

# Civil Service Board Dismisses Five Charges Against Noguchi

Former Coroner's Lawyer Had Sought to Have 15 Counts  
Expunged on Grounds That No Evidence Supported Them

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Five of the charges which led to the firing of Coroner Thomas T. Noguchi were thrown out by the County Civil Service Commission Monday at its hearing of Noguchi's appeal for reinstatement.

The commission acted after Noguchi's counsel, Godfrey Isaac, argued that no evidence relative to 15 of the more than 60 charges against Noguchi was presented by witnesses called by the county.

Isaac's motion to strike the other 10 charges in question was denied by the commission.

The five charges ordered dismissed were:

1—That Noguchi "prayed that Mayor (Sam) Yorty's helicopter would crash, because the press would be there and you would be there and this would bring glory and prestige to the (coroner's) office."

#### Means of Aggrandizement

2—That Noguchi "jeopardized the confidence of the community in the county government and your office by your statements indicating that you view great tragedy as an avenue of aggrandizement for yourself and the office of chief medical examiner-coroner."

3—That Noguchi spoke to employees "with unwarranted profanity."

4—That Noguchi made fun of a pathologist in the office who had one leg shorter than the other, driving the man to quit.

5—That Noguchi "suddenly changed the topic and started discussing totally unrelated subjects" in the middle of a conference last February at which the performance of a staff member was being evaluated.

Dep. County Counsel Martin Weeks argued against dismissal of all of the 15 charges questioned by Isaac except the profanity allegation.

A previous witness, Noguchi's secretary, Mrs. Ethel Field, a Japanese-American as is Noguchi, said she heard him use such words as "hell" and "damn."

In moving for the dismissal, Isaac

warned: "If they are not dropped, I feel I have no alternative as a lawyer but to put on a defense to them."

By dismissing them, he added, the hearing could be speeded up considerably. The hearing began May 12 and the county finished presenting its side of the case May 26.

Isaac argued that the county had a "burden of proof" relative to these charges and that it failed to carry the burden.

Later, Lt. Norman Hamilton of the sheriff's homicide bureau and Palos Verdes Police Chief Richard Conroy took the stand at the hearing in the Hall of Administration to testify on Noguchi's behalf.

Hamilton told how in 1968 Noguchi resolved a difficult death case which another law enforcement agency believed to be a homicide. Noguchi, the lieutenant said, showed to everyone's satisfaction that the death was the result of a traffic accident.

The officer said Noguchi is regarded highly by local law enforcement officers.

Chief Conroy said Noguchi was extremely helpful in evaluating for him preliminary information from an autopsy performed on a person outside Los Angeles in 1968.

"He's considered an outstanding pathologist" by peace officers, the chief said.

Then four veteran employees of the coroner's office testified that they regarded Noguchi as an outstanding coroner.

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One of them, Mrs. Bonnie Kennedy, who works in the coroner's business records office, disputed a county charge that at a retirement dinner for a coroner's employe last January Noguchi made himself "the subject of ridicule" during a 45-minute address.

Mrs. Kennedy, who was present at the dinner, said Noguchi spoke for only 10 minutes and handled himself well.

She said a previous speaker, a television actor who "might have been inebriated," was "definitely needling" Noguchi by referring to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor at the start of World War II.

Noguchi replied, she said, that he had made a pilgrimage to Pearl Harbor and the sunken battleship Arizona "as an American."

Earlier Dr. Yoshio Yamaguchi, a dentist, testified he had been treating Noguchi for lesions of the mouth since April, 1965.

Dr. Yamaguchi said the lesions were "excruciatingly painful" and made it difficult for Noguchi to swallow, eat and talk.

He said he had prescribed a pain-killing drug and Vitamin B for Noguchi. The capsules containing the Vitamin B, he said, were half green and half yellow.

#### Testimony on Capsules

One of the charges against Noguchi is that he took excessive amounts of Dexamyl, a "pep" drug which comes in a half-green, half-transparent capsule.

Dr. Yamaguchi said one lesion on the side of Noguchi's tongue measured one-third of an inch by three-quarters of an inch when he treated it on March 12, 1968.

Isaac asked the dentist if this lesion would affect Noguchi's speech.

"Yes," Yamaguchi replied, "the tongue would touch the side of his

teeth," when he spoke.

Yamaguchi said that, at the dentist's invitation, Noguchi in April, 1968, addressed the Uptown Optimist Club on accident cases handled by the coroner's office.

Isaac asked how the Optimists received Noguchi's talk.

"They thought he was one of the best speakers they ever heard," Yamaguchi said.

On cross-examination, Weekes asked Yamaguchi if the pain-killing drug and Vitamin B he prescribed for Noguchi would make him feel "omnipotent"—wanting to extend the authority of his office into Orange and Riverside counties.

Yamaguchi said it would not.

Another witness called to testify for Noguchi was Dr. Victor J. Rosen, patho-

logist for the Mt. Sinai division of the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and an associate professor of pathology at UCLA who has done extensive work for the Veterans Administration.

He said Noguchi contacted him in May of 1968 and asked him to help with various projects at the coroner's office, in-

cluding the setting up of a teaching file on liver and kidney diseases—specialties of Dr. Rosen.

#### Tells Admiration

Dr. Rosen said he came to admire Noguchi while working with him.

"Dr. Noguchi was one of the most available individuals I ever worked with," Rosen said. "He was an around-the-clock pathologist."

Rosen said that in October, 1968, he reviewed more than 400 slides made during the autopsy on Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and that, in his professional opinion, the Kennedy autopsy was a "prototype" of excellence.

He said this autopsy was "highly arranged" and "unique."

Rosen said he himself regarded Noguchi as a "dedicated, highly energetic individual" and that Noguchi was regarded by most pathologists in the community as "an extremely competent, extremely well-trained individual."

#### Discusses Terminology

The witness said Noguchi had a sense of humor similar to that of most pathologists, which is "more or less a survival kit for us."

"I know things I've said in an autopsy setting, or a hospital setting, I'd never say in a social setting," Dr. Rosen said.

The pathologist said he and Noguchi often discussed the role of the coroner's office, and that both agreed it should be "totally autonomous."

"The medical school has to remain independent of the medical examiner's (coroner's) office, and vice versa" . . . to prevent "conflict of interest," Rosen said.

Isaac apparently brought this out in reference to opposition to Dr. Noguchi by officials at the USC and UCLA medical schools.

The hearing will be in recess until 9:30 a.m. Wednesday.