

# NAACP Brands Fontana Fire As Incendiary; Kerosene Theory Flatly Denied By Arson Expert

The possibility that the disastrous Fontana, California fire December 16 that took the lives of Mrs. Helen Short and her two small children, Carol Ann and Barry, was caused solely by kerosene was flatly denied this week by Paul T. Wolfe, arson expert who has been investigating the case.

"Some highly inflammable or explosive substance other than kerosene was present," stated Wolfe in a telephone interview with the Sentinel.

"How it got there is still a mystery," he continued. "How a substance of that character got there is unknown. But it was definitely present." He further stated that in all of his experience he had never heard of kerosene causing an explosion such as that which occurred at the Short home. Such a fire, he went on, indicates the presence of alcohol, benzine, gasoline, or some other such substance.

## REFUTES THEORY

The findings of Wolfe, who for 25 years was connected with the Los Angeles fire department, completely refutes the theory of Fontana authorities that the fire was caused by explosion of a kerosene lamp.

The presence of an inflammable gas or explosive strongly indicates the possibility that the fire was deliberately set and was of incendiary origin.

Two weeks prior to the fire,

O'Day H. Short, only survivor of the tragedy who is still seriously ill, was warned of physical violence at the hands of a "vigilante committee" if he did not vacate his newly purchased home.

## TRANSFUSION GIVEN

On Saturday, meanwhile, an emergency call was sent out for blood in an endeavor to save Short's life. Five pints were needed at once. Scores of colored and white sympathizers and friends of the stricken family immediately volunteered. It is learned that five members of CIO unions in Fontana donated a pint each.

On the afternoon of the fatal fire, Short was absent from his home for a period of about two hours, according to a statement he made to Wolfe in an interview last Wednesday. He returned to his home, he said, and long before the explosion took place.

Wolfe made his findings known

to a NAACP committee, headed by Lorenzo Bowdoin, secretary of the Angeles Funeral Home, for whom he conducted the investigation. The committee was set up to probe the causes of the fire, including the violence threats.

## FIRE INSTANTANEOUS

During the interview, Short shed further light on the incidents immediately preceding the explosion. He had previously purchased, he stated, a gallon of kerosene which he obtained in a five-gallon can. The kerosene lantern that lit the home began to go out, and he started to refill it. The lantern, he said, caught fire, and he also saw a ring of fire in the five-gallon can. He grabbed the can, rushed to the door, and flung it far from the house. The can had not yet exploded.

In the few seconds it took him to dispose of the can, the entire house was in flames. He returned

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# ★ *More about* Fontana Fire

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**SEEK INVESTIGATION**

The NAACP committee has sent copies of Wolfe's report to Attorney General Robert W. Kenney, the San Bernardino County Grand Jury, and to District Attorney Jerome B. Kavanaugh of San Bernardino, with the request that a full investigation be made and those guilty punished.

It is also reliably learned that the Citizens Committee of Fontana, composed of representatives of Negro organizations in the area, has launched a campaign for the recall of the two deputy sheriffs, "Tex" Cornelson and Joe Glines, who told Short that he was "out of bounds" and warned him that "neighbors" had complained of his presence.

Wolfe, who conducted his investigation at the request of the NAACP committee, made his report following extensive investigation at the scene of the fire, laboratory examination of specimens taken at the scene, and an interview with Short on Thursday of last week.