

# Proof of Threat Barred from Short Inquest

Three hearses carried the charred bodies of Mrs. Helen Short and her two small children, Carol Ann and Barry, from the Angeles Funeral Home to the Holy Cross cemetery Saturday morning, following funeral services, at St. Patrick's church, 34th and Central avenue, and Rosary the previous evening.

O'Day H. Short, husband and father, was unable to attend, since he is still seriously ill in the Southern Permanente Hospital, Fontana, suffering from third degree burns received in the explosion and fire which claimed the lives of his family Sunday, December 16.

## CAUSE UNKNOWN

Cause of the fire is still undetermined. A coroner's inquest held in Rialto, near Fontana, last Thursday returned a verdict that the deaths were caused by shock and extensive burns, but that the origin of the fire was "unknown."

Efforts of several witnesses at the inquest to force a probe into the vigilante threats which two weeks before the tragedy Short had reported receiving proved unavailing.

Mrs. Marion Downs, 3712 Cameron, Los Angeles, sister of the dead woman, interrupted the investigation at one point.

## DEMANDS INQUIRY

In the tense, filled room, she reportedly demanded from her seat: "Why wasn't there an investigation of the murder of these people?"

She was asked to take the stand and tell what she knew about the

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# ★ more about Short

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causes of the fire. "I will tell you about the threats!" she declared.

Jerome B. Kavanaugh, district attorney of San Bernardino county, who assisted the county coroner, allegedly replied: "No, you won't because the coroner won't admit it."

J. Robert Smith, editor of the Tri-County Bulletin, also tried to introduce testimony regarding threats of violence. He was prevented from doing so on the grounds that such testimony was of the nature of rumors or hearsay.

## SAYS NOT COMPETENT

Part of a transcript of testimony

Short in his hospital room. Short was in bed and unconscious, but the attendant physician said that he was conscious and rational.

Short reportedly made the following statements during the course of the interview: "I cannot speak competently for myself in this case. I am not confining myself to any statement unless I have had time. All you want to do is get the information you are looking for."

Toward the end of the interview, in response to questioning, Short reportedly stated: "My opinion . . . the best of my ability, it was an explosion."

## USUAL INTENSITY

Fire Chief Earl B. Reeves, of Fontana, who said that he spent two hours at the scene of the fire, stated on the stand that he found nothing we could "really put our fingers on" as to the cause other than piecing together stories and examining material found in the house. He also stated that in his opinion the lantern itself had not exploded.

Asked for his opinion, he said that he assumed that Short was filling an oil lamp too close to an open fire.

Leszeno Bowdoin, head of a

committee appointed by the Los Angeles NAACP, reported that an arson expert hired by the committee had stated in a preliminary report that the intensity of the fire was greater than could be expected from an ordinary structure of the type of the Short home.

District Attorney Kavanaugh and the coroner made no effort to trace down the threats of violence, although at the outset of the inquest Kavanaugh had stated that if there was evidence available that murder or arson had been committed, persons responsible would be prosecuted.

## THREAT DELIVERED

On December 4, Short reported to his lawyer Ivan Johnson, to the F.B.I. and to the Los Angeles Sentinel that he had been warned the previous day of threats of physical violence if he did not remove his family from their newly purchased property. Two weeks later an explosion and fire caused the death of Short's wife and his two children, and seriously burned Short, himself.

Short stated at that time that J. Sutherland had delivered the threat to him, in the presence of Louis Helfman, former owner of the property Short had purchased.

In the sheriff's report released immediately following the fire, Deputy Sheriff's Joe Glines and "Tex" Cornellson were reported as having visited Short on several occasions and having told him that he was "out of bounds." The deputies are also alleged to have told Short that some of his neighbors had complained of his living there.

Neither Sutherland, Glines nor Cornellson were placed upon the stand, nor was any effort made to determine the names of the individuals who were responsible for the threats or the neighbors who had complained.

J. H. Mulvey, from the State Attorney General's office, was present at the inquest.