

Urgently in Study of the Warren Report Data

News Pooling Is Suggested for Major Events

By PETER KIHSS

The nation's newspaper editors are being asked to propose that their publications and other news media pool reporters and photographers in certain major news events. Under this plan, one or more newsmen would represent a group covering an event.

The proposal, made by a special committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, was disclosed in essence yesterday after criticism by the Warren Commission of the newsgatherers' role in Dallas after President Kennedy's assassination.

Chief Justice Earl Warren's group charged that news media must share responsibility with the Dallas police "for the failure of law enforcement" that led to the slaying of Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin. It suggested that a "code of professional conduct" be worked out by the bar, law-enforcement associations and news media.

Panel to Study Problem

Among other reactions, the Associated Press Managing Editors Association named a five-member committee to study the problem. The group's president, Sam Ragan, executive editor of The Raleigh (N.C.) News & Observer, said, however, that responsibility for "orderly coverage" rested with authorities in charge.

Miles H. Wolff, president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, said his organization's monthly bulletin would publish on Thursday the report of a committee that has been working since April on a study growing out of criticisms of the Dallas coverage.

Mr. Wolff, who is executive editor of The Greensboro (N.C.) Daily News, said the committee was recommending that the society's members decide whether pooled coverage in certain cases was feasible.

"The committee feels that it could be," he said.

Meeting on Report Asked

In Greensboro, Mr. Wolff said he had suggested that Alfred Friendly, the committee's chairman, confer on the Warren Commission's report with representatives of Sigma Delta Chi, the national journalism society; the Radio-Television News Directors Association, the National Association of Broadcasters, and any others willing to join.

Mr. Friendly, managing editor of The Washington Post, said in Washington that he would act as soon as possible to arrange such meetings on "the proposals and implications of the Warren Commission report."

"What the commission had to say on the matter of press conduct and responsibility must, obviously, be weighed thoughtfully by everyone connected with the function of news presentation in a democratic society," Mr. Friendly said.

Agreement to Be Sought

Mr. Friendly said his committee's "preliminary report" was "proposing the device of pooling of newsmen in certain circumstances where the presence of unlimited numbers of reporters and photographers could prove disturbing, and of seeking agreement on this policy with representatives of other news media."

"It suggests also," Mr. Friendly added, "that if there is such general agreement, the facts be made known to those participating in and organizing a plan that the press is usually willing to operate on a pool basis if the situation requires it."

The committee of the newspaper editor's society also includes Creed Black of The Chicago Daily News; Herbert Brucker of The Hartford (Conn.) Courant, and Felix R. McKnight of The Dallas Times Herald.

For the A. P. managing editor's group, Mr. Ragan said the Warren Commission's criticisms merit our serious concern and study.

'Deeply Conscious'

"Newspapers of America," Mr. Ragan said, "have been for some time deeply conscious of the problems arising from mass coverage of major news events. It is my opinion, however, that the responsibility for orderly coverage of such events lies with the proper authorities in charge at the time. Such authorities, of course, must have the cooperation of news media."

Mr. Ragan said he believed "that the request in the Warren report relating to news media is reasonable and that this is a matter of much importance to the press as a whole."

Accordingly, he named a special committee to study the problem and to make recommendations, with the hope that at least a preliminary report would be available by time of the association's convention in PHOENIX, Ariz., Nov. 17.

Members named were George Beebe, managing editor of The Miami Herald, chairman; William B. Dickinson, managing editor of The Philadelphia Bulletin; I. William Hill, managing editor of The Washington Evening Star; Clifton Daniel, managing editor of The New York Times; and Mr. McKnight.

Reservations Expressed

Wes Gallagher, general manager of The Associated Press, said in a statement here:

"Undoubtedly there is much to be done in curbing the excesses of mass reporting. Exploring means to accomplish this would be useful. However, to try to apply the ordinary criteria of what should or should not be reported in a criminal case to the assassination of the President of the United States would not only be futile but basically wrong.

"In an age where much less than the assassination of the President could trigger an atomic war, to delay facts as to who the killer was, what his background was and whether he was a part of a conspiracy would not only be a disservice to the country and the world but highly dangerous.

"It would seem to me in a case of this kind the rights of the individual must be secondary to the broader rights of the country and the public to know every detail about the assassin as quickly and fully as possible. The Warren report itself confirms that the American press did an outstanding job of keeping the public accurately informed of events at Dallas.

"This does not mean that the press and the public officials could not have conducted themselves better or obtained their information in a more orderly fashion at Dallas. Mass reporting has caused increasing problems in recent years, hindering getting the news to the public rather than speeding it."

Earl J. Johnson, editor of United Press International, stressed that he could speak only for his news service in comment on the Warren report.

Says U. P. I. Must Be Present

"We have a responsibility," the U. P. I. editor went on, "to be represented at all newsworthy events by reporters and photographers because we and The Associated Press are primary for most of the newspapers and broadcasters.

"I wouldn't try to say how many specials [those from individual papers] should be on the scene of the big story. That's for their editors to decide, and it seems to me that the authorities can always limit the number to suit their own security requirements.

"In this case, it was not the number of reporters who were present which permitted Jack Ruby to shoot Lee Oswald. It was the fact that the police permitted Ruby to be there.

"Again speaking only for our own service we did not distribute any unchecked information about the assassination of the President or the killing of Oswald two days later."

Gene Robb, president of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, said "newspapers and their organizations are already discussing improved criminal-case procedures with bar and law-enforcement groups."

"The paramount public interest that newspapers always must serve," Mr. Robb, publisher of The Albany (N. Y.) Times-Union, said, "is to get and print the news, exactly what they did in the Oswald case."

Arthur B. Hanson, A. N. P. A. counsel, has been discussing

the problem with American Bar Association committees, Mr. Robb said, and other discussions between the bar and the press have been held at state levels.

In Richmond, Va., Lewis F. Powell Jr., president of the American Bar Association, said a special committee had been created to review all the lawyers' canons of ethics, "including those of fair trial versus free press."

Edward L. Wright of Little Rock, Ark., immediate past chairman of the association's House of Delegates, has been named chairman, Mr. Powell said. He said the committee's work might take two years.

Delays Action on Proposal

Because of this review, Mr. Powell added, the delegates' group has delayed action on a proposed amendment by a standing committee on professional ethics. The amendment would have held it "improper and professionally reprehensible" for a prosecutor or defense counsel to "express to the public or in any manner extrajudicially any opinion or prediction as to the guilt or innocence of the accused."

In Washington, Vincent T. Wasilewski, executive vice president of the National Association of Broadcasters, said his group had been cooperating in "the preliminary phase" of a Brookings Institution "feasibility study along lines suggested by the Warren Commission."

"We should not overlook the benefits to the public of free reporting," Mr. Wasilewski added. "We should not permit this incident to becloud an objective appraisal of the role of news media in a free society."

Mr. Wasilewski said that Prof. J. Edward Gerald, who has been teaching journalism since 1929 at the University of Minnesota, had been working on a report for the Brookings Institution on whether a study should be made. Professor Gerald is a former Texas newspaperman.

The institution, in Washington, said it hoped a proposal would go before its trustees late in October. The study of a possible code or guidelines for fair practices in reporting of judicial proceedings had been urged last spring by Dr. Frank Stanton, president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, C.B.S., the National Broadcasting Company and the American Broadcasting Company all reserved comment yesterday.