

Noguchi's Joy Over Influenza Autopsies Told

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'Look of Elation' Shown
by Ex-Coroner in Tragic
Situations, Witness Says

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Dr. Thomas T. Noguchi beamed with "joy" when he looked into his busy, overcrowded autopsy room during the height of the influenza epidemic last December, the hearing into Noguchi's dismissal as coroner was told Friday.

Autopsies on Hong Kong flu victims were being performed on all four tables in the room, testified Edward G. Day, a senior coroner's investigator, and other bodies awaiting examination were stacked two deep on gurneys.

There were so many flu cases in the morgue that some autopsies were being done in an embalming room, Day said.

He said Noguchi walked up to him and said, "You like it?"

The witness told the Civil Service Commission hearing in the Hall of Administration that twice before after great tragedies he had noticed a "look of elation" or a "slight smile" on his chief's face.

Autopsy on Kennedy Cited

The first time, he said, was at Good Samaritan Hospital, where Noguchi had gone to perform an autopsy on Sen. Robert F. Kennedy last June. The second time was at the scene of a shuttle-helicopter crash.

Day was asked if Noguchi's behavior on these occasions appeared to be abnormal.

"It didn't appear to be appropriate for the situation involved," the investigator replied.

Another witness for the county, Dr. Donald A. Stuart, a deputy medical examiner and acting inquest officer here, said Noguchi became "extremely enraged" after

an inquest had ruled "justifiable homicide" in a case late last year.

Noguchi angrily told Stuart, the witness said, that there should be "less justifiable homicides" at inquests.

But suddenly, Stuart added, Noguchi stopped being enraged and "showed me some group pictures of himself."

Stuart said Noguchi appeared normal when the witness joined the coroner's office last July, but that he noticed a change in the coroner around September.

'Moods of Depression'

Noguchi's "speech became more rambling... his ideas became more disoriented" and he had "moods of depression," the witness testified.

"He would jump from one subject to another without ever completing the wording of the subject he was on," Dr. Stuart said.

Earlier, a pathologist friend of Noguchi testified that the coroner told him here last June that "what we need is a forensic mafia," a world brotherhood of autopsy surgeons.

One of the charges against Noguchi is that while coroner here he wanted to use such an organization to extend the authority of his office over all coroner cases "west of the Mississippi."

Dr. William G. Eckert, a pathologist from Wichita, Kan., said that he himself first used the term "mafia" while talking with Noguchi about the coroner's problems with local doctors and medical schools last June 12.

"There must be a medical mafia here," Eckert said he told Noguchi, using the term in the "good connotation" of "brotherhood."

Noguchi replied, Eckert said, that a "forensic mafia" was needed and that a foundation for such an organization already had been laid by a world meeting of pathologists in Copenhagen.

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But there was no connotation of evil in Noguchi's suggestion, the pathologist continued. He wanted such an organization so that "when one (pathologist) has problems, every one of us would be willing to help this man."

All it meant was a pooling of expertise, Eckert said.

The Kansan noted that after Sen. Kennedy had been shot in Los Angeles last June, Noguchi tele-

phoned Eckert in Wichita and discussed ways to handle the autopsy.

"Forensic medicine and forensic science had taken a black eye in the United States because of the Texas assassination" of President John F. Kennedy, Eckert said.

Eckert said he advised Noguchi to contact Col. Pierre Fink of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology and Dr. Cyril Wecht, a Pittsburgh pathologist, to assist with the Robert F. Kennedy autopsy.

Aided Noguchi

Eckert added that he flew out from Wichita after the autopsy to assist Noguchi in finishing up the case.

There are only about 150 men, Eckert went on, certified in forensic pathology in the United States.

There are only two in Kansas, and in California I doubt there are more than 10," he said.

Eckert, who was called as a witness by Noguchi's defense counsel, Godfrey Isaac, was asked by the lawyer whether he ever carried a knife in the field, as Dr. Noguchi had.

The witness replied that it was "common practice" for a medical examiner to have a knife with him and that he carried "a collection of knives in the back of my car."

Isaac wanted to know if it was a common practice for pathologists to use "forensic jargon" in their work, and to joke.

Eckert said yes, noting that "floaters," or bodies taken from water, are often humorously referred to as "job security" by pathologists as "not too many doctors like this kind of work."

He said pathologists used humor as an "outlet" to their tensions.

On cross-examination, Eckert was asked by Dep. County Counsel William Kerr whether he ever carried a knife on his person, as Noguchi had.

Eckert said not any more because they usually

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The witness said he regarded Noguchi as "an excellent forensic pathologist" who was "in the process of developing pro-

bably one of the most outstanding offices in the world in Los Angeles."

He said Noguchi was considered a world authority in the investigation of the deaths of scuba divers.

The next witness, called by Dep. County Counsel Martin Weekes, was Dr. Ramesh C. Gupta, a native of India and head toxicologist in the coroner's office here.

Gupta said that three days after Noguchi took office as coroner in December, 1967, he called Gupta into his office and told him, "Never trust an American."

Gupta said Noguchi also once told him without any provocation:

"If you are not happy over here, you can go back to Ontario (Canada, where Gupta worked before coming here) or back to India."

And, said Gupta, who has a doctorate in chemistry, Noguchi once ordered him out of his office without any apparent reason by shouting, "Out! Out! Out! Out!"