

# Noguchi Threatened to Slay Some Aides, Witness Asserts

BY RICHARD WEST

Times Staff Writer

Dr. Thomas T. Noguchi said he was "going to assassinate certain people in the office" while serving as county coroner, a County Civil Service Commission hearing into his dismissal was told Wednesday.

Noguchi also threatened to "get" L. S. Hollinger, county chief administrative officer, and people at the USC school of medicine, it was testified by Noguchi's secretary at that time, Mrs. Ethel T. Field.

"He said if he had to go down, he'd take certain people with him," said Mrs. Field, who is a Japanese-American like Dr. Noguchi.

The witness said he once told her, "Mrs. Field, if I die, you'll die with me."

Another secretary in the coroner's office, Miss Eleanor Schmidt, testified that Noguchi once pulled a knife from a sheath on his belt,

slashed a piece of scrap paper in two and remarked:

"It could be used for an autopsy on the living, and perhaps to perform an autopsy on Mr. Hollinger."

Miss Schmidt also said that the Japanese-born Noguchi had a puzzling way of referring to Orientals as "yellow submarines."

And Michael Wood, a former staff assistant in the coroner's office, told the commission that he was present when Noguchi waved the "dagger-type" knife with a 3-inch blade and said of a subordinate:

"I'll cut him up . . . I'll kill him, I'll kill him . . ."

Wood said that on one occasion he had to restrain Noguchi from jumping out of an automobile traveling 30 m.p.h. to make a telephone call to his office.

Please Turn to Page 24, Col. 1

## Continued from First Page

Noguchi's "beeper," a radio signal device that the coroner wore on his belt so that his office could contact him, was sounding at the time, Wood said.

Deputy County Counsel Martin Weekes, representing the county at the hearing in the new Hall of Records, asked Mrs. Field how Noguchi looked when he assertedly made the assassination threats in April or May, 1968.

Sometimes he was smiling, Mrs. Field replied, and sometimes he "looked rather serious."

Noguchi had quarrelled with Hollinger over operations of the coroner's office. Officials of the USC School of Medicine had opposed his appointment as coroner in December, 1967.

Mrs. Field also testified that Noguchi told her he hoped Robert F. Kennedy would die after he was shot here last June and that he prayed for more

helicopter and airplane crashes, so he could become famous for performing autopsies.

The coroner often swore in her presence, saying such things as "God damn it," "son of a bitch" and "go to hell," she said.

"Did you find this language offensive," Weeks asked.

"Well, I was shocked," Mrs. Field replied.

On cross-examination, Dr. Noguchi's counsel, Godfrey Isaac, asked Mrs. Field if she knew that at the scene of one helicopter crash "Dr. Noguchi had tears in his eyes and was comforted by (County Supervisor) Kenneth Hahn."

"No, sir," Mrs. Field said.

The witness told Isaac that she liked Dr. Noguchi "in a way" and that she regarded him as "a fine man medically but not administratively."

Mrs. Field had testified Monday that Noguchi once told her he hated all Negroes, Japanese and Jews. Isaac now asked her if she was aware then that Dr. Noguchi was Japanese himself.

She said she was, but that "I was rather shocked, to tell you the truth."

Isaac began to question Mrs. Field about Lewis Sawyer, a Negro coroner's aide whom Noguchi used as a chauffeur. Sawyer died May 7 and his funeral was held Monday. X X

When the lawyer asked her if she knew that Sawyer had been in a "Y" classification, which barred him from getting promotions or salary increases, and that Noguchi had promoted him to a deputy coroner so he could win advancement, Mrs. Field burst into tears.

"I'm very upset at Mr. Sawyer's death," she explained as Commission President C. Richard Capen ordered a five-minute recess.

Weekes and Herbert McRoy, administrative deputy in the coroner's office, comforted Mrs. Field. She recovered her composure

after sipping from a glass of water.

Mrs. Field later replied that she did not know whether Noguchi had Sawyer reclassified.

She did admit to Isaac, though, that once when Sawyer became ill while driving Dr. Noguchi to the airport, the coroner had him taken care of and later telephoned her from Washington to inquire how Sawyer was.

Mrs. Field admitted, too, that she knew Dr. Noguchi had a lesion on his tongue and took medication for it.

"Did Dr. Noguchi preach teamwork?" Isaac asked.

"Yes, he did," she said.

Another witness called by Weekes, Mrs. Nancy Palmer, a medical transcriber-typist in the coroner's office, testified that Noguchi told her in August or September, 1967, that he had ordered "5,000 or 10,000" amphetamine, or "pep," pills for himself.

Under questioning by Isaac, though, she admitted that only once did she ever see the coroner take an amphetamine pill.

Miss Shirley Jordan, a clerk-typist in the coro-

ner's office, testified that while Sen. Kennedy lay dying at Good Samaritan Hospital she asked Noguchi if there was a chance that he might recover.

"He said no, he didn't have a chance," Miss Jordan said.

"Did you observe the expression on his face at this time?" Weekes asked.

"Yes."

"What was the look?" Weekes pursued.

"There was a smile on his face," Miss Jordan said.

Thomas J. Dunlap, an accounting technician in the coroner's office, produced records showing that Sawyer worked 210 hours overtime in 1968 and 103 hours overtime in January and February of 1969.

However, Isaac insisted that Dunlap also reveal how many overtime hours Sawyer worked in 1967, before Noguchi became coroner. This figure turned out to be 206 hours.

In cross-examining Miss Schmidt, who is secretary to McRoy, Isaac asked her if she believed it was "proper or useful to take a knife into the field" as was Noguchi's practice.

"Yes, I feel a knife would be useful in the field," she said.

When Noguchi displayed his knife, Isaac went on, "Did you ask him, 'Are you going to use that for autopsies on the living or the dead?'"

She said she did not.

Noguchi is fighting for reinstatement to the \$31,104-a-year coroner's job, contending there was no reasonable basis for the Board of Supervisors to fire him last March 18.

The supervisors acted after Hollinger submitted a report accusing Noguchi of taking drugs in excessive amounts, exhibiting symptoms that indicated a need for psychiatric care, administering his office badly and bullying employees.

Isaac also got Mrs. Field to confirm that she typed up a petition to the Board

of Supervisors which stated that Noguchi conducted his office with "honor, integrity and leadership" and that his resignation would be "a great loss to the county."

But Mrs. Field insisted that someone else in the office composed most of the document.

Scores of Japanese-American supporters of Dr. Noguchi continued to attend sessions of the hearing, which was moved Wednesday from the Hall of Administration to the new Hall of Records.