

SF Examiner

Kennedy case: Still the doubt

In the killing of John Kennedy there was a bullet which, if official explanations are believed, flew in a manner that defied all known laws of physics, completing its journey in miraculously mint condition.

In the killing of Robert Kennedy, if official explanations are believed, there was one gun which discharged disparate bullets, producing powder burns at a remarkable distance.

I don't believe in going all hysterical about these gruesome matters, but it does seem that effort is in order to uncover and disclose all the facts. The confusion has to be resolved.



DICK NOLAN

In a sense, the Robert Kennedy murder is more especially our concern, because he was killed in Los Angeles, and it's the efficiency and probity of our state and local officials which must be checked.

The weapon taken from Sirhan Sirhan, the convicted assassin of Robert Kennedy, was an Iver-Johnson .22 caliber revolver, serial number H53725.

The eight-shot revolver had eight expended shell casings in the cylinder. The police report accounted for eight bullets, seven which were recovered.

According to the report, one bullet entered Kennedy's head just behind the right ear. Another struck him in the right shoulder. Another entered his back, passed through his body, then through ceiling tile, and then "was lost somewhere in the ceiling interspace."

Five bystanders were wounded by the remaining five bullets.

Where the record gets murky is in tying the weapon, Iver-Johnson H53725, to the recovered bullets. In a highly scientific age, the existence of these doubts ought to be just plainly ridiculous. Yet they remain, and the authorities show a stubborn reluct-

ance to try to resolve them.

Post-trial testimony of several expert witnesses suggests, among other things, that one of the Kennedy bullets and one that wounded bystander William Weisel could not have been fired from the same weapon.

Questioning criminalists have remarked on difference in rifling marks, on differences in grooves which vary as between bullets produced by one factory when compared with the product of another.

One thing they seem to agree upon is that further tests are required if any final answer is to be given to an obviously critical question.

The dubious experts have included Lowzll Bradford, former head of the Santa Clara District Attorney's crime laboratory, and Professor Herbert L. MacDonnell, a college instructor from Corning, New York.

What remains to be proved, astonishingly enough, is that any of the recovered bullets actually came from the Sirhan revolver, or if some of them did, or if all of them did.

In this connection we have some testimony on the record that a potentially valuable test in this important case was omitted entirely. It's called "neutron activation analysis," and it can determine the slightest differences in the chemical composition of, in this case, tiny scrapings from bullets.

Dr. Thomas Noguchi, the Los Angeles coroner, says he wanted a neutron activation analysis made of the bullets recovered, as the simplest way of making certain that all were the same.

Doctor Noguchi got in touch with Dr. Vincent P. Guinn of the chemistry department at the Irvine campus of the University of California. He confirmed Noguchi's opinion that the test ought to be carried out. Their talk took place two days after the assassination.

Noguchi then asked DeWayne Wolfer, the Los Angeles police expert who eventually prepared the technical side of the case against Sirhan.

"He (Wolfer) advised me that a test like this could result in variances so that the metallic analysis of even one bullet from nose to shell would be different. So he advised me not to have the test done. I took his advice."

Doctor Guinn has since reiterated his opinion that the delicate neutron activation analysis ought to be made, even now.

In summary of all this, we have more questions than answers, and some apparent official reluctance to look. It won't do. It won't do at all.