

Skeptics Refuse to Drop 2d Gun Theory in Robert Kennedy Case

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LOS ANGELES, Oct. 11—Despite the conclusion of a panel of firearms experts that the gun wrestled from the hands of Sirhan B. Sirhan was apparently the only weapon involved in the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, a few skeptics are refusing to abandon the so-called "second gun theory."

Among others, the attorney for Mr. Sirhan, the convicted assassin, has declared that he is reasonably satisfied that the bullets fired in the Ambassador Hotel pantry on June 5, 1968, probably came from his client's .22-caliber Iver-Johnson pistol.

The seven nationally known firearms examiners, who worked independently for nearly two weeks in a court-ordered investigation of the bullet evidence in the Sirhan case, said in their joint report issued Monday:

Some Doubts Remain

"There is no substantive or demonstrable evidence to indicate that more than one gun was used to fire any of the bullets examined."

Godfrey Isaac, Mr. Sirhan's attorney, said this week that his client was "naturally disappointed in the results" but he added: "I have no further intention of bringing up the question of the second gun in legal proceedings."

Other persons, however, including Paul Schrader, who was wounded in the shooting and who with CBS television requested the re-testing of evidence by experts, said that the report left unanswered the question of a second gun.

Mr. Schrader and Allard K. Lowenstein, the former New York Democratic Representative who has been a leading advocate of reopening the investigation, said this week that they believed the new inquiry resolved some of their doubts but both contend that the experts' findings were inconclusive.

They pointed out that although the scientists had found no evidence to suggest that a second gun had been fired they were unable to prove that all the bullets had been fired from the Sirhan gun. The lack of proof, said the panel, was a result of the inability of the Sirhan gun to produce "insufficient corresponding individual characteristics" on bullets necessary to make positive identification.

The experts attributed this "poor reproducibility" to "barrel fouling, copper alloy coating, impact damage and distortion, cylinder alignment, and possible loss of fine detail over intervening years."

Differences in Photographs

The experts agreed, however, that each of the bullets retrieved from victims "is the same with respect to caliber, weight, number and position of cannelures and copper alloy coating as caliber .22 Long Rifle bullets manufactured by Cascade Cartridges, Inc., and thus the same type of ammunition used by Mr. Sirhan.

This finding was considered important because a central argument of second gun theorists had been that a bullet taken from Senator Kennedy's neck and one removed from

William Weisel, another victim, appeared to have different markings.

The argument was based on photographs of bullets taken by William Harper, a Pasadena ballistics expert who made an independent study in 1970. Mr. Harper said that the Weisel bullet appeared to have two cannelures (concentric rings around a bullet's circumference) while the Kennedy bullet had only one, indicating a different type of ammunition than Mr. Sirhan used.

The same apparent discrepancy was pointed out by Herbert MacDonell, a Corning, N.Y., forensic scientist, in 1973. But the seven examiners found unanimously that both bullets had two cannelures.

Lowell Bradford, one of the seven court-appointed examiners, explained that the Harper-MacDonell conclusions may have been based on a black and white photograph, which he said could be unreliable, rather than on a microscopic comparison.

The new examination cleared up that mystery, but Mr. Schrader, Mr. Lowenstein and some others say there are remaining questions beyond the scope of the recent limited investigation.

Judge Robert A. Wenke of Los Angeles Superior Court, in ordering the retesting Aug. 14, refused to extend the inquiry to consideration of number of bullets and trajectories. Critics say the entire matter cannot die until every avenue of doubt is fully explored.

Thomas Krantz, the Deputy District Attorney specially ap-

pointed for the re-examination, of the year, the remaining "second gun" questions and also attempt to explore for a report other less popular conspiracy theories.