

'I Was Not Aware of Anything'

Sirhan Testifies He Shot RFK

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By Arthur Everett

LOS ANGELES, March 3 (AP)—Sirhan Bishara Sirhan took the witness stand at his murder trial today and quietly identified himself as the assassin of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. But he said that at the time of the shooting "I was not aware of anything."

"Did you on or about the fifth of June, 1968, shoot Sen. Kennedy?" asked defense attorney Grant Cooper as he began his examination of the young Jordanian Arab, who is on trial for his life.

"Yes, sir," replied Sirhan in an even tone.

Cooper then referred to the grand jury indictment that also charges Sirhan with the wounding of five bystanders in the Ambassador Hotel, the scene of Kennedy's slaying.

The defendant testified that he knew none of them, bore no malice against them and when he was asked if he was aware of shooting them he answered:

"I was not aware of anything."



Associated Press

See SIRHAN, A8, Col. 1

Sirhan's mother and her youngest son Munir leave court.



United Press International

Issa Naklileh (left), director of the Palestine Arab delegation to the United Nations, and Sarhee Nahas, onetime U.N. refugee worker in Palestine, wait with pipe-smoking

defense counsel Grant Cooper for the Sirhan trial to resume. Naklileh has been sitting at the defense table as an adviser. Nahas has testified for the defense.

SIRHAN, From A1

Cooper quoted from a page of the notebook found in Sirhan's home in which was written, "My determination is more the more to kill Sen. Robert F. Kennedy."

Q. Did you write that?

A. Yes, I did.

'Port Wine' Phrase

Cooper read a passage in which Sirhan had written "RFK must die," and asked, "Is that your handwriting?" Sirhan said it was.

"Does the phrase 'port wine' mean anything?" Cooper asked.

"Yes, sir," said Sirhan. "It's the name of a race horse."

The words port wine were written four times in the notebook on the same page where Sirhan wrote more than two dozen times in different phrasings that Kennedy must be assassinated.

Defendant Smiles

The jury of eight men and four women paid close attention as Sirhan spoke, his hands spread out in front of him on the rail of the witness chair.

Occasionally, the defendant smiled slightly and more than once began to answer before Cooper completed the question. He appeared tense but collected.

He followed his mother, Mary, to the stand. She testified he was exposed to childhood horrors that sent him into shaking fits.

"How long would he shake," she was asked.

"Two weeks," Mrs. Sirhan said.

Sirhan was the seventh defense witness in the nine-week-old trial.

Cooper began leading Sirhan through a recital of the horror and poverty that he experienced as a child in Jerusalem during Arab-Zionist warfare. The defense claims this is a key to Sirhan's emotional development and the state of his mind at the time of the Kennedy slaying.

Sirhan referred to what he called frequent bombings in the area of his home.

Cooper noted that these might be confused with aerial bombardment and began groping for another word.

Huddling for Heat

"Cannon sounds — how's

that?" Sirhan volunteered.

Sirhan told of huddling for heat around an open brazier in a bombed-out building where seven or eight other families lived.

"We had to rehabilitate the building. We had to cement it and whitewash it," he said.

The family got a ration of staples from United Nations headquarters and a can of kerosene each month for heating.

Starvation Pangs

"How cold does it get there?" Cooper asked.

"Pretty damn cold, sir," Sirhan replied.

"Watch your language, Sirhan," Cooper said.

Sirhan couldn't recall having starvation pangs, but "if there had been more we could have eaten more." People in the neighborhood died of starvation, he said.

Pro-Arab Attitude

Another factor cited by the defense was Sirhan's extreme pro-Arab attitude and his feeling that Sen. Kennedy favored the Israelis.

Cooper asked Sirhan to summarize conversations with his mother concerning their being forced out of a comfortable home in Jerusalem during 1947 warfare. He said of himself and his brothers and sisters: "We were told the Jews kicked us out of our home, the Zionists kicked us out of our home. We were frightened and terrorized out of our home."

Sirhan's mother sat forward on the edge of her chair in the second spectators' row during the testimony.

Came to U.S.

After he came with his family to the United States in 1957, Sirhan said: "From history books here I read that the West wanted to bring in the persecuted Jews of Germany and evict the indigenous Arabs from their homes."

Q. That's what you learned?

A. Yes, sir.

Sirhan was still testifying when the trial was recessed until Tuesday.

Mother's Testimony

Her testimony was intended to bolster a defense claim that Sirhan had a background of emotional and mental instability, much of it the residue of his childhood in war-torn Jerusalem.

In an emotional aside at

one point, the 4-foot-11 mother said to the jury of four women and eight men: "I tell you we are lucky in this country. I want you to know this. We are blessed to be in this country, after what we went through."

Sirhan listened quietly and at most times attentively as his mother testified in his behalf.

Speaks Clearly

Mrs. Sirhan, 56, wore a black suit with gold leaf trim. She spoke clearly, but quite rapidly at times.

"Oh, yes, we had money and property," Mrs. Sirhan said of her life before the 1947 Arab-

Zionist warfare. "My husband had a very good job with the English. He provided very well . . . It was a very nice place and we were very happy."

But the war forced the Sirhans to flee their home in the new city of Jerusalem in 1948 and take refuge in a partially wrecked, 900-year-old building in the old walled city.

"All our money gone," Mrs. Sirhan recalled. "All our furniture gone. We didn't know where to lay our heads. We didn't have beds, we didn't even have a blanket to put on my baby . . . we slept on the floor and that was made of tile."

Days Without Water

"It was drafty. It was dark. We used to go thirsty for many days before we could get a drink of water."

And, there were the atrocities of war, she recalled—explosions that blew victims to pieces, young men and women tortured and bloodied. After one such occurrence witnessed by the then 3-year-old defendant, Mrs. Sirhan said: "He took a blanket and covered his face with it . . . he stayed in bed two days. For two weeks he doesn't want to take his little brother from near the house."

Sirhan fits of trembling after seeing blood, his mother said, and shook for two weeks after seeing a neighbor's body against a fence.

Saw Brother's Body

He was the first to see the body of a brother, killed by a truck while running from a shooting, and every so often he would cry and say, "Mama, when does he come back and

play with me?"

"He became fearful of the Zionists?" his mother was asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Sirhan replied.

On cross-examination, the State sought to bring out that any anti-Jewish sentiments Sirhan developed were the result of prejudices he drew from others or things he read.

As for the atrocities Mrs. Sirhan described, the State suggested that little effort was made to spare Sirhan the knowledge or sight of them.