

Southern investigators balk as to who killed students

BATON ROUGE—Although it seems quite clear that a deputy sheriff fired the fatal shot that killed two Southern University students last month, a special committee of inquiry probing the incident equivocated when it came to a point of saying in clear terms that this was the case.

The key phrase in the commission report, based on hundreds of interviews and examination of evidence, including films, said only that the deadly shotgun blast came from an area where sheriff's deputies were deployed.

Atty. Gen. William A. Guste Jr. was considerably more positive, while carefully

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noting that the commission had produced its report with dotted i's and crossed t's.

"The shots came from an area that was occupied by approximately six deputies," Guste said outside of the committee report. "The investigation to this time has not revealed that there was anyone else in that area.

"The boys killed were killed by a single shot. It is my conclusion that the shot was fired by a single deputy."

Reading the commission report, of course, leads directly to that conclusion. But apparently the group, composed of six whites and six blacks, did not want specifically to point the finger.

In a detailed explanation of the sequence of events as it found them, the commission noted that deputies were armed with shotguns using No. 4 buckshot as well as tear gas shells, that buckshot shells were stored in the weapons' magazines, that when students dispersed only a group of 45 or so was left in front of the building, that No. 4 buckshot killed the two students, that they fell in front of the line of deputies, that experts determined the shot could only have come from the area of the deputies.

Students unarmed

One further finding was that there was no evidence that any student was armed.

Why the equivocation? Apparently, the commission, which included a number of attorneys, felt that possible criminal investigation by a grand jury might be jeopardized.

The commission stopped when it reached

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this point, recommending that it be turned over to the parish district attorney for further investigation.

Edwards continues to disagree

Meanwhile Gov. Edwin Edwards continues to disagree with another aspect of the committee report that police hurled the first missile. He declined to review the evidence for a possible revision of his opinion on the grounds that his views were not consequential because the Guste committee findings would be the final official report of the state.

It is probable that Guste or one of his assistants will be called on to handle the matter before a parish grand jury. There is every indication that further investigation may well determine who fired the shot, although one assistant attorney general expressed doubt that the deputy would be determined short of self-admission.

FBI on the case

The FBI, of course, has been working the case and its findings may be somewhat less influenced by local considerations.

The Southern University tragedy and its accompanying problems over student unrest and maladministration have virtually dominated the state capitol scene for over a month.

The big event overshadowed by the Southern events is the constitutional convention which convenes next month in the opening round of Gov. Edwards' efforts to produce a new supreme state law.

EDWARDS' PRESS CONFERENCE

Edwards held one of his busiest press conferences to date Thursday—touching on such items as the Southern report, the convention, the Luling bridge crossing of the Mississippi River, the pending resignation of Highway Board Chairman Louis Johnson.

He also announced that he was giving Insurance Commissioner Sherman Bernard a present of the Insurance Rating Commission for what Edwards considers is enough rope to hang himself in the event premium rates aren't reduced.

Bernard has won this fight with Edwards over personnel and a course of action to be followed, and now it will be up to Bernard to see if he can produce on his intentions to lower insurance rates in the state.