

# Sirhan Reads, Paces... Waits

By Gene Handsaker

LOS ANGELES, July 14 (AP)—A 45-second ding-ding-ding from electric gongs on corridor walls awakens Prisoner No. 718486 at 6:30 a.m.

A small figure, under-wear-clad, rises from 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 Center'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 next Friday to plead guilty or not guilty.

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 1834 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 emptied of inmates.

The guard in his cell is one of 18 husky deputies who tower over the swarthy,

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bushy-haired young man who stands 5 feet 3 and weighs 110 pounds.

From jail store carts 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.

### Under Constant Watch

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.

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.' "

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.

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.

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

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 prisoners.

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.

### More than \$200,000

[An accounting from County Auditor Mark Bloodgood on what the Sirhan case has cost the county thus far put the figure at \$210,629 through July 7, the Los Angeles Times reported.]

Pitchess said Sirhan "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 ourselves for trying so hard to keep him alive."

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.

Says and 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 is "cooperating with me and seems to be making

the best of it. He's under a strain."

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

Like Parsons, Sirhan's

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

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.



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