

A270

lbylecczck

SIRHAN BJT 400

By LYLE W. PRICE

Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES AP - The county grand jury stirred memories of the three-year-old assassination of Robert F. Kennedy by opening an investigation Monday into whether the alleged murder weapon and fatal bullets have been tampered with.

The closed-door probe came after several persons raised questions about the case, including a Canadian journalist who asserted that Kennedy was killed by a second gunman rather than convicted assassin Sirhan B. Sirhan, now on San Quentin's Death Row. Grand jurors are expected to confine themselves to the question of tampering with evidence, which was ordered sealed by the judge in Sirhan's trial. The probe is expected to last about three days.

The first witnesses were two judges in the case and a prosecutor. Dist. Atty. Joseph Busch Jr. had declared last month that his office was "terribly concerned" over "evidence that exhibits have been directly handled by numerous persons" in violation of the court order. He requested the grand jury investigation.

The renewed interest in the case began on May 28, when attorney Barbara Warner Blehr asserted that DeWayne A. Wolfer of the Los Angeles Police Department had lied when he testified at Sirhan's trial that he had test fired the gun that killed Kennedy. He actually had fired a similar weapon, she said. She said the fatal shot could have been fired by a second gunman.

Police Chief Edward M. Davis termed Wolfer's work excellent and said Mrs. Blehr had a "vendetta" against Wolfer.

Free-lance journalist Theodore Charach, who is to testify before the grand jury Wednesday, told a news conference Monday that he is convinced "beyond a doubt" that Kennedy was killed by a security guard rather than Sirhan.

Charach said that while Sirhan had been at the assassination scene June 5, 1968, and had fired a weapon, his own three-year investigation convinced him the fatal bullet came from an unseen second gun.

The Journalist, formerly of Winnipeg, Canada, said he was at the ambassador Hotel when the New York senator was assassinated and heard the shots.

The fatal bullet struck Kennedy in the head from behind, yet eyewitnesses placed Sirhan in front of the senator, Charach said. He quoted one witness, broadcaster Don Schulman, as stating he saw one guard firing a weapon.

Charach said Sirhan did wound five other persons at the Ambassador Hotel scene but wasn't facing in the right position to have fired the fatal shot.

Charach's attorney, Godfrey Isaac, has filed a suit on the journalist's behalf alleging that various Los Angeles officials had tried to suppress evidence in the case. Isaac since has become co-counsel with attorney Luke McKissack in Sirhan's automatic appeal of the death sentence.

Sf626ped Aug. 16