Russo Admits He Had Earlier Doubts On His Ability to Identify Oswald

By George Lardner Jr. H Wahnaton Post Staff Writer NEW ORLEANS, March 15 Admitting that he had once been under psychiatric care, Perry R. Russo said today that he was never certain he had seen Lee Harvey Oswald here until investigators for District Attorney Jim Garrison began drawing pictures for him.

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But now, he declared in a long day of cross-examination, he was "absolutely sure.""

he was "absolutely sure."" Wooden and unemotional, the 25-year-old Russo has been Garrison's star witness so far in the District Attorney's investigation of President Kennedy's assassination.

Russo has sworn that he heard Oswald, free-lance pilot David W. Ferrie and businessman Clay Shaw plotting to kill the late President at a meeting in Ferrie's duplex apartment here in the late summer of 1963.

Now an Insurance salesman of Baton Rouge, Russo asserted that he had not come forward before for fear of being tabled a "screwball."

labeled a "screwball." He walked a tightrope in his testimony today at a preliminary hearing on Shaw's arrest for conspiracy in the assassination of President Kennedy. At one point, he refused to identify a picture of Oswald in pain, split seconds after he had been shot in Dallas, as the "Leon Oswald" he had knowh as Ferrie's roommate.

"I'm not going to go out on limb," he said, looking at the picture, although it was clearly of Oswald and, in fact, half of a composite, two-photo exhibit that he had identified the day before.

"The Oswald I knew ... was like a beatnik," Russo asserted. "He had three or four day's growth of beard."

Russo also disclosed that he never volunteered his story to authorities until the night of Feb. 22 after Ferrie had suddenly died in his apartment of a cerebral hemorrhage. He said he wrote Garrison and was subsequently interviewed by the District Attorney's inyestigators, firsh in Baton-Rouge and later here, for Territ

This was after Garrison had promised that "arrests will be made . . convictions ob tained" in his investigation, but before Shaw's arrest.

Russo said Garrison's investigators showed him one photograph after another, but he was unable to identify Oswald positively until "they drew a composite picture . . they added on a beard, something between a beard and whiskers.

"I said, That's the roommate'," Russo declared. "I know Leon Oswald,' who was lightly whiskered, who was dirty, whose hair was ruffled up. I did not honestly know Lee Harrey Oswald. "If I was going to point an,

"If I-was going to point an; accusing finger, I wanted to

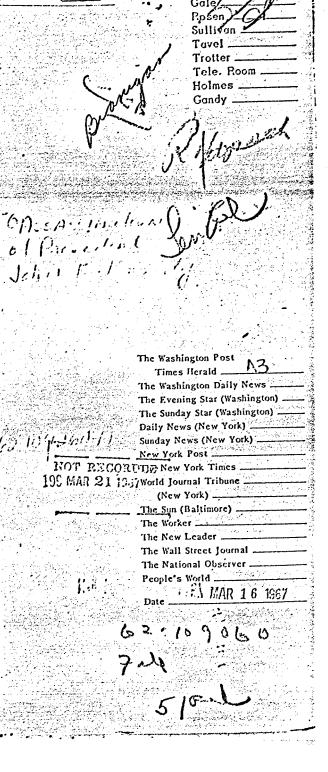
be sure." At the hearing's first day, Russo, a graduate of Loyola University, swore that he heard Ferrie outling a plot to kill Mr. Kennedy "in mid-September" of 1953 with "Leon Oswald" and "Clem Bertrand" sitting in on the meeting as willing students.

Russo, however, was vague about how he got to Ferrie's apartment, who else might have been with him, and whom he had been expecting to take him home.

Russo blandly added that he wasn't even sure that the Dave Ferrie widely publicized as under Investigation by Garrison was the Dave Ferrie he knew, although he testified at other points that he had known the pilot for years. At another point, he said he had visited Ferrie's apartment "30 to 40 times," but was unfamillar with most of the rooms, Russo said he first met Fer-

Russo said he first met Ferrie about seven years ago through a friend, Al Landry, who had run away from home. Russo said Landry had fallen under Ferrie's influence and that he had promised to try to break the two apart. Russo said he did, rousing Ferrie's

anger. "IIe (Ferric) said, 'Well, I'm going to get you for that," Russo testified. Russo has said in the past that he considered this a threat to his life, but today asserted that he did not think Ferrie meant it that way.



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Russo avas also questioned sharply about a television m' terview he granted Feb. 24 that apparently contradicted his testimony in court. In the interview, he said he had never known Lee Harvey Oswald "until television of the assas-gination."

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"until television of the assas-sination." Russo remained unshaken in his claims, although to-day's testimony left them profoundly open to doubt. In Dallas, Oswald's widow, Marina, cast doubts of her own by saying she had not heard of Ferrie, Clay Shaw or "Bertrand." Now Marina Porter, she had been questioned by the Secret Service in 1963 about a "Mr. Farrie." This drew no response from her then either. The Secret Service apparently had been alerted by phone about Ferrie, who had been picked up in New Orleans on rumors that he might have been a getaway pollot. The FBI subsequently cleared him. cleared him.

A special three-Judge panel is conducting the hearing to determine whether to hold Shaw for trial.

Shaw for trial. The Judge had a sharp set to with Shaw's defense at-torney, F. Irvin Dymond, over Dymond's attempts to put the hefty £22 page Warren Com-mission report in the record. Rusco had testified that he lagt sew_Oswald at_Ferrie's

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epartment "somewhere around Ocumer or the end of Septem-ber." Russo said he was "almost sure" it was October, Dymond pointed out that Oswald had left New Orleans Sept. 25 and "never came back."

When proseculing attorneys complained that this remained to be proven, Dymond offered the Warnan report in out the Warren report in evi-dence, citing a Louisiana statute making it admissable

in any state court. "You mean to say it's your interpretation that you can put the whole report in evi-dence," Judge Bagert asked incredulously.

Dymond said it was indeed. "Well, you're wrong," the Judge said. "I'm going to tell you you're wrong. You're overruled."

By the time Russo left the stand for the day, Garrison's men had already decided to issue a subpoena for a new witness: James R. Lewallen, a friend of Ferrie's, who once lived in a rooming house next door to Shaw's spartment in the French Quarter.