

Warren Commission Faces 'Sidetrack' Peril

BY ROBERT E. THOMPSON

LA 2/26 Times Staff Writer

It probably was inevitable that as the Warren Commission pursued its arduous attempt to ferret out all available information about President Kennedy's assassination it would run into some difficulty.

From the moment President Johnson appointed the seven-member panel, there has been criticism of Chief Justice Earl Warren's decision — under presidential pressure — to act as chairman. There also have been complaints within the commission itself over the slow progress of the investigation.

The commission has been embroiled this past week in controversy over the affiliation of one of its chief legal advisers with a group which two congressional committees once labeled as a Communist front.

★

In addition, members of the commission are perplexed over allegedly erroneous newspaper accounts of testimony which presumably have been leaked by staff members.

These are minor difficulties, which the commission is seeking to solve.

But they point up a grave danger. If such extraneous issues are permitted to take the spotlight away from the serious proceedings of the commission, they could eventually cast a shadow upon the assassination report.

This would be tragic.

The solemn — even tedious — work which the commission is undertaking may not cast itself as vividly upon the public imagination as guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam or the water shortage at Guantanamo Naval Base.

But is of no less signifi-

cance in the preservation of the integrity of the Republic.

For it is the task of the Warren Commission to tell the world the truth — as far as it is discernable — about what happened on that somber afternoon in Dallas last November.

It is this truth, and this truth alone, which can put to rest the malicious rumors and deliberate lies about Mr. Kennedy's murder which groups within and without the United States are using for their own propaganda purposes.

Communist forces have twisted the story of the assassination to make it appear that Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused slayer, was in the employ of the extreme right. The John Birch Society has advanced its own theory that Mr. Kennedy was killed by the Communists because he failed to adhere to a pre-determined deadline for turning America over to the Reds.

★

There are those who suggest that Oswald was an American undercover agent who was made the scapegoat for the killing. One faction has contended that Mr. Kennedy planned his own murder because he was dying of some disease and wanted to assure his martyrdom.

Some individuals see Mr. Kennedy's killing as the fulfillment of a gangland conspiracy led by forces hostile to Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy.

These rumors can be scotched only if the commission conducts itself like Caesar's wife — above suspicion.

Members of the commission feel strongly that no one involved in the investigation should be identified with causes of the far right or far left.

The issue does not strike at the abilities or patriotism of staff members. It evolves rather from a fear that certain groups and individuals might attempt to capitalize upon the affiliation of staff members in attempts to besmirch the work of the commission.

By the same token, members of the commission are deeply concerned over erroneous press reports about testimony,

since James reports also play into the hands of propagandists.

The commissioners and their staff of 14 attorneys headed by former Solicitor General J. Lee Rankin are indisputably qualified for the tremendous task they have undertaken.

All seven members of the commission are men of high personal attainment and dedicated service to their nation.

Mr. Johnson painstakingly selected men of varying political ideology and background so as to assure the widest public confidence in the commission's findings.

Warren was an outstanding governor of California for 11 years before joining the Supreme Court, where he has written a significant record as defender of individual liberty. Sen. Richard Russell (D-Ga.) is the single most respected member of the Senate, the patriarch of the South and a profound conservative.

Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.) is possibly the most highly regarded liberal Republican in the Senate and a close personal friend of both Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Johnson.

★

Rep. Hale Boggs (D-La.) and Rep. Gerald Ford (R-

Mich.)—one a liberal, the other a conservative—are so influential within the House that either could be on his way to the speakership.

Allen W. Dulles had been a distinguished diplomat and lawyer before becoming director of the Central Intelligence Agency, a post he held for nine years. John J. McCloy, lawyer, banker and statesman, served as emergency troubleshooter for Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy before Mr. Johnson named him to the commission.

Such men must be the pride of their nation. If they can overcome the minor obstacles which have fallen in their path, they should also be able to produce an assassination report that will remove the doubts and fears of that nation.