Exclusive: Trail of Assassin's Gun

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NEAR
DEATH;
SUSPECT
IDENTIFIED
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
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 .45-caliber man who was 10 feet behind the speech, but she became en-

veloped in the crowd. Kennedy seemed to hear the sound of a clock at 12:30. His wife, Ethel, had been at his side during the speeches, and she was milled around as if searching for her.

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

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fire, 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 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 backstand 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 a papers, which he spread out on a stainless steel table. One waiter described them as sketches.

The backslap area was crowded with waiters, press and others, and the man's presence went little noticed.

Kennedy finished his speech and began working his way off the platform and into the kitchen, followed by close as-

sociates and members of his family. His wife, Ethel, had been at his side during the speech, but she became en-

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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 'be'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 Edmonton 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 Petrucki, 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."

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 to 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.

... after a victory speech only moments before.—(AP)
This is the area of the Ambassador Hotel where Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was shot early today.—(AP)