

Sirhan's Life

By Stephen Cook

Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, slayer of Robert F. Kennedy, is awaiting punishment by death while almost totally isolated from the world he sought to change by a bullet.

In a stark steel and concrete corner of San Quentin Prison's Death Row, the young Arab immigrant lives

a life which could qualify him as one of the loneliest men on Earth.

The Examiner was allowed a rare peek at the assassin's daily regimen last week, when Warden Louis S. Nelson ordered that the official lid of secrecy concerning Prisoner No. B21014 be lifted slightly.

Sirhan, 25, lives apart from the other men of Death Row — in a special, three-cell section at the end of the tier on

the sixth floor of the prison's North Cell Block.

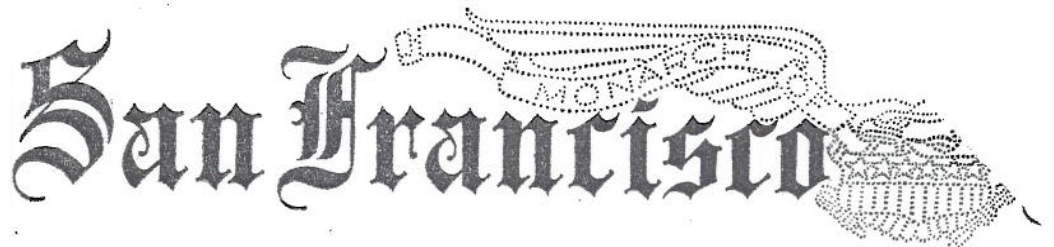
No other inmate is allowed closer than 15 feet to Sirhan. Even then, the two men are separated by two steel mesh screens, running from floor to ceiling on the Death Row tier.

Sirhan — a light eater who always skips breakfast — draws his one meal a day from the same food cart that serves the cells of other con-

Weather

Low overcast with fog and drizzle along the coast with clearing this afternoon through tomorrow. Little cooler today. Highs from low 60's to 70's. Westerly wind 10 to 20 MPH

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on Death Row

demned men. (They are fed twice — at 8 a.m. and 2 p.m.)

But a Death Row guard, not a convict from the kitchen, brings Sirhan his food on a tray. The guards have instructions to vary each day the time at which they take his food from the cart. The administration wants no poison attempts.

"We try to eliminate the predictable portion," said Associate Warden James

Park. "If anything, we are over-cautious."

Sirhan's wiry black hair once grew to extraordinary length while correctional officers debated who should give him his haircuts. All San Quentin prisoners get their trims from convict barbers.

"A man is pretty helpless when he's sitting in a barber chair," Park said.

Sirhan's hair is now cut by a Death Row guard. Park

would not name the barber.

The men of Death Row are freed from their cells three and a half hours a day. All but Sirhan are allowed to mingle in a 10 by 200 foot exercise area.

They talk, work out with a heavy punching bag, play table tennis, cards, checkers and other table games.

Sirhan has his own exercise area — a 10 by 15 foot

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SIRHAN SIRHAN

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stretch of concrete behind the steel screens. But he has no one to play cards with and conversation is scarce.

Talks to Guard

Behind another steel screen, a guard on a gunrail passes occasionally and Sirhan talks with him when he can.

"But that's only idle prison talk and the man on the gunrail is supposed to keep moving," Park said. "He's got the whole row to watch."

Guards on the row don't think Sirhan has made any friends among the condemned men, but there are three or four convicts who come down to the end of the tier to talk with him occasionally.

"It's not a regular, faithful sort of thing," Park said. "And it's more their choice than his. He can't go to them."

No conversation between Sirhan and another inmate can be private. They must talk over an expanse of 15 feet, each standing behind one of the steel mesh screens.

Park visits the assassin about once every two weeks.

No Complaints

"I think he prefers serious intellectual discussions; not the type of idle conversation you get so much of in prison. He likes to play with ideas, exchange ideas," said Park.

Sirhan has not complained about the isolation he must endure because of his notoriety.

"But he has indicated a distaste for living in confinement. He doesn't like prison at all," Park said.

Sirhan has made a few changes in his living area to keep himself physically fit, guards report.

The prison gave him a wrestling mat and a medicine ball. He hung the ball from his cell door and uses it daily as a punching bag. He

Chess Players Offered Match With Master

Chess Grandmaster Larry Evans will compete with all challengers at 7 p.m. tomorrow in a chess contest in the Chess Room of the Mechanics' Institute.

Challengers may reserve boards for a \$5 fee and players who win or draw against Evans will receive an autographed copy of his book, "New Ideas in Chess."

does morning pushups and sit-ups on the mat, Park reported.

Follows Arabs

Sirhan never reads a newspaper and seldom watches television," Park said. He subscribes to Playboy magazine, plus a number of newsletters promoting American sympathy for the Arab position in the Middle East War.

Guards say he spends most of his waking hours reading

books on theosophy, psychology and mysticism are his favorites — and listening by earphones to Arabian music, played on a phonograph his family bought him for use in prison.

Sirhan receives mail every week, but never sees most of it. The majority comes from strangers, at a rate of two or three letters a week.

"Most of it is religious stuff, you know 'repent while you can' kind of stuff," Park said. "We impound all of that mail and hold it. He's received a couple hundred letters like that since he arrived in May."

'Keep Clear'

Sirhan gets occasional visits from his lawyers and his mother and two brothers visit when they have time to drive up from Los Angeles. The family is allowed 12 hours of visiting time a month.

Most prisoners at San Quentin might forget Sirhan is there if it weren't for the times he is escorted through the main yard to the condemned men's visiting room, just inside prison walls.

A voice over the loudspeaker announces each such trip

with a warning to the convicts to clear a 30-foot wide path for Sirhan and his two body guards. An armed guard walks the gunrail overhead.

From a distance, the prisoners can watch the isolated progress of the man who killed Kennedy.