

## **“Smoking and Health”**

### **“For Satisfying Pleasure...Kent with the Micronite Filter...”**

#### **Cover story and back cover advertisement for Kent cigarettes (Lorillard), November 18, 1963**

This six-page article is the most definitive coverage published in any news magazine about the U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health in the lead up to the release of the committee’s findings on the role of cigarette smoking and disease. The committee had been set up a year and a half earlier after *Washington Evening Star* reporter Edgar Prina surprised President John F. Kennedy at a news conference by asking what the federal government was going to do about smoking in the wake of the Royal College of Physicians’ recent indictment of cigarettes. Kennedy asked Surgeon General Dr. Luther Terry to establish a committee to study the issue. Just as the committee was winding up its top-secret investigation, and only a few days after this issue of *Newsweek* was published, President Kennedy was assassinated. There was doubt that the report would be released, since President Johnson’s friend, attorney Abe Fortas, had represented the tobacco industry. But the report was issued on January 11, 1964--an indictment of smoking as a cause of lung cancer and other diseases, after having reviewed 7,100 studies.

The article included statements from the Tobacco Industry Research Council and several physicians who cast doubt on the evidence that smoking caused cancer. The issue featured an advertisement for Kent cigarettes (Lorillard) on its back cover.

“Outside, the wan autumn sun played on the glass roof of the new National Library of Medicine in suburban Washington. In a windowless office deep in the basement, ten men quietly struggled through a white mountain of paper--Xeroxed documents were piled on the table, cardboard-backed reports were heaped on the metal shelves lining the walls, and long scrolls full of figures snaked over the chairs. Paper coffee cups and ashtrays added to the clutter as the group, mostly M.D.'s or Ph.D.'s, went over their work paragraph by paragraph, line by line, and finally, word by word. Dr. Charles Le Maistre, medical director of Woodlawn Hospital in Dallas, puffed on a pipe; Dr. Louis F. Flieser, professor of organic chemistry at Harvard, lit a cigarette, and silverhaired Dr. J. Jacob Furth, the wellknown pathologist, smoked a cigar.

“Every word counted, and so perhaps did the choice of tobacco, for the ten men around the table were the U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health and their final report, due by the year's end, was already being regarded last week with the hyper-jittery respect which usually surrounds a time bomb. Surgeon-General Luther L. Terry, outwardly affable but his eyes on reel alert, told an interviewer he wouldn't want to say anything that might ‘pre-judge my committee,’ not even to amplify his own recent switch from cigarettes to a pipe. Even so, he was more talkative than his boss, Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary Anthony J. Celebrezze, a pack-a-day filter cigarette smoker, who wouldn't grant an interview.”

**“Big Business:** If it contains a strong, unequivocal indictment of cigarette smoking as an important cause of lung cancer and other diseases, it could adversely affect not only an \$8 billion-a-year business and the

nation's fifth largest cash crop, but also one of the most familiar and deeply ingrained national habits. This year, no fewer than 67 million adult Americans, about the same number that voted in the 1960 Presidential election, smoked cigarettes (cigars and pipe tobacco are considered far less involved in the lung and heart questions for the simple reason that their smoke is ordinarily not inhaled).

But if the committee should conclude that it is unable to make a judgment one way or the other on the correlation between cigarettes and health, the indecisive report will force into question a decade of statistical and experimental evidence: the preponderant weight of medical judgment has been that cigarette smoking is a major causative factor in lung cancer and plays an important part in heart disease and other degenerative ailments. Both Dr. Leroy E. Burney, who was the Surgeon General under President Eisenhower and Dr. Terry, Mr. Kennedy's Surgeon General, have gone on record with statements indicting cigarette smoking. (In April 1962, the Surgeon General said, in part, that 'the weight of scientific evidence ... demonstrates that cigarette smoking is a major cause of the increase in cancer of the lung.')