

That Morning

Agents' Drinking Rapped

WASHINGTON — (AP) — Four Secret Service men riding behind President John F. Kennedy took a few drinks in violation of rules in the early hours of that day, the Warren Commission reported.

But the commission emphasized that they did all they humanly could when the fatal bullets struck. The response of some of them "was in the finest tradition of government service."

THE COMMISSION gave this account:

Nine agents went off duty about midnight Nov. 21 in Fort Worth. Hoping for a bite to eat, they stopped in at the Fort Worth Press Club. No food was available, but they stayed for periods up to an hour and a half. Some drank beer — but no more than three glasses — and some drank mixed drinks — but no more than 1½ drinks each.

At 2 a. m., two of the

nine retired, the other seven proceeding to the Cellar Coffee House that serves no alcoholic beverages.

***ALL HAD** assignments to guard Kennedy, beginning no later than 8 a. m. that day. Four were assigned to the backup car behind the President's limousine — three on the running board, ready to dart forward at every stop and in emergencies, the fourth inside the car.

Another agent was assigned to Love Field, where Kennedy's plane landed. Four more were assigned to the Trade Mart, where Kennedy was headed when he was slain.

The commission quoted a regulation prohibiting drinking by White House agents while on the road with the President. Violation is cause for removal.

BUT SECRET Service Chief James J. Rowley said

he felt disciplinary action in this case "might have given rise to an inference that the violation of the regulation had contributed to the tragic events of Nov. 22."

Since he was convinced that this was not the case, he testified, it would be unfair to the agents and their families to take explicit disciplinary measures.

THE COMMISSION acknowledged that members of the White House detail work long, hard hours "under very great strain."

It said:

"It might seem harsh to circumscribe their opportunities for relaxation. Yet their role of protecting the President is so important to the well-being of the country that it is reasonable to expect them to meet very high standards of personal conduct, so that nothing can interfere with their bringing to their task the finest qualities and maximum resources of mind and body."

* see Drew Pearson, this file, Sept. 29

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