

Sirhan Waits in Solitude with Six Guards Nearby

Gongs Awaken Prisoner at 6:30 a. m.

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A 45-second ding-ding-ding-ding from electric gongs on corridor walls awakens Prisoner No. 718486 at 6:30 a.m.

A small figure, underwearing a narrow bunk hinged to the concrete wall. Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, the 24-year-old Jordanian charged with assassinating Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, starts another day of—

—Confinement with a guard in a 6-by-8 foot windowless cell on the 13th floor of the Civic Cen-

ter's smog-grimed, 15-story Hall of Justice.

—Wearing standard Los Angeles County jail garb—blue denim pants and blue cotton shirt stenciled "L.A. Co. Jail," his name and booking number on a plastic band riveted around his left wrist.

—Reading newspapers he buys or books he orders from the jail library.

—Pacing a larger caged area outside his cell 20 minutes morning and afternoon.

—Eating candy bars ... smoking cigars ... hoping for visitors ... and, mostly, just waiting to be taken to an improvised 13th floor courtroom July 19 to plead guilty or not guilty.

STANDARD FURNISHINGS

His cell furnishings are standard: toilet—coverless because a seat could be ripped off and used as a weapon; wash basin and round metal mirror attached to the wall.

Sirhan's attorney, Russell E. Parsons, calls him "a reader and a loner ... a man who could spend a lot of his life alone."

Paradoxically, despite the capacity 1,834 prisoners around him on the top five floors—accused robbers, burglars, forgers, rapists, etc.—Sirhan already is largely alone.

His cell is in an isolated corridor, its other cells empty of inmates. On his own floor, but beyond thick walls, are separate tankfuls of homosexuals and rules-breakers denied such privileges as mail and cigarettes.

18 HUSKY DEPUTIES

The guard in his cell is one of 18 husky deputies who tower over the swarthy, bushy-haired young man who stands 5 feet 3 and weighs 110 pounds.

From jail store-cart the deputies buy the candy, cigars and paperbacks Sirhan requests, paying for them from the \$6 weekly personal funds allowed each prisoner. His reading

ranges from the occult to light fiction.

Picked for proven dependability and stability, the guards watch Sirhan six at a time in eight-hour shifts: one in the cell, one in the exercise area, four in the corridor.

They're forbidden to talk with him unnecessarily—just as with any prisoner.

FACTUAL TALK

Says a sheriff's aide, speaking rhetorically:

"If Sirhan asks what time it is, the guard will tell him. But if he asks, 'What do you think of my attorney?' the guard may say, 'I don't know him' or if he asks, 'What do you think of this country sending planes to Israel?' the guard will say, 'I don't know much about it.'"

A New York committee on American-Arab relations said after the assassination that the young Jordanian immigrant "may have been inflamed" by Sen. Kennedy's call for U.S. jets for Israel.

Security around the Hall of Justice has been tightened. A newly assigned deputy stands outside the jail elevator at the ground floor. Additional officers patrol the grounds.

NO DALLAS

Why such measures? Says the sheriff's aide: "We don't want another Dallas"—a reference to Jack Ruby's slaying of Lee Harvey Oswald, accused assassin of President Kennedy, before Oswald could be brought to trial.

Even before he enters a plea, Sirhan's life is somewhat grimmer than it was in the first month of his confinement.

His left index finger broken and one ankle sprained in his capture at the June 5 assassination scene—the Ambassador Hotel—Sirhan was taken to the hospital section of the county's central jail.

In that \$17-million, 4½-year-old facility, watched by the same deployment of guards as now, he occupied a hospital bed

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in an air-conditioned, 8-by-10-foot room. He wore brown pajamas and ate the high-protein diet prescribed for all 300 prisoners in the hospital section.

While the 3,000 other central jail inmates might lunch on baked beans for example, Sirhan might have been having sausage steak with gravy and mashed potatoes.

SECRET TRANSFER

On July 7, recovered from his injuries, he was transferred secretly and swiftly in a caravan of three sheriff's radio cars to the Hall of Justice jail a mile away. The move—routine for any prisoner—was to place him in the same building where he would be going to court.

A reporter was given a tour next day of the Hall of Justice jail—except the Sirhan security area. Brown-clad trustees served from big stainless-steel pots the evening's main course: noodles with meat sauce.

'Sirhan's' food matches the menu of other inmates but is prepared separately—a precaution, an aide says, against poisoning.

In contrast to Sirhan's former air-conditioned quarters, he, his fellow inmates and guards endure the city's recent 90-plus temperatures in a 43-year-old building where big fans on tall stands propel the warm air.

The sheriff's department has two main preoccupations with Sirhan: (1) to see that he is brought to trial and (2) within security limits, treat him no differently from any other prisoner.

LITTLE MYSTERY

Says big Peter John Pitchess, 56, attorney, former FBI agent and for the past 10 years Los Angeles County sheriff:

"We try not to make too much of a mystery of Sirhan. What we do is judged necessary for security purposes. We must prevent mistakes made in the past."

The Oswald slaying?

"We learned a lot of things from the Oswald case."

The Sirhan security measures were Pitchess' decision. They probably set a record for any prisoner in Los Angeles County history, he acknowledged, because:

"Times are changing. There's more violence in our society today. More public attention is fo-

cused on cases like this."

The cost of Sirhan's security? Says an aide: "\$10.48 per day, the cost of housing any county jail prisoner." But Sirhan's guards are diverted from regular duties.

Pitchess remarked that he saw Sirhan briefly the day of his arrest, asked him if he was satisfied with medical attention he had received and:

"He said he was but asked, 'Do you really care about my medical condition?' I thought it unnecessary to reply."

Said Pitchess: "He has given us no bad time particularly. He has attempted to communicate with our deputies. They respond primarily with 'yes' or 'no.'"

"We continue to receive a large number of threats against this man's life—and against our-

selves for trying so hard to keep him alive. There have been threats by phone and mail against me, my home and my family. I haven't lost any sleep over them."

Sirhan receives "a fair volume of mail, at least 100 letters so far." These are machine-copied and the copies are given to Sirhan's attorney.

SOME MAIL VICIOUS

Says an aide to attorney Parsons: "We give him the ones that are favorable. Some are pretty vicious."

Parsons, 69, nearly 50-year veteran of law practice, said Sirhan's attitude is "similar to that of most men in jail. He looks about as comfortable as most men in jail. He's cooperating with me and seems to be making the best of it. He's under a strain."

Does Sirhan sleep well?

"I think he does, but he's a nervous, restless man. I asked him, 'Are you eating all right? Getting what you want to eat?' He said, 'Yes.' With any prisoner, I want to be the first to know if he's mistreated."

Sirhan asks about his family—his mother Mary and four brothers, in nearby Pasadena. Has he asked Parsons for anything? "Just to come and see him. I've been through that all my life. They want to talk to you."

"I tell him his mother sends her love, and he says, 'Give them my love.' He thinks a lot of his mother and brothers."

Parsons' aide, a young private detective named Michael A. McCowan, called the family "very nice, ordinary people. They're cooperating with us fully."

Like Parsons, Sirhan's broth-

er Adel, 29, has visited the prisoner several times. His mother has visited twice, once since the move to new quarters.

Parsons empties his pockets and is frisked by deputies before he enters Sirhan's cell.

But family members get no farther than a window of heavy glass. On built-in metal stools Sirhan sits on one side, his mother or brother on the other in the corridor. They talk over hand telephones.