

Sirhan Is Just Another Prisoner Except for Tight Security Rules

He Reads, Paces Caged Area and Smokes, but Mostly He Awaits Date to Enter Plea

LOS ANGELES, July 14 (AP)—A 45-second ring of the electric gongs on the corridor walls awakens Prisoner No. 718486 at 6:30 A.M.

A small figure, clad in underwear, rises from a narrow bunk hinged to the concrete wall.

Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, the 24-year-old Jordanian charged with assassinating Senator Robert F. Kennedy, starts another day.

He is confined with a guard in a 6-by-8-foot windowless cell on the 13th floor of the Civic Center's smog-grimed, 15-story Hall of Justice.

He wears standard Los Angeles County jail garb—blue denim pants and blue cotton shirt stenciled "L.A. Co. Jail." His name and booking number are on a plastic band riveted around his left wrist.

He reads newspapers he buys or books he orders from the jail library.

He paces a larger caged area outside his cell 20 minutes morning and afternoon.

He eats candy bars, smokes cigars, hopes for visitors and, mostly, just waits to be taken to an improvised 13th floor courtroom July 19 to plead guilty or not guilty.

'Reader and Loner'

His cell furnishings are standard—a toilet, coverless because a set could be ripped off and used as a weapon; a wash basin and a round metal mirror attached to the wall.

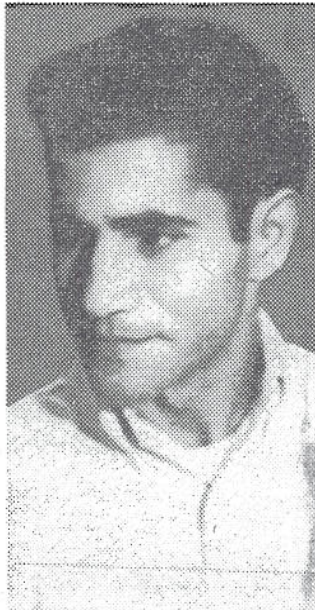
Sirhan's attorney, Russell E. Parsons, calls him "a reader and a loner, a man who could spend a lot of his life alone."

Despite the capacity 1,834 prisoners around him on the top five floors—accused robbers, burglars, forgers, rapists, and so forth—Sirhan is largely alone.

His cell is in an isolated corridor, its other cells emptied of inmates. On his own floor, but beyond thick walls, are separate sections of homosexuals and rules-breakers denied such privileges as mail and cigarettes.

The guard in his cell is one of 18 husky deputies who tower over the swarthy, bushy-haired young man who stands 5 feet 3 inches and weighs 110 pounds.

From jail store-carts the deputies buy the candy, cigars and paperbacks Sirhan requests, paying for them from the \$6 weekly personal funds allowed each prisoner. His reading ranges from the occult to light fiction.



Associated Press
Sirhan B. Sirhan

Picked for proved dependability and stability, the guards watch Sirhan six at a time in eight-hour shifts—one in the cell, one in the exercise area, four in the corridor.

They are forbidden to talk with him unnecessarily, as with any prisoner.

A sheriff's aide said: "If Sirhan asks what time it is, the guard will tell him. But if he asks, 'What do you think of my attorney?' the guard may say, 'I don't know him' or if he asks, 'What do you think of this country sending planes to Israel?' the guard will say, 'I don't know much about it.'"

Security around the Hall of Justice has been tightened. A newly assigned deputy stands outside the jail elevator at the ground floor. Additional officers patrol the grounds.

The reason for these measures was explained by the sheriff's aide, who said, "We don't want another Dallas," a reference to Jack Ruby's slaying of Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin of President Kennedy.

Sirhan's food matches the menu of the other inmates but is prepared separately—a precaution, an aide says, against poisoning.

The sheriff's department has two main preoccupations with Sirhan—to see that he is brought to trial and, within security limits, to treat him no differently from any other prisoner.

Peter John Pitchess, 56, Los Angeles County sheriff, "We learned a lot of things from the Oswald case."

The security measures probably set a record for any prisoner in Los Angeles County history, he acknowledged.

The cost was put by an aide at "\$10.48 per day, the cost of housing any county jail prisoner." But Sirhan's guards are diverted from regular duties.

Of Sirhan, Mr. Pitchess said. "He has given us no bad time particularly. He has attempted to communicate with our deputies. They respond primarily with 'yes' or 'no.'"

"We continue to receive a large number of threats against this man's life and against ourselves for trying so hard to keep him alive. There have been threats by phone and mail against me, my home and my family."

Sirhan receives "a fair volume of mail, at least 100 letters so far." These are machine-copied and the copies are given to Sirhan's attorney.

An aide to the attorney, Mr. Parsons said, "We give him the ones that are favorable. Some are pretty vicious."

Mr. Parsons, who is 69, said that Sirhan's attitude was "similar to that of most men in jail."

"He looks about as comfortable as most men in jail," he said. "He's cooperating with me and seems to be making the best of it. He's under a strain."

Sirhan's brother Adel, 29, has visited the prisoner several times. His mother has visited twice. But family members get no farther than a window of heavy glass. On built-in metal stools Sirhan sits on one side, his mother or brother on the other in the corridor. They talk over hand telephones.