

Panel Says One Gun Killed Sen. Kennedy

Los Angeles

A panel of seven independent experts reported unanimously yesterday that there is no evidence to substantiate a belief that a second gun was fired in the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

Superior Court Judge Robert A. Wenke read a "final joint report" of the ballistics experts who had re-fired the gun wrested from Sirhan B. Sirhan. They also had examined the bullets taken from Kennedy's body and compared them to those that wounded bystanders in the shooting in the Ambassador Hotel in June, 1968.

Judge Wenke said the experts had found no reason to believe that anyone other than Sirhan was involved in the murder of the senator.

The experts attached to their reports lengthy worksheets detailing what tests they had made on the Sirhan gun, and the bullets involved, and clothing Kennedy wore that night.

The case was reopened by the Los Angeles Superior Court on the basis of motions filed by the Columbia Broadcasting Systems and by Paul Schrade, a former United Auto Workers union executive, who was standing beside Kennedy in the pantry of the hotel and was wounded.

The shooting was witnessed by a score of persons. Sirhan was

convicted of murder in 1969 and sentenced to death. His punishment was reduced to life imprisonment, and he is in San Quentin Prison.

Godfrey Isaac, an attorney representing Sirhan at the hearing, said afterward:

"It was a tremendous blow to Sirhan but it was also a tremendous triumph on behalf of the courts.

"It should effectively conclude any argument as to one or two guns."

Judge Wenke ripped open three sealed brown manila envelopes.

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lopes containing the findings and said, "Interesting."

He was about to enjoin the session for the day, but then changed his mind and began reading the final joint report.

"The examiners working independently arrived at the same conclusion as follows," he said.

"There is no substantive or demonstrative evidence to indicate that more than one gun was used to fire any of the bullets examined."

The subsequent findings said, however, that it could not be concluded that three of the bullet exhibits were fired from the Sirhan revolver because of "poor reducibility" or grooves left on test bullets.

Acting Los Angeles County District Attorney John Howard, one of Sirhan's prosecutors, had argued against re-firing the pistol, contending that handling of the bullets and the passage of time would make any comparisons meaningless.

Howard and other members of the Sirhan prosecution team said the "second gun" theory was given birth through what they termed a "clerical error."

They said DeWane Wolfer, a ballistics expert for Los Angeles police in the case, mislabeled an envelope containing the death bullets, marking them not with the serial number of Sirhan's gun but the serial number of a similar gun used for a test re-enactment of the crime.

Wolfer testified before Wenke last month that in several instances he could not remember exactly what he had done, but said he assumed he had made reports on the matters he was questioned about.

But two police officers assigned to search for the reports told the court they were unable to locate them and could think of no other place to look.