Merriman Smith, 57, Found Dead in Home

United Press International

Merriman Smith, Pulitzer price-winning White House correspondent for United Press International, was found dead in his home late yesterday, apparently of a self-inflicted gunshot. He was 57.

He had covered six Presidents over a span of more than 28 years. As dean of White House correspondents, he was the one who usually ended residental news conferences with "Thank you, Mr. President."

A highlight of his reporting career was his coverage of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, which won him a Pulitzer Price to go with many other laurels.

Smith suffered a severe illness in December 1968 in Miami where he had gone with the President-elect Richard M. Nixon. He recovered in time to cover the beginning of the Nixon administration in 1969.

Ten days ago he entered a Washington hospital for a few days. Following his discharge he had been busy arranging entertainment for the White House Correspondents Association annual dinner, to be held this coming Saturday night. Yesterday morning he telephoned his office that he had a severe cold and would not be at work.

In the afternoon he and his wife made plans to go to one of his favorite Chinese restaurants for dinner. He went to his bedroom in their suburban home in Alexandria, to dess.

When he did not answer her call a little later, she went to his room and found him in an adjoining bathroom — a bullet wound through his head and a .357 Magnum revolver nearby. Alexandria officials said a death certificate would be issued today.

4/14/70

Dear Dick,

In today's Washington Post story on the apparent suicide of Merriman Smith, there are these things about which I wonder:

His wife was in the house with him. He went to his room to dress for a planned dinner out. When she called him after a while and he did not answer, she went there "and found him in an adjoining bathroom - w bullet wound through his head and a .357 Magnum revolver nearby."

There is no reference to a silencer and is it likely that even a gun buff, intending nothing improper on acquiring the weapon, would have a silencer?

Is it not likely, then, thatbhis wife should have heard some sound?

Is it possible to estimate, from the available ammo, the range in volume of the sound inside the home?

I do not for a minute suggest the wife knowcked him off. If she stayed with him as long as she did, either she liked the kind of guy he was or had learned to take it. Nor do I suggest anyone else murdered him. I believe it likely was a suicide, whether from illness or other cause. But I am absolutely fascinated that the wife feports hearing no sound at all.

The Post carried the UPI story. I have seen no other. Nor have I heard any more detailed or contradictory account on the air. Having been listening to the all-news station all day, pretty much, I think had there been any contrary account or any denial, I'd have heard it.

The unsuccessful effort at making a copy of the 399 pix is enclosed. If you miss the note on the back, I'm investing in a composite of the three, my first, Howardis, andmy second. Be devil's advocate when I send it.

Best,