

Witness Tells of Doubt in Shaw Identification

Russo Also Testifies He Didn't Hear Him Actually 'Agree' to Assassinate Kennedy

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NEW ORLEANS—Per-
ray Raymond Russo, who
claims he attended a party
in 1963 and overheard a
plot to kill President John
F. Kennedy, admitted
Tuesday he had told a
New Orleans police ser-
geant in June, 1967:

"If I had to give a yes or
no answer to whether
(Clay) Shaw was at the
party, I would have to say
no."

Russo also conceded
Tuesday that he had never
heard Shaw or Lee Har-
vey Oswald actually
"agree" to assassinate
Kennedy, and that he told
the policeman he did not
consider the conversation
he overheard a "legitimate
plot."

Russo's story two years
ago about the party was
the basis for Dist. Atty.
Jim Garrison's charge that
Shaw conspired to assassinate
the President and a
subsequent grand jury
indictment of the 55-year-
old New Orleans civic
leader. Shaw's trial on the
charge now is in its fourth
week.

'Agreement' Idea

Under Louisiana law to
convict Shaw, Garrison
must convince nine of the
12 jurors that Shaw know-
ingly entered into an
"agreement" or "combina-
tion" to assassinate the
President, plus establish-
ing that an act was carried
out to accomplish the
deed.

Russo's admissions came
as Shaw's chief counsel, F.
Irvin Dymond, for a se-
cond straight day whittled
away at Russo's credibil-
ity.

Russo, a 27-year-old
book salesman, was spruce
and confident at the day's

start. By adjournment,
however, he appeared
tired and drawn and fre-
quently replied in anger to
Dymond's cross-examina-
tion.

However, he stuck by
his story that Shaw was
the man he had been
introduced to in mid-Sep-
tember, 1963, as "Clem
Bertrand" in the late Da-
vid Ferrie's apartment,
and that Shaw, Ferrie and
Oswald had "talked" about
a s s assassinating Kennedy.
(Jack Ruby slew Oswald
two days after the assas-
sination. Ferrie died in
1967.)

Did anyone actually

agree to kill John F.
Kennedy?" Dymond
asked.

Russo replied that Fer-
rie had said, "We will kill
him," but he acknow-
ledged that Ferrie had
said that "many times
before" and it came as no
"great shock" to him be-
cause such outrageous
statements were "charac-
teristic" of Ferrie.

Did he hear Oswald,
whom he said was intro-
duced to him then as
"Leon Oswald," agree to
kill Kennedy? "No," re-
plied Russo. Did "Ber-
trand?" "No," replied Rus-
so.

"Then you never heard
anybody agree to kill the
President?" asked Dy-
mond.

"The problem is the
word 'agree,'" said Russo.
"They talked about it . . .
I don't remember anybody
saying, 'Yes, this is the
time to do it. Let's do it
this way.'"

Speaks Warmly

During later cross-exa-

mination, Russo said vene-
rently:

"I don't call them con-
spirators . . . I never use
that word.

"I never said anything
about conspiracy."

His remark to the police
sergeant was the result of
a Garrison proposal that
he take a lie detector test
—four months after his
allegations had led to
Shaw's being charged.
Russo said he had ex-
pressed the desire to meet
the polygraph operator,
Police Sgt. Edwin O'Don-
nell, before taking the test,
which reportedly proved
inconclusive.

Russo admitted that
during the hour to hour-
and-a-half he spent with
O'Donnell he said he
wished he "never had
gotten involved," and, in
reply to a question had
responded:

"You want to know the
truth? . . . I don't know if
he (Shaw) was ever there
or not . . . If I had to give
a yes or no answer, whe-
ther Shaw was at the
party, I would have to say
no."

Russo testified that
while those were not his
exact words they captured
the "essence" of what he
told O'Donnell.

Russo also admitted that

after a preliminary hear-
ing in 1967, in which his
testimony led a three-
judge panel to hold Shaw
for trial, he told James
Phelan of Long Beach, a
writer:

He "did not know the
difference between fanta-
sy and reality."

"If Garrison knew
what I told my priest in
Baton Rouge after the
Shaw hearing he would go
through the ceiling."

That he would like to
"sit down alone in the
same room with Shaw,
listen to him breathe and
talk, so I can resolve my
doubts about the identity
of Shaw."

'I Lied to You'

—"I lied to you when I
told you I didn't want to
talk to Shaw. I was afraid

if I talked to him I would know it was not the man."

Russo admitted asking Phelan to arrange a confrontation between him and Shaw because he thought he was "100%

certain" of his identification, but he was not "1,000%."

"One thousand per cent," said Russo, is something you can never really reach . . . doubts are negative, Mr. Dymond. The positive is that you'd rather be more sure than you are sure."

Russo also said he was being "pressured" by Phelan and two television reporters to "alter" his story. He identified the latter as Walter Sheridan of NBC, a former Justice Department investigator, and Richard Townley of New Orleans' WDSU-TV, an NBC affiliate.

He described the three men as "midgets out to slay the dragon (Garrison)," and contended:

"Sheridan and Townley didn't try to report the news at all . . . They tried to create it. They told me they were going to cut Garrison down, so he couldn't get elected dog catcher."

Russo's remarks about

the telecasters came after he said he told Layton Martens, who traveled to Texas with Ferrie the day of the assassination:

"This is the most blown-up and confused situation I have ever seen . . . I don't think any of these people involved except Sheridan and Townley should be convicted."

Again, Russo insisted he was reacting from "pressure" put on him by Sheridan, Townley and Phelan, all of whom insisted that Garrison had a faculty of turning on people once he had "used" them, and if Shaw weren't convicted Garrison would "lobber" him.

Talk With Phelan

He also admitted he had allowed Garrison to install an electronic listening device in his residence to "find out how far" Phelan and other newsmen "would go."

He conceded he had talked with Phelan about

weaknesses and holes" in his story of the party, but he denied telling George Lardner Jr., a writer for the Washington Post: "I'm willing to disclose the weaknesses for a price."

The entire Tuesday session was devoted almost entirely to cross-examination, and during it Dymond also drew from Russo the admission that he had been under "psychiatric treatment" during his first year in college, 1959. It lasted, he said, "12 to 18 months." He said he also had consulted his psychiatrist by telephone once in 1963 and again in 1965 "when I wanted to talk."

"Have you ever at-

tempted to commit suicide?" Dymond asked, at the close of his cross-examination. "No," replied Russo.

"Do you know a Mike Fitzpatrick?"

"Yes."

"Didn't he come to your home in 1963 and find your wrist cut and blood spotting the carpet?"

"I deny that," replied Russo.

"That is all," said Dymond. *end*