

60-19 (Supp 127-66)

Taped Denial He Knew Oswald Shakes Russo

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New Orleans, March 15—Perry Russo, the star witness who says he heard Lee Harvey Oswald plotting with others to kill President Kennedy, was confronted dramatically in court today with a tape recording made a few weeks ago in which he denied knowing Oswald. He listened to it with a poker face, but in the ensuing cross-examination he appeared badly shaken.

Russo also said that he had undergone psychiatric treatment.

The audio tape, made during a TV interview by a local station, was played in the courtroom here by attorneys defending businessman Clay Shaw, 54, who is accused of taking part in a plot to assassinate Kennedy.

"Not Till I Saw Him on TV"

The packed court heard the interviewer ask Russo, 25, if he had ever met Lee Harvey Oswald. The recorded voice of Russo replied: "No, I had never heard of Oswald until I saw him on TV."

Today's hearing before a three-judge panel that is trying to determine whether there is enough evidence against Shaw to warrant bringing the case to trial ended with Russo still on the stand. The hearing will resume at 10 A.M. tomorrow.

Russo, District Attorney Jim Garrison's mystery witness, told the court yesterday that he was present when Oswald, Shaw and an ex-pilot named David Ferrie discussed slaying Kennedy. He said yesterday that he then knew Oswald as Leon Oswald and only learned later that the man he knew was in fact the assassin.

Attack on Credibility

Also yesterday, Russo, an insurance salesman from Baton Rouge, described how Ferrie had discussed in detail how to kill Kennedy and how to make a getaway. But in the recording Russo said that Ferrie had talked "in a joking way" of killing the President. He said Ferrie "used to say just jokingly that you and I could do it."

Immediately after the nine-minute tape had been played, defense attorney Irvin Dymond began a bitter attack on Russo's credibility. He demanded that the witness explain the apparent

discrepancy between his testimony and his taped words.

Russo, who continually asked Dymond to repeat his questions, began to rub his left eye in a nervous gesture. He said that after the assassination he did not definitely connect the man he knew as Leon Oswald with Lee Harvey Oswald although he had seen pictures of the alleged assassin on TV and in newspapers.

"There was a similarity, but I couldn't be sure," he said. "I was trying to say yes or no to myself. When Oswald was shot, I let it pass, but I believe I said to friends, 'I think I know the guy.'"

Russo said Ferrie's joking reference to an assassination had been made the summer before the killing in Dallas. "During September it was another story, a different story altogether," he insisted. "It was during this period that things took on a different aspect."

Russo said yesterday that he had been present when the plot was discussed in Ferrie's home in September, 1963.

Asked why he had not come forward until Garrison started his probe, Russo answered: "I left it to the professionals and I forgot it. Then Garrison began his probe and said he could prove there was a conspiracy."

He said he wrote to the DA and was interviewed by Garrison's investigators.

"Threatened by Ferrie"

Earlier, Russo said that Ferrie had threatened his life when he tried to break up a friendship between Ferrie and a youth whose parents disliked the ex-pilot. According to Russo, the youngster, Al Landry, was living with Ferrie when the three met on Bourbon St. He said that when he refused to let Ferrie talk to Landry alone, Ferrie said: "I'll get you for that."

"I think he just said it out of anger," Russo added. Later he said, "I don't think it was a threat on my life now."

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- The Worker _____
- The New Leader _____
- The Wall Street Journal _____
- The National Observer _____
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Dymond asked Russo how many times he had been in Ferrie's apartment and Russo replied, "thirty or 40 times." Did he ever meet any roommates of Ferrie's? Russo answered: "Yes, Leon Oswald."

"Shared Apartment"

Asked if he was certain that Oswald was sharing Ferrie's apartment, Russo said: "Yes, he was living there in September, 1963. I had seen Oswald in Ferrie's apartment on three or four occasions."

Dymond attacked Russo on his inability to remember exactly who was at a party at Ferrie's home which, Russo said yesterday, was followed by the discussion among Shaw, Oswald and Ferrie on how to kill Kennedy.

"How," Dymond asked, "are you able to tell exactly what Oswald, Ferrie and Bertrand (the name under which Russo says he knew Shaw) were wearing and not know so much else?" Russo replied: "Ferrie was always spectacular. You never know what you were going to find or see. If you didn't get a spectacular by sight, you got it by words."

Dymond asked, "Can you tell us about anyone else there (at the party)? Can you name anyone else?"

Russo said "I can't remember. . . . There were a couple of Cubans with green fatigues on—a couple of Cubans with khaki clothes."

Today's hearing was surrounded by tightened security precautions because a number of threatening telephone calls had been received at the court house.

An ex-convict from Michigan, James R. Liscombe, 30, now living in New Orleans, had been arrested and booked during the night for making threatening

calls. He was alleged to have called equity prison officials, told them he had been brooding and "intended to make national headlines in New Orleans."

Police received a tip yesterday that a fully loaded gun was hidden in the area where Shaw had been parking his car. Acting on it, detectives found a loaded .22-caliber pistol underneath an old tire lying on the ground next to a service station.

As a result, Shaw was permitted to park his car inside the grounds of the prison, which adjoins the court house.

Searched for Weapons

Sheriff Louis A. Heyd said other persons involved in the case had received threatening calls. Everybody entering the courtroom was searched for weapons.

The session began with records on Russo from his universities, Tulane and Loyola, and from his insurance firm being brought into court under defense subpoenas and being held for possible future use as evidence. No details from the records were given in court.

Dymond led off by asking him loudly, "Do you believe in God?" Russo replied steadily: "It would depend on the definition."

Pressed, he said his conception of God was that He was the entity of all the universe.

He swore that he had told the truth yesterday to the best of his knowledge. He said he went to church on occasion and talked problems over with clergymen.

"Would you feel you had committed a sin if you gave an untruth?" he was asked. Russo replied, "I believe the truth should be spoken or it would be against myself and mankind as well as everything else."

"Would it be a sin in the eyes of God?" Dymond asked.

"I have never conceptualized His mind and the relationship in that respect," the witness replied.

Aided Grandmother

The prosecution eventually objected to this line of questioning and Presiding Judge Bernard J. Bagert cut it off with the comment: "This is not a catechism class. Let's move on."

Asked about his family, Russo said his mother was dead and a sister had died when he was 4. He has a brother, Edwin, 23, who lives in Baton Rouge and is working for a doctorate at Louisiana State University.

Dymond asked the witness if he had ever supported any dependent and Russo replied that he had allowed a grandmother to take any earnings from a property in Mississippi which he understood belonged to him following the death of his mother.

The reason for this line of questioning became clear when the defense attorney asked him about records from his firm which said he "partially" supported one dependent.

Russo said this must have come from a conversation he had with an official of the firm during which he mentioned his grandmother.

Dymond had a number of brushes with the judge, who once told him: "You haven't contradicted any of his (Russo's) statements yet. Let's get on."

Went to an Analyst

Russo was asked if he had ever undergone psychiatric treatment and he said he had, between 1959 and the middle of 1960. Since then he had talked with the psychiatrist on the telephone, but had seen the analyst last in October, 1965.

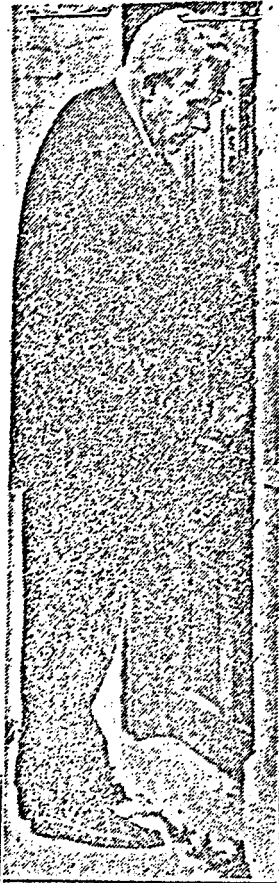
Then Dymond began to trace Russo's life in high school here and at the universities. The witness denied that he had been threatened with expulsion from high school for making public statements that he did not believe in God. He agreed, however, that he had had "discussions" with the faculty on the matter.



Perry Russo
His testimony shaken



District Attorney Garrison
His witness has bad day



Clay Shaw outside his house
before going to hearing