

Special LA Prober: Sirhan Acted Alone

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Los Angeles—No matter what some skeptics say, the special counsel appointed to review Robert Kennedy's assassination thinks that Sirhan Sirhan acted alone.

"I'm totally convinced from the scientific evidence, from eye witnesses, from circumstantial evidence, from inferences, as well as the reality of common sense, there was no second gunman," Thomas Kranz said in an interview.

The 37-year-old private attorney, appointed in August by then acting District Attorney John Howard, one of Sirhan's prosecutors, is preparing a report for District Attorney John Van De Kamp. Aside from concluding there was no second gunman, the report will recommend creation of an independent crime laboratory outside the Los Angeles Police Department and adoption of a policy for preserving potential evidence.

Kranz also will suggest that Van De Kamp's office investigate a mystery: How did the barrel of Sirhan's .22-cal. gun become severely coated with lead after it was originally test fired in 1968? Kranz speculates that someone may have tried to discredit the police

department or intelligence agencies by creating doubt about the case. Whatever the reason for the leaded barrel, Kranz does not think it bears on whether Sirhan acted alone when Kennedy and five others were shot in the Ambassador Hotel pantry on June 5, 1968.

In Kranz' view, a hearing before Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Robert Wenke answered the "second gun" question to all but diehard doubters, conspiracy lovers, publicity seekers or the uninformed. A panel of seven experts re-fired Sirhan's gun last Sept. 26, exhaustively examined bullet evidence introduced at Sirhan's trial and jointly responded on Oct. 5 that "there is no substantive or demonstrable evidence to indicate that more than one gun was used to fire any of the bullets examined."

Although some experts came close to positive identification, none found unequivocally that bullets taken from Kennedy and two other victims, Ira Goldstein and William Weisel, came from Sirhan's gun and "no other gun in the world." Their difficulty, the experts said, was a lack of sufficient individual characteristics—they scratches called striations—on the bullets to permit a positive identification.

In press conferences afterward, skeptics argued that since Sirhan's re-

volver had not been positively identified as the murder weapon the question of a second gunman in the pantry remained entirely open. They accused the press of misinterpreting what the experts had found and they again raised questions about how many shots had been fired, calling for further investigation.

Publicly ignored at the time, however, were other expert conclusions, which, in Kranz' opinion, reduce the probability of a second gunman to nonsense and nearly a "mathematical impossibility." The experts discovered that Sirhan's revolver had been damaged—either accidentally or in manufacture—in a way that left "gross imperfections" on test bullets fired from it. Damaged spots in the gun's muzzle marked bullets with a double furrow.

That "gross imperfection" was discovered on the Kennedy, Goldstein and Weisel bullets and on test bullets fired by the Police Department in 1968 and by the expert panel last fall. For a second assassin to have shot the senator, Kranz reasons, the unseen gunman would have had to have a weapon exactly like Sirhan's down to the damaged barrel.

In Kranz' view, the police did an "excellent job" in probing whether Sirhan might have been part of a con-

spiracy but "sloppy" scientific work, mistakes and poor judgment led to questions about the entire investigation.

Kranz is specifically critical of police department criminalist DeWayne Wolfer, who mismarked bullet evidence introduced at Sirhan's trial and who used a substitute for Sirhan's gun to conduct muzzle-distance tests. He also criticizes what he considers to be a lack of sufficient written reports showing what Wolfer did in evaluating physical evidence in the Kennedy case.

The "second gun" hearing before Judge Wenke produced testimony that a search of police files failed to disclose analyzed evidence reports on bullets taken from the five victims other than Kennedy. It also was reported that there were no reports on X-rays or spectrographic analysis of evidence bullets, both of which Wolfer testified he might have made.

Kranz plans to recommend in his final report that the police release a 10-volume summary of the Kennedy investigation with personal histories edited out. "It again takes no sense to keep these things private because all they do is undermine people's faith in law enforcement and public agencies," he said.