

Secret Service Laxity Confirmed

By Drew Pearson

It is never pleasant to criticize such agencies as the FBI and the Secret Service, and last December this writer



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was subjected to considerable newspaper criticism for doing it.

On Dec. 2, I reported that "six Secret Service men charged with protecting the President were in the Fort

Worth Press Club the early morning of Friday, Nov. 22, some of them remaining until nearly 3 o'clock. They were drinking. When they departed, three were reported en route to an all-night beatnik rendezvous, "The Cellar."

"Obviously men who have been drinking until 3 a.m. are in no condition to be trigger-alert or in the best physical shape to protect anyone."

Publication of this column brought an angry call from Pierre Salinger, then in charge of White House press relations, plus concerted queries from some editors. The statement was made by Salinger and others that the members of the White House detail who stayed up late did not have to work next day.

The Warren Commission, after exhaustive investigation, has now reported to the contrary. It bears out the column of Dec. 2 except that nine, not six agents were involved, with seven going on to The Cellar.

"Most of the agents were

there from about 1:30 or 1:45 a.m. to about 2:45 or 3 a.m.," the Commission reported. "One agent was there from 2 until 3 a.m.

Work Next Morning

"Each of the agents who visited the Press Club or the Cellar Coffee House had assignments beginning no later than 8 a.m.," the Commission found: "Four had key responsibilities as members of the complement of the follow-up car in the motorcade. Three of these occupied positions on the running-boards and the fourth was seated in the car."

The Commission then quoted from Secret Service rules against "use of intoxicating liquor of any kind, including wine and beer, by members of the White House detail," with the penalty "removal from the service."

The agents involved were not removed, or even disciplined, despite what the Commission described as a "clear violation."

The Warren Commission was stern in its report.

"The role of protecting the President," it said, "is so important . . . that it is reasonable to expect them to meet very high standards of personal conduct. This is the salutary goal to which the Secret Service regulation is directed when it absolutely forbids drinking by any agent accompanying the President.

"Nor is this goal served when agents remain out until early morning hours and lose the opportunity to get a reasonable amount of sleep. It is

conceivable that these men who had little sleep, and who had consumed alcoholic beverages, even in limited quantities, might have been more alert in the Dallas motorcade if they had retired promptly in Fort Worth.

FBI to Blame, Too

The column also reported on Dec. 14: "It is an indisputable fact that the FBI did interview Lee Oswald, the suspected assassin, in advance. Despite this, it did not report him to the Secret Service."

"The FBI at first tried to cover up the fact that it had interviewed Oswald," I reported, "and asked one of Oswald's friends not to admit to the press that the FBI had been around to see him."

"It would appear to have been a shocking oversight to permit an unstable, irrational young man who had lived in Russia, had passed out circulars favoring Castro, and quite recently had taken a trip to Mexico to contact the Cuban Embassy, to remain unwatched and unreported to the Secret Service," I reported.

"The FBI learned . . . that Oswald was working at the Texas School Book Depository, located along the usual parade route through Dallas," I also reported.

The Warren Commission, confirming this, stated: "The Commission believes that the FBI took an unduly restrictive view of its responsibilities" . . . There was much material in the hands of the FBI about Oswald, the knowledge of his defection, his arrogance and hostility to the United States,

his pro-Castro tendencies, his lies when interrogated by the FBI, his trip to Mexico where he was in contact with Soviet authorities, his presence in the School Book Depository, job, and its location along the route of the motorcade.

On this failure to cooperate between the FBI and the Secret Service, the Warren Commission concluded: "There was no fully adequate liaison between the two agencies."

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