

Guards Couldn't Save Kennedy, Chief Says

Testimony of Secret Service Head Tells of Drinking by Some of Agents in Texas

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WASHINGTON — Secret Service chief James J. Rowley is convinced his agents could not have prevented President John F. Kennedy's assassination even though some might have been more alert if they had not been drinking the night before the tragedy.

In testimony released Monday by the Warren Commission, Chief Justice Earl Warren sharply questioned Rowley about 10 Secret Service agents who attended a beatnik club in Ft. Worth until 3 or 4 a.m., the morning of the assassination and others who had drinks at the Ft. Worth Press Club.

Rowley said nine agents were at the press club and

that three had one scotch each, "and others had two or three beers." He said no alcohol is served at the beatnik place.

Referring to the "rather unusual hours" kept by the agents, Warren said:

"Now, other people, as they went along there, even some people in the crowds, saw a man with a rifle up in this building from which the President was shot.

"Now, don't you think that if a man went to bed reasonably early and hadn't been drinking the night before, (he) would be more alert to see those things as a Secret Service agent, than if he

stayed up until 3, 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning, going to beatnik joints and doing some drinking along the way?"

Rowley agreed with Warren and said he did not condone the late hours. But he said the agent in charge reported that men in question were in "good physical condition" the day of the assassination and "I don't believe they could have prevented the assassination."

Agents Cleared

The commission, headed by Warren, agreed with Rowley in its report issued last Sept. 27. The commission said there is no evidence that the agents failed to take any action that could have averted the assassination.

The question of alertness on the part of the agents also was raised by Sen. Ralph Yarborough (D-Tex.), who was riding two cars behind President Kennedy's limousine.

In an affidavit to the commission, Yarborough expressed surprise at what he called the slow response of the agents. He indicated that he felt they did not respond as fast as trained soldiers or marines would have done.

Seemed Puzzled

"After the shooting, one of the Secret Service men sitting down in the car in front pulled out an automatic rifle or weapon and looked backward," Yarborough said. "However, all of the Secret Service men seemed to me to respond very slowly, with no more than a puzzled look."

"In fact, until the automatic weapon was uncovered, I had been lulled into a sense of false hope for the President's safety by the lack of motion, excitement or apparent visible knowledge by the Secret Service men, that anything so dreadful was happening."

"Knowing something of the training that combat infantrymen and marines receive, I am amazed at the lack of instantaneous response by the Secret Service, when the rifle fire began."

On the other hand, two Secret Service agents riding in President Kennedy's car in-

dicated they felt they responded swiftly.

Roy H. Kellerman, the agent in charge of security on the trip, was riding next to the driver. Kellerman said he swung around at the first shot and saw Mr. Kennedy holding his hands to his throat.

With the same motion, Kellerman said, he swung right back and said to the driver: "Let's get out of here, we are hit." He said he also grabbed the microphone and called to the car in front: "We are hit. Get us to the hospital immediately."

Kellerman testified that he gave both commands before the second and third shots were fired.

Hoover Testimony

FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover told the commission that his agency did not send the Secret Service a report on Lee Harvey Oswald because Oswald never had been known to threaten the President's life, prior to the Dallas slaying. Most of Hoover's testimony had been disclosed earlier.

At the time of the assassination, the FBI forwarded to the Secret Service only the names of persons who had threatened the President or Vice President. Under revised regulations, Hoover said, the name of Oswald would have been forwarded "because we now include all defectors."

In his testimony, Rowley said none of the Secret Service agents who attended the beatnik club or had drinks at the Ft. Worth Press Club had been disciplined or reprimanded—despite a regulation banning such conduct.

Explaining his decision against any reprimand, Rowley told the commission:

"I felt that these men, by their conduct, had no bearing on the assassination of the President in Dallas; that to institute formal punishment or disciplinary action would inevitably lead the public to conclude that they were responsible for the assassination of President Kennedy."

"I did not think in the light of history that they should be stigmatized with something like that, or their families or children." **END**