

Another JFK-linked death as conspiracy evidence mounts

BY WILLIAM TURNER

New evidence—accented by a mysterious death—is rapidly turning the case that the Warren Commission couldn't solve into a climatic drama in Orleans Parish, Louisiana.

The un-opportune death of the New Orleans commercial pilot, David William Ferrie, and the simultaneous disclosure by Orleans Parish District Attorney Jim Garrison that he was going to arrest Ferrie this week in connection with the Kennedy assassination has raised the curtain higher on this new and third act of the affair.

Ferrie was found dead in bed on February 22, some 31 hours after being exhaustively interviewed by Garrison. The coroner ascribed death to a ruptured blood vessel at the base of the brain. Because of pills at the bedside, Garrison termed it a suicide.

It might also be pointed out that a competently administered karate chop to the neck, such as possibly killed another assassination figure Jim Koethe of the Dallas Times-Herald, could cause a fatal embolism in the brain vessels.

Although Ferrie had denied

knowing Lee Harvey Oswald, a possible connection was through mutual activity in the New Orleans Civil Air Patrol.

When first interrogated by New Orleans authorities in 1963, Ferrie had admitted he traveled to Texas on the afternoon of the assassination, but claimed that it was on a spontaneous hunting trip that did not include Dallas.

Garrison has announced that he had planned to arrest Ferrie in about a week, although he did not connect the suspect with any aircraft that might have been used

in a getaway plan. In this respect, the inquiry into the assassination that has been conducted by Ramparts magazine has determined that two witnesses observed a twin engine private plane, engines idling, in a field next to the highway bounding Red Bird airport, a field used primarily by business and pleasure aircraft that is situated just south of Dallas' Oak Cliff area. The witnesses took particular note of the plane because of its location well away from the paved runways and assess strips.

The death of Ferrie adds one more name to the list of mysterious deaths of persons in some way touched by the assassination which was reported in the November issue of Ramparts magazine.

Additional fuel has been heaped on the fire by a new development in the strange death of Thomas Henry Killam, one of those on the Ramparts list. Killam was the husband of Wanda Joyce Killam, a long-time employee of Jack Ruby in the Carousel Club, and a close friend of one John Carter, who

resided in the same rooming house as Oswald. He left Dallas after the assassination and wandered through Florida, telling his wife he was being hounded by "federal agents." Two days before his death he called his brother Earl Killam in Dallas and stated: "I'm a dead man. I've run as far as I'm going to run."

On the day of his death, March 17, 1964, in Pensacola, he was summoned from bed by an unidentified phone caller and later was found, his throat fatally cut, in front of a broken store window. At first adjudged suicide, Pensacola

resided in the same rooming house as Oswald. He left Dallas after the assassination and wandered through Florida, telling his wife he was being hounded by "federal agents." Two days before his death he called his brother Earl Killam in Dallas and stated: "I'm a dead man. I've run as far as I'm going to run."

On the day of his death, March 17, 1964, in Pensacola, he was summoned from bed by an unidentified phone caller and later was found, his throat fatally cut, in front of a broken store window. At first adjudged suicide, Pensacola authorities have re-opened the case in the light of recent develop-

ments.

Garrison's probe has included the questioning of a state prison inmate, a Cuban who formerly lived close to Oswald in New Orleans; a coffee house proprietor whose establishment reportedly was frequented by Oswald and Cu-

bans; and a private detective. The latter, a man named David Lewis, knew Oswald in New Orleans as well as five Cubans who were fanatically anti-Castro; Lewis says he fears for his life and has asked for police protection.

Assassination buffs have long felt that New Orleans, along with Miami, Houston and Mexico City, may well hide the key to unlock the Pandora's Box. Apparently Garrison is on the spoor of an anti-Castro element, and he has developed the intriguing theory that Oswald was associated with this element, had gone to Mexico City with the intent of obtaining a Cuban visa to travel to Havana to assassinate Castro, and, failing that, had been importuned to turn to the President.

According to the State-Item, Garrison has been in Miami recently hunting for a "physically powerful and dangerous" Cuban man who "is believed to be one of a group of Cubans who reportedly hid behind a billboard on the parade route in Dallas Nov. 22, 1963."

The Warren Commission volumes contain the testimony of a Cuban refugee, Mrs. Sylvia Odio, whose father allegedly is still a Castro prisoner on the Isle of Pines.

According to Mrs. Odio, Oswald appeared at her Dallas apartment several weeks before the assassination accompanied by two Latin men who identified themselves as Leopoldo and Angelo. She did not previously know the three.

The next day, she said, Leopoldo telephoned her and mentioned that Oswald had been in the Marine Corps and had said that Cubans should have assassinated President Kennedy for his role in the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Leopoldo also assertedly said that he and his companions had just come from New Orleans and were about to leave on another trip.

Another fascinating angle to New Orleans is the testimony of Attorney Dean Andrews that an enigmatic figure using the name

Clay Bertrand had brought Oswald to his office for legal counsel. After the assassination Bertrand telephoned Andrews asking him to defend Oswald. Although Andrews saw Bertrand in a New Orleans bar on one occasion afterward, the man avoided contact and slipped out a rear door. Mark Lane, the Commission's most persistent critic, contends that Andrews, a Louisiana Democratic functionary, agreed to an interview but reneged after "contacting the White House" and being told not to talk. EWO

PERSONALITY IN THE NEWS

Judge in Shaw Case Appreciates Import

Exclusive to The Times from a Staff Writer

NEW ORLEANS —

There, in the courtroom's front row Tuesday, you are certain to find Mrs. Philomene Bagert and the other members of her sewing circle.

The events which will unfold before them could be as portentous as any in recent American history.

The presence of a sewing circle's dowagers in the best seats in the house at such a significant event might seem preposterous to some. But not to Mrs. Bagert.

That's because she is the wife of Criminal District Court Judge Bernard J. Bagert, head of a three judge panel which will hear evidence Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison claims establishes a plot to murder President John F. Kennedy.

Garrison has arrested Clay L. Shaw, New Orleans businessman, and has questioned several others in his investigation of the alleged assassination plot. Garrison has stated that David W. Ferrie, who was found dead Feb. 22 in his apartment here, was part of a conspiracy involving Shaw and Lee Harvey Oswald.

Import of Case Felt

But the presence of the sewing circle does not imply an unawareness of the hearing's import on the part of Judge Bagert. Since becoming involved, he has been so immersed in the magnitude of the case he has barely had time to conduct his court's normal activities.

And, lest anyone think Bagert, 54, is a soft man in the courtroom it should be pointed out that he recently sentenced a defendant to 30 years in prison for an armed robbery that netted the gunman 85 cents.

Bagert also has laid down a no-nonsense set of

"rules governing conduct of news media, spectators, witnesses, interested parties . . ."

By doing so, Bagert has become engulfed in the increasingly controversial limitations of press coverage of trials.

Thus, from the anonymity of the Criminal District Court of the Parish of Orleans, Division H, Bagert has rocketed into national limelight.

Despite the furore, Bagert and his staff have handled a mass of details, scores of telephone calls and the regular routine with a minimum of difficulty.

The judge, a leading figure here in the American Legion, has behind his desk a blown-up photograph of the LST he served on during four years of world War II. It serves to steady him during trying moments.

"I've had cases where many complicated legal angles were involved but none where the impact could be so great as the one before me now," he said.

Tension, Pressure

"Never did I envision so much publicity of any case I might handle.

"The tensions and pressures, just thinking about this thing are tremendous. but I'm relieved about one thing: It's not going to be



Judge Bernard J. Bagert
(A photo)

my duty to find anyone guilty or innocent. This is a preliminary hearing and the case before me and the other two judges sitting with me is only to find whether there is probable cause to send it to trial.

Bagert, who has generously mixed politics with a law practice that began in 1935 here, admits to a "checkered career." But he says so far he has not felt any political pressure. "And I got a couple of good friends in the White House."

Sitting with Bagert will be two other Criminal Court judges, Malcolm V. O'Hara and Matthew S. Braniff. O'Hara is a former district attorney who ran against Garrison in 1965 and was trounced at the polls.

Bagert is one of eight Criminal Court judges in the huge, old Criminal Court Building that also houses Garrison's office. He was among the eight judges whom Garrison

compared to the "sacred cows of New Delhi" during a feud between the jurists and the district attorney recently.

Bagert became involved in the Garrison case two weeks ago because he happened to be acting magistrate the day Garrison's office asked for a preliminary hearing.

Bagert granted the request and in accordance with court custom set the hearing date for Tuesday.

Served Democrats

Bagert practiced law in New Orleans until 1956, when he was appointed a Criminal Court judge. He was elected to a 12-year term in 1960 and he has served on the State Central Committee of the Democratic Party.

He and his wife have four children, Bernard J., Bonnie Louise, Broderick Armand and Barbara Lourdes.

Bagert served in the Coast Guard during World War II and saw action in North Africa, Sicily and Salerno and took part in the invasions of Anzio and Normandy.

One of his mementos of those days is a yellowing leaflet, one of thousands distributed to the invasion troops by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower just before the Normandy Beach landing. It says, in part:

"Soldiers, sailors and

airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Forces — you are about to embark upon the great crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you."

Those same eyes will be fastened upon him again Tuesday.