed up with elation and other spirits.

Kennedy got into the mood immediately. He played around with the microphone and asked whether people could hear him.



Sirhan Taken From Hotel After Shooting

... he now sits in death row in San Quentin



—United Press International Telephoto

With His Wife Beside Him, Sen. Kennedy Gave Victory Sign
... just before making speech to supporters at Ambassador Hotel

"I want to first express my high regard to Don Drysdale who pitched his sixth straight shutout tonight and I hope that we have as good fortune in our campaign," he said.

Then he turned serious.

"What I think is — what I think is quite clear is that we can work together in the last analysis and that what has been going on in the United States over the period of the last three years, the division, the violence, the disenchantment with our society, the division whether it's between black and white, between the poor and the more affluent or between age groups or over the war in Vietnam, that we can start to work together. We are a great country and an unselfish country and a compassionate country. And I intend to make that my basis for running in the period of the next few months."

He expressed his thanks to his supporters and then wound up:

"Mayor Yorty has just sent me a message that we've been here too long already. So my thanks to all of you and on to Chicago and let's win there."

Then he turned and jumped down the two feet off the back of the stage and started the wild push through crowds that extended their hands to shake his or just touch him which marked his every appearance.

MRS. KENNEDY, pregnant with their 11th child, was on the other end of the stage and Bill Barry hesitated a moment to help her down off the platform and in that brief span of time the crowd closed in between him and the senator.

Karl Uecker, the assistant maitre d' at the Ambassador, had Kennedy by the right hand and was leading him through a pantry toward the colonial room where the "pencil press" reporters were banging out their stories. It was a last minute change of plans. Kennedy originally had been scheduled to go downstairs to another victory celebration in a ballroom on the ground floor.

Kennedy stopped to talk with the kitchen help. He shook hands with Juan Romero, a 17-year-old busboy.

Seconds later, a tiny little fellow named Sirhan Bishara Sirhan stepped off a tray rack, shouted "Kennedy, you son of a bitch" and shoved a .22 caliber revolver an inch from the senator's ear and pulled the trigger.

The gunman kept firing until he had emptied the eight cartridges in the chamber. Two other bullets entered Kennedy's body below his right armpit and the others felled five persons standing nearby.

It was 12:15 a.m., Wednesday the 5th of June, 1968.

IN ONE lightning moment the old superstition came true — tragedies, big and small, come in threes. John Kenne-

dy, Martin Luther King, Robert F. Kennedy.

There was a frozen instant of incomprehension and then it was inchoate pandemonium.

Kennedy crumbled to the floor. Juan Romero bent over him and put a rosary in his hand. A wild-eyed Ethel Kennedy came tearing her way through the crowd, knelt in a pool of blood and

began shouting:

"Get back, all of you! Get out! Please get out! For God's sake, give him room to breathe."

Eight feet away, Barry, Grier and Johnson were struggling for the gun and pinning the tiny assassin down on a steam table.

In the ballroom, a noise like "Chinese firecrackers" had been heard and then shouts for a doctor went out over the public address system and the word spread: "Bobby's been shot."

Pretty "Kennedy girls" in white blouses and navy blue skirts and straw skimmer hats burst into tears. In the pantry, men beat their fists on steel tables in frustration and others fought to get at Sirhan, yelling, "kill him! kill him!"

Two police officers arrived and literally ran with Sirhan out of the hotel. They whisked him into a patrol car and sped off to Ramparts Station. California legislative leader Jess Unruh was in the car and Sirhan mumbled "I did it for my country." For the rest of the night and well into the next day the 24-year-old Arab immigrant refused to tell police anything — not even his name.

IT SEEMED an eternity until an ambulance arrived. Then two attendants carried Kennedy out on a stretcher with Ethel holding back their pace so they wouldn't jostle her husband. They sped to Central Receiving Hospital. Kennedy had sunk into a coma.

A young doctor at Central Receiving examined Kennedy and then roughly slapped his face in an attempt at revi-

val. Ethel Kennedy, sitting on a high metal stool, gasped. The doctor handed her a stethoscope and put it to Kennedy's heart. An expression of relief spread over Ethel Kennedy's face and she said: "Will he live?"

"Yes, right now he's going to be all right," the doctor said.

Father Thomas Peacha of nearby St. Basil's Parish entered the room and performed the last rites of the Catholic Church.

But at that time, no one could comprehend that Kennedy would die.

Robert Donovan, head of the Washington Bureau of the Los Angeles Times, wrote in a front page story:

"If he should recover in time to continue his quest for the Democratic presidential nomination, public sympathy could fan the fires of his support to a degree that it would diminish Vice President Humphrey's current lead.

"If Kennedy is disabled and cannot continue the race, the result would approach a national crisis."

Kennedy stayed at Central Receiving less than 30 minutes. Then he was transferred to Good Samaritan Hospital. A crowd which grew to 800 persons gathered in the street outside. Automobiles were bumper to bumper on Wilshire Boulevard, some of them bearing a placard which came out of nowhere, "Pray for Bobby."

Surgeons spent three hours and 40 minutes removing the fragments of the bullet from his brain.

FROM ALL over the world, the Kennedy clan congregated. Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy flew from New York. She had been awakened by a call from Prince Radziwill, the husband of her sister Lee in London with the news.

A grim Edward Kennedy came from Massachusetts.

Frank Mankiewicz, the senator's press secretary, hid his grief and dealt with the horde of newsmen.

At 2 a.m. on the morning of June 6, Mankiewicz read a brief statement. Robert Kennedy had died at 1:44 a.m.

There was a long period while an autopsy was performed. The family waited in patience. They did not want a recurrence of the shadow that still hangs over John Kennedy's death in Dallas.

Late that Wednesday afternoon the plane finally took off to carry Robert Kennedy's body back to the East and burial in Arlington beside his brother.

It has been a year now since those shattering days.

During his trial Sirhan said he could not even remember killing Kennedy, that he was in a "trance" when he fired the fatal bullets.

A jury of seven men and five women did not believe him. They sentenced him to death. He sits now in death row in San Quentin awaiting an order to enter the gas chamber which probably will never come.