

Police Told to Disclose Summary of RFK Case

By DAVID FREED, Times Staff Writer

Seventeen years after it investigated the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, the Los Angeles Police Department was directed Tuesday to make public its confidential 1,500-page summary of the case, but not before editing from it evidence still deemed "sensitive."

In unanimously ordering disclosure of the summary, the Los Angeles Police Commission turned down requests from a handful of scholars who came from as far away as Massachusetts requesting access to all of the department's investigative case file on Kennedy's assassination.

Few Made Public

The file, a massive collection of more than 50,000 documents and 1,700 photos, is stored in five cabinets at the Police Department's Parker Center headquarters. Only a few of the reports have ever been made public.

Commissioners said they fear that releasing the complete file could threaten the privacy of some people involved in the case and could possibly violate confidences established between informants and detectives who investigated Kennedy's death in June, 1968, at the Ambassador Hotel.

Commissioners also expressed concern that releasing such items as autopsy photographs of Kennedy's body would serve no public good.

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"This board and this (police) department have shown a commitment to open government and to recognizing the public's right and need to know," said Stephen D. Yslas, commission president. "The board is also cognizant of a commitment to the protection of individuals' rights to privacy."

The commission established a subcommittee to set standards by which sensitive parts would be removed from the summary before it is released. No deadline was set, but it is expected to be months before the summary report is made public.

While dismissing requests for the file's complete disclosure, the commission indicated a willingness to consider turning the main files over to a university archives, provided that the documents could be purged of sensitive information. The commission, however,

made no formal pledge to do so.

Police Chief Daryl F. Gates supported the commission's decision, saying he had hoped "at some date" in the distant future to "simply ship off" the files to national archives.

'People Would Be Harmed'

"I don't know that that time has arrived," Gates said. "There are still people who are living that I think would be harmed, seriously harmed, because their privacy would be invaded. And I think that the Police Department would be harmed in terms of those people who came to us knowing that we would keep faith with their confidentiality only to find that we were no longer doing that."

The decision to make public only the summary of the Police Department's file drew mixed reviews from the 10 historians, professors and others who testified before the commission requesting complete disclosure.

"At least it's a start," said Paul Schrade, a former Kennedy campaign official who was wounded in the barrage of bullets fired by Sirhan Sirhan in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel.

Gregory Stone, a political scientist from the University of Wisconsin who is studying Kennedy's background, was less satisfied.

"In complex matters of this kind—matters of supreme national importance relating to recent history and the public life of our country—the historical needs and the evidentiary needs simply cannot be addressed by the release of . . . minute materials from the entire body of evidence," Stone told the commission.

Other government agencies, including the FBI and the Los Angeles County district attorney's office, recently have begun making public their own documents and evidence relating to Kennedy's death.