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LOS ANGELES TAKE 2 Kennedy NL A027 add: condemned.

The assailant, apparently standing on a box or a can for better vantage, swiftly pumped all eight shots of his revolver at Kennedy.

None of the other wounded was hurt as critically as the senator.

Those who were in the corridor had differing accounts of the gunman's words.

Some said he cried as he shot: "I can explain. Let me explain."

Others told of hearing him shout: "I did it for my country."

The deed sent a wave of shock through the world's capitals, and brought to a halt amid confusion and dismay the campaign for the White House.

Kennedy was hit three times, near the right ear, in the shoulder and the forehead.

It was the slug that hit near his ear which plunged into Kennedy's brain.

Kennedy was first taken to Los Angeles Central Receiving Hospital. The doctor who treated him there, Victor Baz, said the senator "was practically dead" when he arrived.

He was transferred to Good Samaritan Hospital and there, the team of six surgeons began operating at 3:12 a.m., PDT.

When their work was done, he was pronounced in "extremely critical condition."

All but a fragment of the bullet was removed from his brain, Mankiewicz said. The surgery was said to have been successful in that its primary goal, removal of most of the slug, was accomplished.

Mankiewicz said a second bullet, considered to have inflicted less serious injury, remained in the back of Kennedy's neck.

He said vital signs such as pulse and breathing were in good order, but there "may have been some impairment of the blood supply to the center of the brain."

Mankiewicz said that center controls the pulse, blood pressure and tracking of the eyes, but not the process of thinking.

The scene of turmoil, tears and hysteria which followed the shooting was televised live by cameras which had just carried Kennedy's victory talk on the California race.

Kennedy and his assailant were out of sight of the television cameras.

Across town, Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy, D-Minn., the man Kennedy defeated in the California contest, led his supporters in silent prayer after the shooting.

Wednesday, McCarthy went to the hospital.

The shock of the shooting quickly turned the roomful of some 2,000 election night celebrators into a scene of chaos.

With startling speed, the gunman fired all the eight shots in his pistol, hitting Kennedy and bystanders.

Kennedy fell to the floor. Blood gushed from his head.

His wife, Ethel, had been at his side during the victory pronouncement. Walking from the microphone, Kennedy had looked around, as if searching for her.

The shots brought pandemonium. There were shrieks of "God, God, not again." There were curses, too.

"Get a doctor," someone shouted. "Please get a doctor."

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