

Exclusive: Trail of Assassin's Gun

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NEAR

DEATH;

SUSPECT

IDENTIFIED



Sen. Robert F. Kennedy lies gravely wounded on floor at Ambassador Hotel shortly after shooting.—(AP) Copyright, Los Angeles Times

Next Hours Crucial, Say His Medics

Compiled from AP and UPI

LOS ANGELES — Robert F. Kennedy fought for his life today after being shot down at point blank range by a young man who mixed in with an exultant hotel party crowd celebrating the senator's victory in the California presidential primary.

The team of six surgeons said his condition was "extremely critical" and that the next 12 to 36 hours would be decisive.

They said it would be several days before determination can be made whether the wound — one of two — would affect Kennedy's eyesight, his speech and his consciousness.

Kennedy "might not make it," according to one of the three surgeons who operated on him following the



SHOOTING SUSPECT SIRHAN SIRHAN
Police traced the gun to his brother.—(AP)

assassination attempt.

Dr. Henry Cuneo said that even if Kennedy lives, he might suffer extensive brain damage.

Cuneo gave his opinion to Dr. Lawrence Pool, director and professor of neurosurgery at Columbia - Presbyterian medical center who reported it on a newscast.

Cuneo told Pool that several major arteries were severed and Kennedy's brain suffered extensive loss of blood and oxygen as well as several blood clots.

Cuneo was quoted as saying Kennedy also suffered injuries to the spinal cord.

In summation, Cuneo informed Pool that it was unlikely the New York senator "will be able to recover fully . . . and makes it doubtful that he could live."

Bystanders grabbed the assassin and wrested a pistol from him at the scene.

The suspect was identified by Los Angeles Mayor Sam Yorty as Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, 24, of nearby Pasadena.

Yorty said the man had been identified by his brother Munir (Joe) Sirhan. The brothers recently came to the United States from Jerusalem, Yorty said. He said the brother was not a suspect but was believed to have owned the weapon involved in the shooting.

Yorty said that Sirhan had four \$100 bills in his possession and a newspaper clipping critical of Kennedy.

Yorty called a special news conference to announce the identification. He said Sirhan was born in the former Jordanian part of Jerusalem.

Kennedy had made several campaign appearances recently before Hebrew congregations in California. On each occasion, he called for Arab recognition of Israel and an end to Jordanian aggression against the Jewish state.

Today was the first anniversary of the start of the Mideast war.

Authorities arraigned the suspect on six counts of assault with intent to commit murder.

Five other persons were wounded.

The presidential contender was struck down about 4½ years after his brother, President John F. Kenne-

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dy, was slain in Dallas by a bullet in the head fired by a hidden rifleman.

The slender, dark-haired young man charged with the shooting sat stonily silent for hours under police questioning, giving only a lone "yes" to one question.

But finally, officers said, he opened up and talked volubly—but not about himself or the shooting.

He was described as "very cool, very calm, very stable and quite lucid" and apparently well educated.

But whenever asked about the shooting, "he just sat there."

He was arraigned in secret as John Doe and bail was set at \$250,000.

All but a fragment of the bullet was removed from the New York senator's brain, an aide said, but a second and less serious bullet remained in the back of his neck.

For Kennedy, said press secretary Frank Mankiewicz, the next 24 to 36 hours are critical.

He said vital signs—pulse and breathing—are in good order but there "may have been some impairment of the blood supply to the center of the brain. The center, he said, controls pulse, blood pressure and tracking of the eyes—but not the thinking processes.

Six neurosurgeons were fighting to save Kennedy's life.

Kennedy had just accepted the cheers of about 2,000 supporters for his victory in California's Democratic presidential preferential primary.

Four other men and a woman were wounded in the gun-attack, which took place in a kitchen corridor of the hotel.

One witness said the shots came so close together that he could hardly believe they were fired from one gun. A reporter heard the shots from an adjoining room and said they sounded almost like a brief burst of machine-gun fire.

Reddin declined to say

where the gunman was held, but added he is under 24-hour guard.

Here is what happened:

The gunman appeared in the kitchen area behind the bandstand of the Embassy Room, where Kennedy backers, including movie stars and students, were listening to their candidate's light-hearted victory speech. The gunman carried papers, which he spread out on a stainless steel table. One waiter described them as sketches.

The backstage area was crowded with waiters, press and others, and the man's presence caused little notice.

Kennedy finished his speech and began working his way off the platform and into the

kitchen, followed by close associates and members of his family. His wife, Ethel, had been at his side during the

speech, but she became enveloped in the crowd. Kennedy gazed around as if searching for her.

At that moment the gunman pushed through the throng, reached his arm around others in front of him and shot the senator.

Roosevelt Grier, beefy tackle for the Los Angeles Rams, grabbed the man's arm. Joe LaHive, a local Kennedy campaigner, wrested the gun away. Grier and Olympic decathlon champion Rafer Johnson lifted the assailant and spread him on a steel kitchen table.

"Nobody hurt this man!" one of the athletes shouted. "We want to take him alive!"

A reporter was in the adjoining press room. He said, "I rushed into the kitchen to a scene of horror. Women were screaming, 'Oh, no!' 'God, God, not again!'"

Kennedy was stretched on the floor, his face covered with blood. "Give him room! Step back!" someone yelled.

Kennedy seemed to hear nothing. His face was blank, his eyes starring sightlessly.

Grier, Johnson and two or three others held the gunman on the table 10 feet away. Screams began to be heard in the ballroom as news of the shooting spread to the campaigners, who had been cheering their candidate two minutes before.

"Let me explain!" the gunman shouted. "I can explain."

A priest handed Kennedy a rosary, and he clutched it in his hand, but the priest was jostled aside.

Kennedy was given emergency treatment by a doctor summoned from the ballroom. Then he was wheeled on a stretcher to the hotel service elevator and put into an ambulance.

He was treated at Central Receiving Hospital, where the Rev. Thomas Peacha administered last rites of the Roman Catholic Church. Kennedy was

then taken a few blocks to Good Samaritan Hospital, where he entered the intensive care unit.

The gunman, apparently unharmed, was rushed through the Ambassador lobby by police 10 minutes after the shooting. By this time the crowd knew that Kennedy had been shot.

"Kill him! Lynch him!" onlookers shouted. They milled forward to get at the man, but

the police ran him down the stairs next to the famed Coconut Grove night club and got him to the central jail.

Chief Reddin said there was only one suspect in the case, the man in custody.

The gunman carried no identification, Reddin said, adding that "We made a skin search of him, checking that he had nothing on him to take his life. We have advised him of his rights. He doesn't want a lawyer now."

"He sits there and says nothing," Reddin said.

There were scraps of paper in the man's pockets, Reddin said, but he declined to identify them.

President Johnson was notified of the shooting. He issued the statement from the White House:

"There are no words equal to the horror of this tragedy.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with Sen. Kennedy, his family, and the other victims.

"All America prays for his recovery.

"We also pray that divisiveness and violence can be driven from the hearts of men everywhere."

Kennedy's opponent for the Democratic nomination, Sen. Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, had retired to his Beverly Hilton Hotel room. He was

awakened, and he went to his hotel ballroom to ask his supporters to pray for the life of Senator Kennedy.

Kennedy's brother, Sen. Ted Kennedy of Mass., was reported to have arrived at Los Angeles International Airport and been flown by helicopter to Good Samaritan Hospital.

In Colorado Springs, Colo., Vice President Hubert Humphrey said "Our hopes and prayers are with Senator Kennedy and those others who have been the victims of this dreadful act of violence. It is a shocking and terrible thing that has happened. Our hearts go out to Mrs. Kennedy and the children and the families of the other wounded."

The senator was a half step ahead of his wife, Ethel, when the shooting occurred.

Ethel, who is expecting their 11th child, was not hurt. She bent over her husband as he lay bleeding from the wound near his right ear and another in his shoulder, whispering to him and trying to console him just as Jacqueline Kennedy had bent over her husband in a Dallas convertible in 1963.

"He was walking through the kitchen toward a corridor going to the freight elevator," said Norbert Schlei, a prominent Los Angeles Democrat who was 10 feet behind the senator.

"He stopped to shake hands with the kitchen help and I heard a sound . . . clap, clap, clap, clap. It didn't sound at all like gunfire.

"It sounded like a cap pistol

or someone popping a paper sack. There were four people lying on the floor after the shots . . . there was a tremendous crush of people.

"I ran out and shouted for a doctor and about three of them came in.

"Sen. Kennedy lay on the floor and his face was tense and white but he seemed conscious. I didn't hear him say anything."

After the shooting a crowd of nearly 500 persons knelt in prayer around the fountain in the main lobby of the hotel.

John Chambers, a UPI correspondent at Kennedy headquarters, reported when Kennedy walked off the podium after making a victory statement "there was sudden pandemonium."

"A girl rushed to the front of the podium and said 'he's been shot'," Chambers reported. "They've shot Kennedy."

Kennedy's brother-in-law Stephen Smith rushed to the

podium and shouted "Is there a doctor in the house? Is there a doctor in the house? A doctor is needed urgently!"

Gabor Kadar, who said he was waiting at the rear exit to the room to shake hands with the senator, heard four or five shots and saw Kennedy and a woman fall to the floor.

"Sen. Kennedy was holding the right side of his chest and there was blood on his head," Kadar said.

Warren Wilson, a reporter for the Estinghouse Broadcasting Co., reported that Kennedy was conscious and talking after the shooting.

Joe La Hive, a member of Kennedy's headquarters staff in Los Angeles, told newsmen he and another Kennedy campaign aide seized the gunman.

"We both looked at Bobby and then we both grabbed the gunman and threw him up on a table. The guy grabbed his gun and handed it to Rafer Johnson and we turned the gun over to the police," La Hive said.

Martin Petruski, a waiter at the Ambassador Hotel, said he had just finished shaking hands with Kennedy and "all of a sudden this fellow jumped out and he started to fire. It was so fast. And all of a sudden somebody was yelling, grab him! Grab him!"

"Then the senator slid down to his knees.

"His eyes were open when he started to go down.

"His wife came over and she asked the photographers to please stop taking pictures.



. . . after a victory speech only moments before.—(AP)

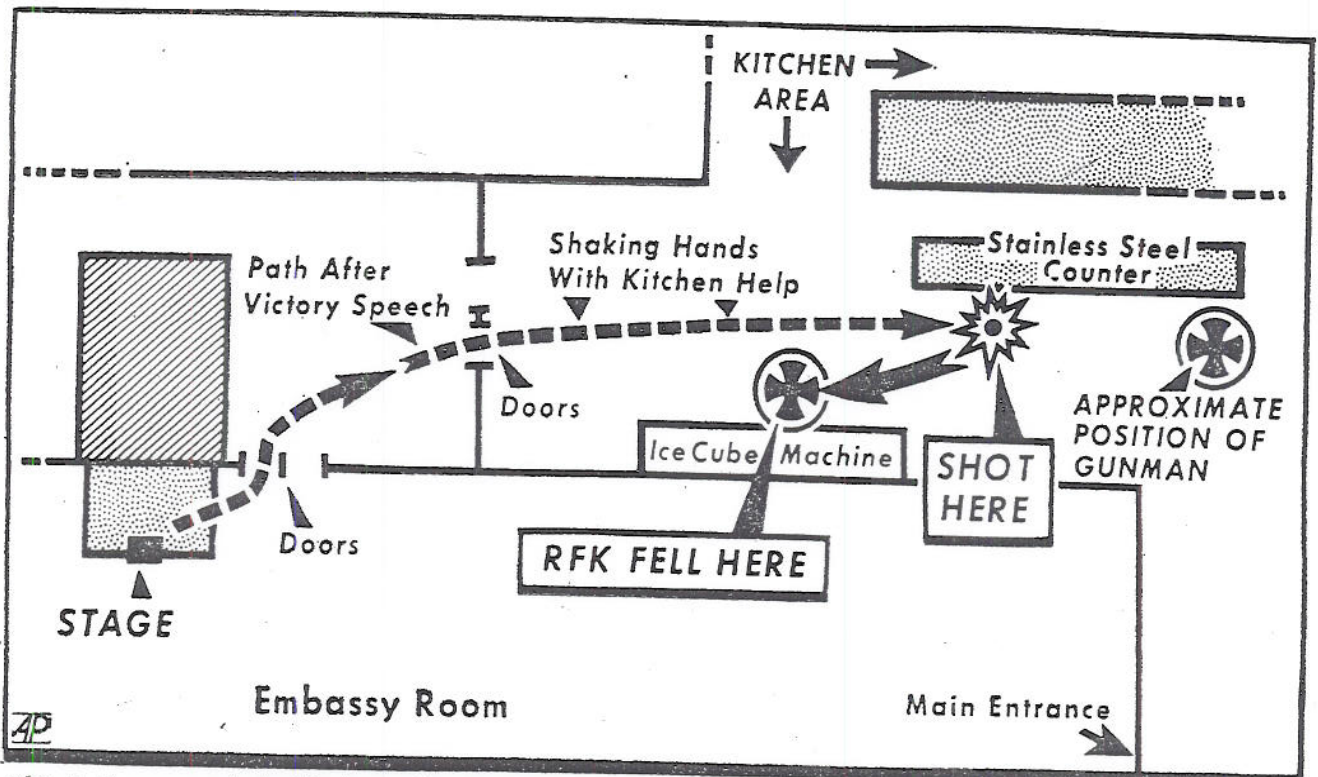
She wasn't crying or anything."

Astronaut John Glenn, who has been campaigning with Kennedy, was one of those who stood in grief-stricken silence in a hospital corridor. Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts flew to Los Angeles in an Air Force plane from San Francisco and hurried to the hospital to be with his brother.

Humphrey and McCarthy suspended their campaign activities leading up the Chicago convention where the three were prepared to battle for the Democratic nomination for the presidency.

In Washington, Attorney General Ramsey Clark said there was "no evidence of a conspiracy at this moment" in the shooting of Kennedy.

Clark earlier had ordered an FBI investigation. His voice breaking with emotion, Clark recalled how he had worked with Kennedy when he was attorney general.



This is the area of the Ambassador Hotel where Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was shot early today.—(AP)