

'Loner' Enjoys Reading

F Post 7-15-68

Sirhan Model Prisoner

LOS ANGELES (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, underwearing-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 impro-

vised 13th floor courtroom July 19 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 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 emptied inmates. On his own floor, but beyond thick walls, are separate tankfuls of homosexuals and rules-breakers denied such privileges as mail and cigarettes.

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-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.

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.

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.

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 assassina-

(Turn To Page Five)

SIRHAN

(From Page One)

tion 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 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.

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.

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.

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.