

# Witness Admits Kennedy 'Plot' Might Have Been 'Bull Session'

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NEW ORLEANS — Perry Raymond Russo Monday retold his story of overhearing Clay L. Shaw and Lee Harvey Oswald plot to kill John F. Kennedy in 1963 but conceded under cross-examination that the discussion may have been just an "inconsequential bull session."

Russo's story two years ago was the basis for Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison's charging Shaw, now on trial in Criminal District Court here, with conspiring to murder the President.

It also led to:

—A three-judge panel's holding Shaw, 55-year-old New Orleans civic leader, to answer on the charge following a preliminary hearing during which Russo was Garrison's premier witness.

—A grand jury's indicting Shaw after hearing Russo, 27, testify before it.

Russo claims to have attended a party in September, 1963, in the apartment of the late David W. Ferrie, an eccentric ex-airline pilot. During it, he said, Shaw, Ferrie and Oswald talked about how Mr. Kennedy could be killed and settled upon catching him in a cross fire.

They also considered possible escape routes and that one of the conspirators would have to be relegated to the role of a "scapegoat," Russo testified, adding:

"As soon as the assassination was performed, there could be an escape by flight. To Brazil or Cuba. And, if Brazil, they would have to stop to refuel in Mexico."

Russo said Shaw, whom he knew then only as "Clem Bertrand" objected to the plan, saying that "the police would be everywhere."

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quential bull session rather than a conspiracy?" Dymond asked Russo.

Alcock objected to the question, and Judge Haggerty told Dymond to rephrase it, which he did by saying: "Couldn't it just as well have been an inconsequential bull session rather than anything serious?"

"Yes," Russo answered.

Dymond also drew from Russo the admission that he had told Baton Rouge interviewers that he had never heard of Oswald before the assassination of Mr. Kennedy. During the preliminary hearing in March, 1967, he had said that Ferrie had introduced him to Oswald by the name of "Leon Oswald" and that Ferrie had described Oswald as his "roommate."

## Unspoken Issue

Monday marked the first time that a publicly unspoken undercurrent which has figured in the Garrison investigation since its start came out into the open: homosexuality.

First there came an airing of Ferrie's homosexual proclivities. Then a memorandum on the first interview by a Garrison representative with Russo in Baton Rouge alluded to the subject in reference to Shaw.

In the memorandum prepared for Garrison by Asst. Dist. Atty. Andrew Sciambra, Russo is quoted as saying he had seen Shaw, whose identity he did not know then, when President Kennedy spoke at a wharf dedication here in 1962. Russo claimed his attention was attracted to Shaw because he seemed

to be the only person attending who did not watch the President as he spoke, but "was just looking around. It struck me funny at the time that he wouldn't be looking at him."

The memo quoted Russo as saying he also "particu-

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Russo claimed Oswald replied: "Shut up! Ferrie knows what he's doing, he's the pilot." Shaw, testified Russo, offered the opinion that Ferrie was a "washed-up pilot."

Asked by Asst. Dist. Atty. James Alcock how the discussion had begun during an informal party after all other guests but he, Ferrie, Oswald and Shaw had left, Russo replied: "Well, Ferrie said he was going to kill the President but he had said that before."

F. Irvin Dymond, Shaw's chief counsel, seized on that remark during cross-examination and exploited it.

Dymond observed that Russo had told of his friendship with Ferrie in Baton Rouge, where he was living in 1967, to a newspaper reporter and two television commentators before traveling to New Orleans in late February of that year to tell his story to Garrison.

## Early Interviews

Dymond asked if Russo,

in any of his Baton Rouge interviews, ever had mentioned attending the party at Ferrie's, overhearing an assassination discussion or said he had met either Shaw or Oswald.

To each question Russo, sipping a soft drink from a can on the witness stand, replied he had not.

"The fact is, Mr. Russo, you really didn't take it seriously, did you?" Dymond asked.

Alcock objected to the question, and Judge Edward Haggerty Jr. sustained him.

But Dymond continued probing and elicited from Russo the admission that he always had thought Ferrie "screwy" and "a paradox . . . prone to the fantastic . . . you never know whether or not to believe him."

## Witness Nods

"Mr. Russo, are you inferring (sic) he was on the crazy side?" Dymond asked. Russo nodded affirmatively.

"Couldn't it (the discussion at the party) just as well have been an inconse-

\* larly remembered seeing this guy because he was apparently a queer . . . (He) wore tight pants like a lot of queers in the French Quarter." Shaw has a reputation among this city's elite for his conservative, impeccably tailored attire.

The defense made the point that Sciambra in the memo following the first interview with Russo and before the latter ever met with Garrison made no mention of the alleged conspiratorial party.

Russo testified he had mentioned it to Sciambra but only fleetingly because he thought the assistant district attorney was chiefly interested in learning about Ferrie's "philosophy."

Dymond established that Russo was familiar with details of the assassination, Garrison's investigation and the role the district attorney thought Ferrie played in it. After which he asked Russo in disbelief, "Knowing all these things you thought the philosophy of David Ferrie was the big deal he (Sciambra) wanted to talk to you about?"

Russo, now a book salesman whose product is "Great Books of the Western World," nodded yes.

Dymond asked Russo to look at the memo and Russo admitted he found a number of errors in it but said they could be explained by Sciambra's preoccupation with getting the full story. When Dymond observed that, as Russo ticked them off, he had counted "approximately 26 errors," Russo noted that Sciambra had made very few notes.

The memo also led Dymond into sharp questioning about Russo's identifying Ferrie's roommate as Oswald from a photo.

The picture showed Oswald clean-shaven, while in the three or four times Russo claimed to have met him he said he was dirty and had "a three or four day" growth of "whiskers" but not quite a beard.

In Baton Rouge before

coming to New Orleans, he said, he and Sciambra both had tried penciling whiskers on the Oswald photo but that he had not been satisfied with the identification. "Sciambra didn't know how to draw, and I tried and couldn't. I don't even have good handwriting," Russo explained.

#### Picture Changed

He made the identification here after a police artist doctored the picture, Russo testified. "But the final photo was not perfect by any means," he added. "But the day was over and I was tired."

Russo also sharply modified his story of who had accompanied him to Ferrie's the night of the alleged party.

During the preliminary

hearing, he had insisted a former girlfriend, Sandra Moffett, had accompanied him.

She is now Mrs. Harold McMaines of Des Moines and has denied ever having attended such a party. She has said she is afraid to come to New Orleans to testify because she fears Garrison will charge her with perjury.

Monday, Russo testified he wasn't certain anyone accompanied him to the party, but that he believed "some of the people with whom I was associating at the time did."

When Dymond pointed out that Russo had testified at the preliminary hearing that Mrs. Mc-

—Maines "definitely" had accompanied him, Russo replied that Dymond had

"forced" him into the statement with misleading questions two years ago.