

Sirhan Tells Court He Killed Kennedy

By DOUGLAS ROBINSON

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LOS ANGELES, March 3—Sirhan B. Sirhan took the stand in his own defense today and acknowledged that he killed Senator Robert F. Kennedy at the Ambassador Hotel last spring.

"You are charged with murder," said Grant B. Cooper, the chief defense lawyer after Sirhan took his place in the witness box. "It is alleged you killed Robert Francis Kennedy, a human being, on or about June 5." Then, after a slight pause, he asked: "Did you?"

"Yes, sir," the defendant answered.

Sirhan appeared nervous, but not as tense as he has been during some angry moments in the courtroom, as Mr. Cooper

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asked him about the Kennedy shooting and the wounding of five other persons in a crowded pantry following the celebration of the Senator's Presidential primary victory in California.

Mr. Cooper asked in turn whether Sirhan remembered shooting any of the victims beside Mr. Kennedy. To each name, the defendant said he could not remember. Asked if he bore any of them any ill will, he replied, no, sir.

Sirhan took the stand at 3:06 P.M. He clenched his right fist as he took the oath. Two security men stood near the witness box in a doorway leading to the judge's chambers.

With Sirhan watching over his shoulder nervously, Mr. Cooper began to read in a slow, clear voice from a page in the defendant's notebook, a page that called over and over again for the death of Mr. Kennedy. For almost 10 minutes, he read the entry to a hushed, mesmerized courtroom.

"Did you write this?" Mr. Cooper asked at one point. "Yes, sir, I did," came the prompt answer.

Then, Mr. Cooper began to lead him back to his childhood in Jerusalem, where, as his mother testified earlier in the day, he witnessed a number of grisly incidents that his mother said had left him "shaken and afraid."

Asked what he remembered, Sirhan said he recalled "quite vividly many things." He said he remembered seeing a dismembered English soldier and

witnessing a brother's death.

He told the court that once, as a child, he had been playing with other children at the base of the high wall that surrounds the Old City. One of the Arab guards let the youngsters climb to the top of the wall and look through his binoculars. He said he recalled the soldier peering at the Jewish side of the city and saying, "That's our land out there, our land."

"I didn't understand what he meant," Sirhan said, intensely. "But now I understand."

A few minutes later, as Sirhan was recounting more about the bombings in Jerusalem, court was adjourned for the day. The defendant will resume his place on the stand tomorrow.

Earlier today, Mrs. Mary Sirhan, speaking in a soft voice that underscored the events she described, told the court that her son had seen a number of killings and explosions in the tempestuous late 1940's during fighting and terrorism between Arabs and Zionists in Jerusalem.

"Once when he came across the body of a neighbor hanging on the barbed wire on the street in front of our home, he paled, his lips were dry and his whole body trembled," she said.

"It took some time before he could even stand and for two weeks he didn't go far from home."

As his mother testified in a dignified, almost regal manner, Sirhan B. Sirhan sat morosely at the defense table, gazing at his hands or reading legal documents. He seldom conferred with his attorneys and only rarely looked up at his 56-year-old mother.

Apology for Friday

There was no repetition of the defendant's dramatic action last Friday when he demanded to change his plea to guilty, asked to discharge his counsel and requested his execution for the murder of the Senator at the Ambassador Hotel last June 5. All the demands were denied by the court.

Following the mid-morning recess today, while the jury was out of the courtroom, Grant B. Cooper, chief defense attorney, offered his client's apologies to Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker for the "emotional outburst" on Friday and said that Sirhan had decided to "have his counsel remain."

"I don't really feel that any great apologies are due and I understand the circumstances," Judge Walker replied. "I wasn't mad; I was just trying to be emphatic."

During the Friday upheaval, Judge Walker threatened to put the defendant in irons and a face mask that would prevent him from talking if he continued to interrupt the proceedings.

Over the weekend, Sirhan was visited by the chief defense

counsel, Dr. Bernard Diamond, of the University of California at Berkeley, and by Issa Nakleh, director of the Palestine Arab Delegation, an unofficial observer group at the United Nations.

Both men were reported to have persuaded Sirhan to trust his attorneys. This morning, at the outset of the session, Mr. Nakleh was sitting at the defense table and Mr. Cooper told the court that the Palestinian would be there all week in an advisory capacity.

Although Sirhan has pleaded not guilty, his attorneys have admitted that the slight, dark-haired Jordanian immigrant fatally wounded Senator Kennedy. To save Sirhan from the gas chamber the attorneys are relying on proving that the defendant was not capable of giving rational or mature consideration to his act.

No Not Guilty Verdict

Under state law, if the defense can prove that the defendant acted under "diminished capability," the jury must find him guilty of a lesser crime than first degree murder. The jury cannot return a not guilty verdict, since Sirhan has admitted the killing.

In her testimony, Mrs. Sirhan sought to show that violent traumas in her son's boyhood were the rule rather than the exception. She described Sirhan's shock at seeing dismembered bodies and said that shooting and the sounds of terrorist bombs had constantly been heard in Jerusalem.

"He saw blood all the time," she recounted, "and whenever he saw it he shook and trembled."

Mrs. Sirhan said that once a "Zionist truck drove through our street carrying a number of young Arab girls whose breasts had been slashed."

"I was out walking with Sirhan, who was about 4 years old at the time, and our attention was drawn to the truck by the sound of Zionist soldiers aboard it who were clapping and shouting 'This is what we'll do to you.'"

"Look at the blood, Mama, look at the blood," Sirhan said to me," Mrs. Sirhan testified. "And he began to shake all over."

Mrs. Sirhan, who was rigidly composed during most of her appearance on the witness stand, said the incidents of violence had occurred both when the family lived comfortably in Jerusalem's New City and later when they become impoverished refugees in the Old City. It was, she said, the continual fighting that led the family to migrate to the United States in 1956.

Brother's Death Recalled

One of the Sirhan sons, the mother said, was run over and killed by a vehicle near the barbed wire in front of her

home. The boy, named Munir, was running from a shooting. Mrs. Sirhan went on, and young Sirhan saw his brother lying on the street covered with blood.

"They used to play together," Mrs. Sirhan said quietly. "When I had another son, I named him Munir."

Only once did Mrs. Sirhan become emotional during almost two hours on the stand. This came when she was describing the lack of sanitary toilet facilities and clean drinking water while the family was living as refugees.

"When we came to this country," she said, "my daughter flushed and flushed the toilet, saying God bless America."

Then, her voice rising, Mrs. Sirhan looked at the jury and said, "Everyone is blessed in this country. I want you to believe it." A defense attorney, Russell E. Parsons, interrupted at this point and gently led her back to the line of questioning.

Mrs. Sirhan was followed on the stand by her 30-year-old son, Adel, who testified as to Sirhan's behavior before and after a head injury that he sustained in 1966 when he fell from a horse while working as an exercise boy at a ranch in Corona, Calif.

Before the injury, Adel said, his brother was "more ambi-

tious" and used to "go out and look for work more often." Following the injury, he went on, Sirhan "stayed in his room and read all the time." Some of the time, he testified, his brother talked to himself.

During the Israeli-Arab war in 1967, Adel said, the whole family would watch the news on television. Sirhan, he said, would get furious and swear at the set. "How can you sit there and watch these things that are happening to our people?" Adel said his brother once shouted at the family.



Associated Press

Mrs. Mary Sirhan, assisted by a son, Munir, leaves Los Angeles courtroom after testifying at trial of another son, Sirhan B. Sirhan, for the slaying of Robert F. Kennedy. Top, second from left: Grant B. Cooper, a defense lawyer.