

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

By George Lardner Jr.  
Washington Post Staff Writer

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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.

But now, he declared in a long day of cross-examination, 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 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 known 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 investigators, first in Baton Rouge and later here.

This was after Garrison had promised that "arrests will be made . . . convictions obtained" 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 Harvey Oswald.

"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 1963 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 unfamiliar with most of the rooms.

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.

"He (Ferrie) 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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- DeLoach
- Mohr
- Casper
- Callahan
- Conrad
- Felt
- Gale
- Rosen
- Sullivan
- Tavel
- Trotter
- Tele. Room
- Holmes
- Gandy

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*On a... of President John F. Kennedy*

- The Washington Post \_\_\_\_\_
- Times Herald 13
- The Washington Daily News \_\_\_\_\_
- The Evening Star (Washington) \_\_\_\_\_
- The Sunday Star (Washington) \_\_\_\_\_
- Daily News (New York) \_\_\_\_\_
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- The Worker \_\_\_\_\_
- The New Leader \_\_\_\_\_
- The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_
- The National Observer \_\_\_\_\_
- People's World \_\_\_\_\_
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Russo was also questioned sharply about a television interview 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 assassination."

Russo remained unshaken in his claims, although today'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. Ferrie." 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 pilot. The FBI subsequently cleared him.

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

The judge had a sharp set-to with Shaw's defense attorney, F. Irvin Dymond, over Dymond's attempts to put the hefty 822-page Warren Commission report in the record.

Russo had testified that he last saw Oswald at Ferrie's

apartment "somewhere around October or the end of September." 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 prosecuting attorneys complained that this remained to be proven, Dymond offered the Warren report in evidence, citing a Louisiana statute making it admissible in any state court.

"You mean to say it's your interpretation that you can put the whole report in evidence," 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 apartment in the French Quarter.