

Sirhan Trial--

Problems, Some Solutions Provided By CCTV 'Second' Court Coverage

By Howard Williams
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The initial reaction of reporters to the closed circuit TV system in the Sirhan trial was charmingly frank.

"My God, the picture's terrible," said Helen Dudar of the *New York Post*.

"They got better pictures from Apollo 8 at the Moon," said Dick Shoemaker of KNBC.



Williams

After three months of work and uncertainty, such comments had a particular sting. After all, we were opening a new field in journalism, and a certain nervous pride was involved.

But out of the darkness of audience disdain came some praise

from those who realized what had been accomplished. Soon, even the complaints from those who expected "Cinerema" had an encouraging afterglow: a television camera was in the courtroom during the trial of the assassin of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, and few people thought it was worth much comment except to say the picture was bad. I figured that made it a huge success.

The picture was not really bad. The problem was that we were allowed just one wide shot of the courtroom, and the principals could hardly be recognized. To an audience accustomed to panning, zooms and closeups on "Perry Mason," one long shot—with vidicon lag—was not good.

As this is written, the trial is well into the third month, and the closed circuit

story is far from complete. But we have learned a great deal already.

For one thing, the usefulness of an auxiliary courtroom is severely limited unless it adjoins the main courtroom, so that during recess all of the reporters have equal access to lawyers and witnesses. Our second room was four floors below, in the only available space, and much too far removed from what was going on, even though those in the room could see the trial and hear even better than in the courtroom itself.

KNXT's Engineering Director Ed Miller and Technical Operations Manager Norm Cobb came up with the idea which I am convinced clinched our effort to get approval of the closed circuit. We put the camera in the empty metal shell of a window air conditioner in a back corner of the courtroom. The cover was remodeled, with a louvered grill, and the camera shot through the grill, which was out of focus.

At the first demonstration for judges, one said, "I knew it couldn't be up there, because that thing had been there for 50 years." It had been installed and painted 24 hours before.

Many people ask why we didn't install a remote zoom, or more cameras, etc. We offered all of that and much more, but our agreement with Trial Judge Herbert V. Walker, and his agreement with the judges he had to convince, called for one camera, one view of the courtroom without the jury in sight, and only three monitors in the auxiliary courtroom. We had to go to an extremely wide angle lens, a 16mm Angenieux, which brought the grill into focus, but Judge Walker bent the agreement enough to permit a hole to be cut in the grill.

The system was installed because Judge

Walker and Court Coordinator Harold M. Frediani wanted it, and because Judge Walker cleared it with the lawyers and the defendant. They had more than 100 applications to cover the trial, including many foreign newsmen, and only about 40 seats in the courtroom.

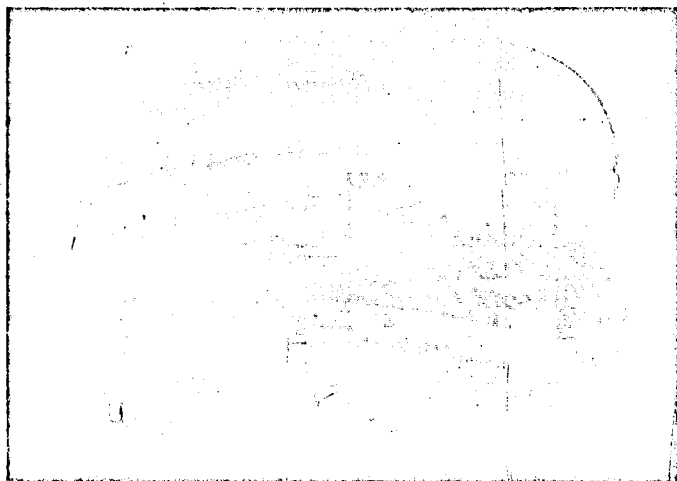
Frediani first proposed a closed circuit to the judges, but it was rejected. The Southern California Radio-TV News Association came in with the same idea and were turned down. Then Frediani got permission to ask the California Freedom of Information Committee for our recommendations. We also said to put in a closed circuit. We came back again with a fat report which included statements by RTNDA 1968 President Jay Crouse, V-P Eddie Barker and many others. So they asked us to show them what we could do.

Our big hurdle was the State Judicial Council which in 1965 had imposed Rule 980 prohibiting photography or broadcasting in the courts. After two demonstrations on Oct. 4 and Nov. 2, 1968, Judge Walker got their agreement that a closed circuit television system would not violate Rule 980. Judge Walker also decided that the Estes Decision would not interfere.

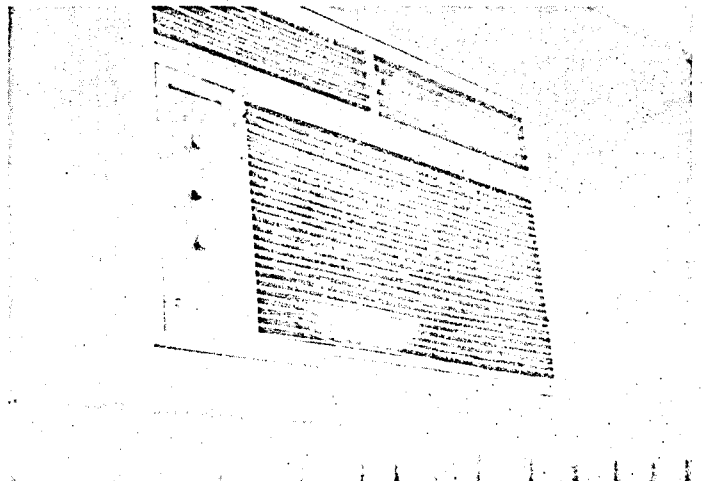
A few questions kept coming up from the various judges. How could we prevent anyone from tapping the cable and taping the trial? We suggested concealed cable, with visual inspections of its terminals, and shielded audio cable which could not be tapped by induction.

They asked how we could prevent anyone in the auxiliary courtroom from sneaking in a recorder, or transmitter, or from taking pictures of the monitors. We said,

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In this off-screen monitor photo of the Sirhan trial courtroom the witness chair is barely in the photo at right. The jury box is out of picture (as agreed) at bottom right. Defendant sits at far left of table where man is standing.



This is the airconditioner-masked camera location in the Sirhan trial courtroom. Louvers show in top of monitor screen (see accompanying photo) because of wide angle camera.

Coöperative Effort on System Finds Good Court Acceptance

(Continued)

"search everybody, just as you will in the courtroom itself." They did.

They asked who would pay for it. Politicians were already complaining about the cost of the proceedings. We said the California Freedom of Information Committee would provide the television equipment, install and maintain it, borrowing whatever we needed from members.

CBS Network remodeled the air conditioner grill. KNXT supplied the cable, borrowed two Norelco industrial vidicons (one was installed for backstop only), and built the camera box and did all of the camera installation and alignment. KNXT's V-P and General Manager, Ray L. Beindorf, let me abdicate my job off and on for three months and released more than 15 other people from the station at various times to do the work. All was with the blessings of Robert D. Wood and Dr. Frank Stanton at CBS in New York.

V-P Bob Howard, NBC, provided a monitor for a demonstration. John McMahon, V-P and general manager of KABC-TV, provided the monitors used for the trial—three 27-inch black and white Conrac studio monitors—and his people maintained them. Bob Mulholland of NBC gave us a cameraman to take color film of a demonstration. Frank Haven, assistant managing editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, and Tony Esparza of CBS publicity gave us stills of the first demonstration for Judge Walker's subsequent presentations to other judges.

Everybody I called produced what was needed in a hurry. The County of Los Angeles did a great deal of work, laying out the auxiliary courtroom as I directed and installing our video cable. All of this concerned just the picture. The sound system belonged to the County and they handled all of that.

The audio system included the bench and witness microphones which were always there, plus five mikes which were placed on the counsel table.

When jury selection began, we had no pictures of them (by the original agreement) and no sound, either. Judge Walker ordered a lavalier, and after the first day each juror wore it while being questioned. Later, the witness mike also was changed to a lavalier, and even Judge Walker traded his mike on the bench for a lavalier—but with a cut-off switch. The changes came easily and naturally. Like the almost-hidden camera, the microphones became simply part of the courtroom furniture. In fact, the entire sound and picture system was taken much for granted by everyone.

We owe a great deal to newspapermen for this project. When the FOI Committee representatives met with the judges Oct. 1, the head of the delegation was Committee Chairman Dick Fogel, assistant managing

editor of the *Oakland Tribune*. He and Ray Spangler, publisher of the *Redwood City Tribune*, who was a national president of Sigma Delta Chi a few years ago, and Ben Martin of Sacramento, executive director of the California Newspaper Publishers Assn., each traveled 400 miles to be there and make the pitch for a system that would permit all newsmen who applied to cover the trial. Also there were Larry Sisk, managing editor of the *San Diego Tribune* and immediate past chairman of the FOI Committee, and Frank Haven, managing editor of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Clayton Brace, V-P and general manager of KOGO, San Diego, who is president of California Broadcasters Assn., spoke for our industry. I was there as vice-chairman of the FOI Committee.

The media cooperation, through our two-year-old statewide committee, gave strong weight to the request for closed circuit. The newspapermen believed in the right of all media to cover the news, and they worked hard for what we wanted. Fogel devoted a great deal of time to it, working for the good of the news business as a whole. In fact, we were all working for the people who otherwise weren't going to get in the courtroom—mainly the small papers, foreign press and small radio and TV stations.

Attendance varied widely in the auxiliary courtroom, from one or two people to 40 or so, depending on news values. But it served the purpose of opening the trial to full coverage, so there was no dollar premium on courtroom seating.

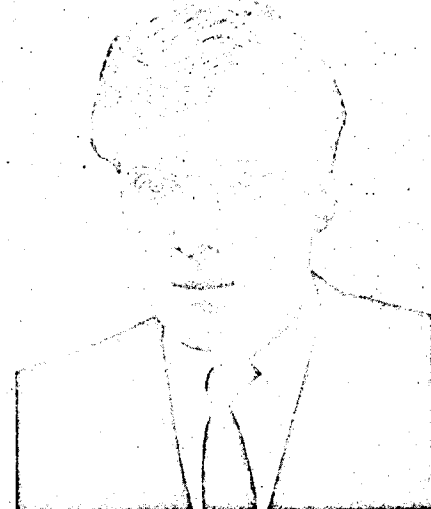
Behind all of this, of course, was Superior Judge Herbert V. Walker, a friend of newsmen for more than 30 years, who, in this most important trial, during which he knew he had to take every precaution to avoid a mistrial or reversal, had the pioneering fearlessness to approve the courtroom closed circuit system. He knew what it meant to us in broadcasting, too, and he confirmed what we've been saying about cameras in the courts.

"I've watched them all," he said, "the lawyers, the jurors and the witnesses, and none of them turned into a ham or acted self-conscious because of the camera. They paid no attention to it at all."

Appointment of Jack Bausman as chief of bureau for the AP in Moscow has been announced by Wes Gallagher, g.m. He will replace Henry Bradsher, who has been granted a leave of absence to accept a Nieman Fellowship.

James Dull of WEII New Haven has been promoted to v-p for news.

Don Harris of the WTOP-TV Washington news staff has been named head of documentary production.



Ken Harnett

The Associated Press has announced it is setting up a new reporting specialty, urban affairs.

Ken Harnett has been assigned to the Washington investigative reporting unit, as a specialist in urban affairs. Harnett, who formerly worked in the New Haven and Milwaukee bureaus, spent a term at Northwestern University last year taking urban affairs. Another newsmen also is going into training in the urban affairs field. Michael Sniffen, Newark bureau, is enrolled in a forthcoming Northwestern University seminar.

Austin Scott, member of the special assignment team, has done considerable work in urban affairs coverage.

In sports, Bloys Britt of the Charlotte bureau, who has reported auto racing for AP, has been named the news service's first fulltime auto racing writer.

KCBS EDITORIALS AWARDED TEACHERS' MERIT CITATION

KCBS San Francisco was the recipient of a John Swett Merit Citation from the California Teachers Association "... for outstanding station editorials interpreting school achievements, issues and needs." The Awards and Merit Citations are given in honor of John Swett, pioneer leader in California education and first professional teacher to serve as Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State. Each year, newspapers, radio broadcasters, and television stations throughout the State are honored for outstanding work, beyond normal news coverage, in the area of educational reporting.

Guy Coates has taken over the broadcast desk in the New Orleans AP bureau. He came from KSLA-TV Shreveport, Louisiana; prior to that he was city hall reporter for the *Shreveport Times*.

Coates replaces Don Cashio who shifts to the night broadcast desk.

Ian MacBride, WLOS-TV Asheville, N.C., has been promoted from news editor to news director.