

Garrison and the CIA

While I was in Washington, working at the National Archives, I met a girl who worked for the CIA. I dated her for a while; she was still only a trainee, although her father was a career man with the agency. One day Garrison subpoenaed the director of the CIA, Richard Helms, and started to level accusations of complicity in the assassination at the CIA. "What's all this about?" my friend asked me. "I don't know," I said. "I'll have to find out when I get back to New Orleans."

Over a year and a half later, in December 1968, I returned to Washington for a short Christmas vacation. I decided to call up my friend at the CIA, for old times' sake. I had neither seen her nor heard from her during the intervening period. I went over to see her at her apartment in Alexandria. "What was all that about the CIA?" she asked. "Nothing there," I told her. "Garrison was more or less making it up as he went along."

Now, several months after the trial of Clay Shaw, during which not one scrap of evidence was produced to link either Shaw to the CIA or the CIA to the assassination, I still find that many people one meets believe—or at any rate want to believe—that Garrison "had something" on the CIA. It therefore seems worth while to say something here about this aspect of Garrison's investigation.

Garrison started to make accusations against the CIA very shortly after he hired Bill Boxley to work as an investigator on the case. Boxley (whose real name is Bill Wood) had worked for the CIA in the '50s, and it was he who first told Garrison that the CIA, at the very least, was not above engineering an assassination to achieve its ends. He told Garrison that it was not unthinkable that the CIA may have been behind this assassination. At the same time, it should be borne in mind, this was the season for iconoclasm as far as the CIA was concerned. The Ramparts NSA-CIA expose had only recently been published. Bill Gurvich, who was working with Garrison at this time, and later quit, reports that Garrison told him that the advantage of attacking the CIA was that they "won't answer back." In truth, accusing the CIA of assassinating the President is to take a position which is not easily refutable. In the face of such an accusation, how could the CIA deny they had done it?

At about the same time as Boxley was hired, I sent to New Orleans the list of classified documents from the National Archives, which included over 50 withheld CIA documents. Garrison was very interested in this list. One day shortly after I sent this list to New Orleans I called Ivon routinely and I was immediately transferred to Garrison. He expressed great interest in the titles of the CIA documents, and asked me if there was any way he could get to see them. I told him there was no way, as far as I knew, and subsequently, of course, Garrison never did see any of the classified files; he therefore had no reason to believe that they contained any information which would incriminate the CIA, other than the fact of their being classified. (In fact, it is obviously absurd to imagine that the CIA or any other agency would type up reports which incriminated itself in the assassination of a President and then calmly send these reports off to the National Archives with a request that they be kept classified.)

Another factor which contributed to Garrison's (and the public's) belief that the CIA was somehow connected with the assassination was the case of Gordon Novel. Novel had been temporarily employed by Garrison as an eavesdropping technician. He provided Garrison with some information about an alleged raid on a munitions bunker in Houma, La., which—according to Novel, David Ferrie and Cuban exile leader Sergio Arcacha Smith had been involved in. The Garrison learned that Novel had been dealing with NBC investigators working on the Garrison case and he subpoenaed Novel to appear before the Grand Jury. Novel promptly fled to Ohio. His lawyer then stated that Novel had at one time worked for the CIA—a statement which received prominent coverage in the press. Whether or not Novel had had any

connections with the CIA, however, (and he denied that he had,) he had no connection with the assassination. Garrison himself admitted as much to a lawyer from Playboy who came to New Orleans after Novel sued that magazine for libel.

Garrison's initial accusation against the CIA was that they were concealing evidence about the assassination. A photograph appears in the 26 volumes of the Warren Report of an unidentified man which was, according to Warren Commission counsel Wesley Liebeler, taken by the CIA outside the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City. Supposedly, the man was Oswald, and the picture was forwarded to the FBI office in Dallas. Obviously, however, the man depicted in the picture is not Oswald. Garrison therefore hypothesized that the original picture had shown Oswald in the company of this man, who was, Garrison guessed, a CIA agent. Garrison then subpoenaed the director of the CIA and directed him to produce this hypothetical photograph.

The U.S. Marshal in Washington returned this subpoena unexecuted, and the CIA then sent a letter to Judge Bagert (the judge in charge of the Orleans Parish grand jury at that time,) in which they responded at length to Garrison's charge:

"We have been made aware of the contents of the subpoena and in particular that it requests production of a photograph stated to have been taken in early autumn 1963 of Lee Harvey Oswald as he departed from the Cuban Embassy in Mexico accompanied by a Latin individual. In the interest of comity and cooperation which is customary between the Federal Government and state authorities, I thought it would be appropriate to advise you of the following information:

"Because of the publicity which has surrounded the Orleans Parish Grand Jury proceedings, we have recently carried out an exhaustive search of the files of the Central Intelligence Agency for any picture of Lee Harvey Oswald taken in Mexico. As a result of this search, I can state categorically that the files of this agency do not contain, and never have contained, any such picture of Lee Harvey Oswald taken in Mexico and that we have no information whatsoever that any such photograph ever existed. To the best of our knowledge and information, therefore, there is no such photograph. Furthermore, the photograph which is printed in the Warren Report never contained more than one figure, and the figure in the photograph depicts an individual who, to our knowledge, has not been identified. Consequently, we have no record of any photograph that answers in any way the description of the one we understand was requested in the subpoena.

"I hope you will accept this information in this form in the spirit of cooperation in which it is proffered."

And in truth, Garrison never did have any reason to believe that such a photograph ever existed.

After receiving this letter, Garrison progressively escalated his charges against the CIA, culminating in an appearance on the Johnny Carson show during which he said that "the Central Intelligence Agency was deeply involved in the assassination."

On what evidence were these charges based? Most of the information at Garrison's disposal was similar in type to the photograph alluded to above, resulting in the inference that the CIA was concealing evidence. Nearly all of Garrison's ~~ex~~ "evidence" about the CIA was in fact drawn either from the Warren Report or documents on file in the National Archives. He culled many suggestive snippets of information—mostly pertaining to Lee Harvey Oswald—and proceeded to enlarge upon them in his own mind and present them to the press in the form of definitely established facts. With the exception of Bill Boxley, who frequently encouraged this kind of speculation, no one in the DA's

office took these pronouncements about the CIA seriously; in fact they privately deplored them since they would inevitably result—when the Clay Shaw case came to trial—in a wide disparity between Garrison's public statements and his courtroom performance which would embarrass the office. At one point, Jim Alcock advised Garrison that this was the way people in the office felt. Nevertheless, Garrison, supremely confident both that Shaw would never be brought to trial, and (I do not doubt), that what he was saying was true, continued to make sweeping statements to the press about the CIA and the Federal Government.

In any event, it is beyond the scope of this book to go into the details of material which can be found in the Warren Report which suggest that there may have been more to Oswald than met the eye—that he may in fact have had ties with a Federal agency, in however minor a capacity. Much of this material has already been encompassed by William Turner in two Ramparts articles (June, 1967, and January, 1968.) This is precisely the material which Garrison then extrapolated from when he stated publicly that the CIA was "deeply involved" in the assassination. Quite clearly, however, this public evidence—the evidence drawn from the Warren Report and the National Archives—does not warrant such a conclusion. (About all one can say is that Oswald might have been employed at one time by a Federal agency. There is no evidence to connect such an agency with the assassination, however. For a good presentation of the kind of evidence which leads to this conclusion about Oswald, see Chapter 19 of Sylvia Meagher's book, Accessories After The Fact: 'Oswald and the State Department'.)

Therefore, ~~didn't~~ the question is, did Garrison have any evidence in his own files which might have warranted the grave accusations he made publicly? Anticipating that this question would some day arise with respect to the Garrison investigation, I one day made an inventory of all the items in the file entitled 'Central Intelligence Agency' which was kept along with the other files in my office. I made this inventory in July, 1968, that is, long after Garrison had accused the CIA of involvement in the assassination.

At this time, Garrison's CIA file included 33 items, which I listed briefly on two sheets of yellow legal paper. I note that these 33 items can be broken down as follows:

- 12 documents already in the public prints, ie newspaper articles magazine articles, pages from books, etc. (eg. "Drew Pearson column, Jan 23, 1963: Kennedy Has Chance To End Cold War.")
- 2 Subpoenas, (of Richard Helms and Allan Dulles.)
- 4 letters to Garrison from citizens unconnected with the probe, which include speculation about the CIA.
- 2 Documents from the National Archives, including one classified CIA document which the CIA declassified on receipt of an inquiry by Paul Hoch, a West Coast researcher, who then sent the document to the DA's office.
- 1 transcript of a conversation with a subject, not named, who claimed to be an ex-CIA agent. (An incomprehensible document.)
- 1 analysis by Ray Marcus, an independent researcher, of Itek Corp's finding that one frame from the Orville Nix movie taken in Dealey Plaza does not depict a gunman on the grassy knoll. (Marcus disagreed with the finding.)
- 11 memoranda either by Garrison or his investigators.

These 11 memos can be broken down as follows:

2 by Garrison:

(1) Jan 15, 1968 re CIA Aspects/William Cuthbert Brady, in which Garrison notes that Brady was arrested and charged with a crime against

naturex in New Orleans in Augst, 1963, but the records have been removed from the police file. Left city with "unseemly haste" after the assassination. Reported holding "right wing seminars" in Greenwich Village. Used to live on Burgundy St in an apartment owned by Clay Shaw. "In short, Brady appears to be another Novel, Beckham, Thornley--another CIA bag man and courier."

(2) Feb 16, 1968 re Post Office Boxes. A list of those figuring in G's investigation who held post office boxes--seen as a cover arrangement whereby CIA agents communicate with each other.

2 memos by Bill Turner.

(1) Jan 9, 1968 re "contact by former CIA agent"--who turned out to be Jim Rose who was later employed as an investigator by Garrison. Rose provided some information to the effect that "word was that Bradley was high--possibly even chief of station--of the Van Nuys CIA cell."

(2) Feb 16, 1968 memo re forthcoming Ramparts article on Che Guevera.

2 memos by me.

(1) June 26, 1967 re classified CIA files in the National Archives--ie a list of these files.

(2) Feb 16, 1968 memo re David Lewis, who said that Thomas Edward Beckham had told him that he worked for the CIA, and also for a colonel who worked for a "phoney SAC base" near Omaha, Nebraska.

2 memos by Bill Martin.

(1) ~~re~~ May 24, 1967 re CIA connections in the city of New Orleans. (No connection with the assassination.)

(2) May 26, 1967 recording of phone conversation between Bill Martin and Bill Boxley re "Gehlen apparatus".

1 memo by Andrew Sciambra

(re interview with a Mrs Kirkpatrick who said her son had said he was CIA, and knew who assassinated JFK, but also said he was in and out of East La. State (mental) hospital and Mandeville (mental hospital).

1 memo from Steve Jaffe

Jan 26, 1968 re Mrs Teo Brilliant, whose name occurred in Shaw's address book. She lived in the same building as the "Island Timber Co.", but Jim Rose was unable to purchase lumber through them.

1 memo from Lynn Loisel

Jan 2, 1968 re call from a private detective regarding one Augustinovich, a witness in Florida developed by Gary Sanders who said he had information that Oswald was CIA. (Augustinovich later dropped out of the picture when Garrison ~~dx~~ lost interest in him.)

This, then constituted the complete CIA file in July, 1968. It includes nothing that warrants the conclusion that the CIA was "deeply involved" in the assassination. In fact, looking through it, it is easy to see why Garrison's staff was generally embarrassed when he talked about CIA involvement.

On December 9, 1968, Bill Boxley was fired by Jim Garrison "after evidence recently developed by the District Attorney's office indicated current activity by him as an operative of the Central Intelligence Agency." For the record, I would like to make it clear that this accusation was not true. It was in fact one of the most cynical charges to emerge from the whole investigation. Boxley was one of Garrison's most loyal supporters until he was summarily and unexpectedly fired. It came about in this way.

On Thursday, December 5 I went in to the office, where I met Vincent Salandria who was down on a surprise visit. He was going through files in my office, and informed me quite bluntly that he had come to the conclusion that Boxley was a CIA agent and was going to get him fired. I remember thinking "good luck", because

that Boxley and Garrison were close friends. Salandria's sudden response was prompted by some investigative work Boxley was engaged in involving one Robert Perrin. Perrin was the former husband of Nancy Perrin Rich, a woman who had given some provocative testimony to the Warren Commission about Jack Ruby, by whom she had been briefly employed. She testified that Ruby had been involved in gun running activities. Her former husband had been found dead in bed in New Orleans in 1962, and his death was ruled suicide by arsenic poisoning. Boxley was involved in gathering information which suggested that his death may not have been suicide but murder. According to Salandria, Boxley had persuaded Garrison not only that this was murder, but had also persuaded him to make an arrest in connection with this alleged crime. Salandria felt that the evidence did not anything like warrant such a drastic step, and that Boxley was therefore duping his boss and encouraging him to make a fool of himself in the eyes of the world. Thus, Salandria felt, Boxley must be a CIA agent.

Salandria told me that Garrison should content himself with the conviction of Clay Shaw, which, he felt, would be a step in the right direction, but that any further arrests would simply serve to discredit Garrison. Therefore, he told me, he was going to get Boxley fired, adding that he would stay in New Orleans until this was accomplished. The only way to do this was to persuade Garrison that Boxley was a CIA agent.

The remainder of Garrison's staff working on the case did not oppose this move by Salandria; in fact they encouraged it because they also felt that Boxley had too much influence with Garrison and sometimes prompted rash actions by Garrison. Like Salandria they disagreed with Boxley's conclusions about the Perrin death and were afraid that this was going to result in one more arrest by Garrison. However, they saw this simply as an error of judgment rather than a deliberate attempt to undermine the investigation. Thus, seeing an opportunity to get rid of Boxley, they went along with Salandria's accusation that Boxley was a CIA agent, although none believed it privately. Confronted then by a united appeal both from his own staff and Salandria, Garrison was that weekend persuaded that Boxley was indeed CIA and fired him the following Monday.

Later on, after the Shaw trial, I had occasion to talk to Jim Alcock and Louis Ivon and I told them that I thought Boxley had been unfairly treated. Alcock said, "You know the way Jim is. That was the only way we could get rid of Boxley. The only ~~thing~~ way we could get Jim to listen was to persuade him that Boxley was a CIA agent. Of course, I don't believe Boxley was an agent, but he was giving Jim so much bull we had to get rid of him somehow."

Many of Garrison's supporters supported him precisely because they were attracted by what he ~~said~~ had been saying for so long about the CIA. Thus they eagerly awaited developments as the Clay Shaw trial began to unfold. Many were staggered when the state rested its case and the CIA had not once been mentioned in the presentation of the state's case. Pondering this, and recalling Garrison's confident statements in the past, ~~a surprising new theory began to develop which shows the lengths~~ the pro-Garrison, anti-CIA forces began to develop a surprising new theory which demonstrates the lengths some people will go ~~when they~~ to believe something when they want to believe it. The rumour began to circulate that Garrison himself was now ~~working~~ for the CIA. "Someone got to him," was the way you heard it put. In other words, these people believed that Garrison had in the first place uncovered a CIA plot, and was then persuaded to sweep it under the rug. It should hardly be necessary to take issue with such an absurd position, but in view of the widespread paranoia which underlies so much thinking these days, I shall categorically state that this rumour is not true. If Garrison had uncovered a CIA--or any other--plot, he would not have hesitated to uncover it. The truth is more straightforward, and more mundane: he never had any evidence against the CIA in the first place, as perusal of his CIA file should make clear.