

A215

lbylwyyf

Sirhan Bjt 470

By ARTHUR EVERETT

Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES AP —After nine months in a windowless cell, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan will get another glimpse at the outside world as he is transferred to special prison quarters.

The same jury that convicted Sirhan last Thursday of first-degree murder in the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy is to decide this week whether the penalty should be death or life in prison. Either way, the 25-year-old Arab will have, at least temporarily, a look at the outside world.

Sirhan spent Saturday, as he has every weekend for nine months, in a windowless 6-by-8-foot cell on the 17th floor of the Los Angeles Hall of Justice.

When he was overpowered after shooting Kennedy last June 5, Sirhan's left index finger was broken and an ankle sprained. He was held initially in the Los Angeles County central jail hospital.

On July 7, Sirhan was transferred to the Hall of Justice. It was during that one-mile trip that the 5-foot-4 defendant caught his last glimpse of the world outside.

During more than 14 weeks of trial, Sirhan has been brought by elevator from his artificially illuminated cell to an eight-floor courtroom whose windows are covered with steel, and into which no daylight ever creeps.

Because of the lack of sunlight, Sirhan's natural olive complexion gradually took on a pale, jaundiced hue during his confinement.

Waiting for Sirhan in the event the jury decrees life imprisonment is a tightly guarded isolation complex at the California Medical Facility, a state prison at Vacaville, about 390 miles north of Los Angeles, near Sacramento.

There, heavy duty screens have been installed to segregate three cells from those of other prisoners. Sirhan will live in solitary confinement in one of them, a second adjoining cell will be used as a shower room, and the third cell in the complex will serve as a visiting room when occasion warrants.

The defendant should be installed in his permanent prison quarters within two weeks of sentencing, providing the penalty is life imprisonment, said Philip D. Guthrie, information officer for the State Department of Corrections.

Guthrie said more than 200 persons have written from all over the nation to protest the special facilities for Kennedy's assassin.

"They have the impression it's some kind of a luxury deal," Guthrie added. "The man in this segregation unit will be under far more restrictive control than any other prisoner there. It is far from preferential treatment."

In the event Sirhan is sentenced to the gas chamber, Guthrie said the legislature has been asked to authorize his transfer from San Quentin to Vacaville while he awaits execution.

"If the bill fails," Guthrie declared, "it will be necessary to set up special protective quarters at San Quentin."

There are 81 prisoners in San Quentin death cells, Guthrie said, and even the present isolated facilities are not deemed sufficient to insure Sirhan's safety.

In either event, Sirhan will get his first breath of fresh air during his transfer from Los Angeles.

And sunlight will again become a permanent part of his life if he goes to Vacaville.

"There are two barred windows," Guthrie said of the cell intended for Sirhan. "One overlooks a parking lot. The other gives a view of open fields."

GB-RP1-9pes April 19