

## NAGGING QUESTIONS UNANSWERED

# Grotesqueries Mar Inquiry on Kennedy

BY RUDY ABRAMSON  
Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—As the House Assassinations Committee ended four weeks of hearings Thursday on the murder of John F. Kennedy, Bernard Fensterwald, a Washington lawyer preoccupied with the crime for nearly 15 years, said to a friend: "They have set up a bunch of straw men, and now they have knocked them down."

The long-awaited, controversial and expensive House investigation of the Kennedy assassination has turned out to be anything but the catharsis for which many had hoped.

After 79 witnesses and the introduction of 500 pieces of evidence, the inquiry has found no new thread to unravel a conspiracy, no new evidence to undermine seriously the Warren Commission's original conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in murdering the President in Dallas in 1963.

But neither, in view of critics, has the much-publicized investigation eliminated many of the persistent questions that have spawned conspiracy theories over the years.

Rather than settling questions surrounding the assassination, the hearings have been an arresting, sometimes grotesque reliving of it all.

There was Kennedy's blood-stained suit, dragged out from somewhere, hardly faded.

There was Earl Ruby, telling the

country with great sincerity that the Ruby family wanted the National Archives to have the pistol used by his brother Jack to kill Oswald.

There was Marina Oswald Porter, remarried and older, telling much the same story she had told the Warren Commission about the violent man she had married in the Soviet Union.

There were John and Nellie Connally, she giving for the first time her recollection of what happened in the presidential limousine as gunfire broke out in Dealey Plaza.

There were former President Gerald R. Ford, an aging Mafia kingpin and recorded testimony from Fidel Castro.

Despite the long-enduring pressure for further investigation into the deaths of Kennedy and Martin Luther King, the hearings made it appear that the public had tired of the whole subject of assassinations.

Although the committee held its hearings in the huge, ornate Caucus Room of the Cannon House Office Building, where throngs of reporters and spectators could be accommodated, the number of empty seats in-

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# KENNEDY INQUIRY GROTESQUERIES

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creased as the days went by.

As expert witness after expert witness discussed the arcane fields of ballistics, forensic anthropology, acoustics and computer-enhanced photography, sore-footed tourists nodded off for a few moments before resuming journeys about the capital.

Although the public investigation generally traveled well-worn avenues, critics of the Warren Commission report and others who believe there was a conspiracy behind Kennedy's death avoided public criticism of the House inquiry.

The real substance of the investigation will not be known, they said, until the committee issues its final report—due in December—including massive documentation not yet made public.

"So far," Fensterwald said, "all you have seen, really, is a sampling of the overall investigation, and that is not very helpful. All we are getting here is a very rough sample."

Robert Katz, a director of the Assassination Information Bureau, made

much the same point, calling the public hearings "studied superficiality."

"I don't believe these public sessions have even been reflective of the total investigation," he said. "The total investigation exists on two levels, and what they have done so far is to put across some points they consider politically appropriate."

However, the hearings did indicate that the committee had focused on a possible involvement of Cubans and organized crime figures in Kennedy's death.

After taking the Fifth Amendment in a closed appearance before the committee a year ago, Florida Mafia figure Santos Trafficante Jr. denied Thursday that he had ever made a statement before the assassination that "Kennedy is going to get hit."

The statement was attributed to Trafficante several years ago by Jose Aleman, an anti-Castro Cuban refugee, who repeated it under oath and heavy guard this week.

Aleman said he had had financial difficulties in 1963 and had hoped to get Trafficante's assistance in obtaining a loan from the Teamsters Union.

When one of the conversations turned toward politics, Aleman testified, Trafficante told him, "This man (Kennedy) is not going to be reelected. . . . He's going to be hit."

Trafficante, identified as a leading organized crime figure in Havana gambling before Castro's takeover, has in recent years been linked to a CIA plot to assassinate Castro.

According to a 1967 report by the inspector general of the CIA, mobster Johnny Rosselli had identified Trafficante as the courier assigned to take a poison pill to Cuba, where it was to have been slipped into Castro's food by a disenchanted associate. Rosselli, formerly of Los Angeles, was killed in 1976 and his body was found in an oil drum in Florida's Biscayne Bay.

Trafficante acknowledged Thursday that he had been involved in a plot to kill Castro, but he said his only role had been to serve as an interpreter between Rosselli and Cuban contacts.

The Castro assassination plot was a major factor in bringing about the House investigation.