

Garrison & JFK's assassination

The whole story & nothing but the whole story

by Ron Rosenbaum

It's official now. The legal proceedings of District Attorney Jim Garrison in the matter of the death of John F. Kennedy are officially over. On November 20 the Supreme Court ordered Garrison to cease prosecution of State of

Louisiana v. Clay L. Shaw. It was a perjury case. Clay L. Shaw perjured himself, according to Garrison, when he denied meeting Lee Harvey Oswald. It was the last active case in Garrison's six-year-old assassination investigation.

When the end came, Garrison did not take it quietly. Twenty-four hours after the adverse rul-

ing, he issued an intriguing nine-page statement.

On the first page Garrison promised to reveal, for the first time ever, "exactly how, why, and by whom President Kennedy was assassinated"—all the details which, Garrison maintained, restraints upon pre-trial publicity had forced him to keep quiet about until now. At last in this statement, said Garrison, he would unveil the whole story for the press and the public.

The press ignored it. The Supreme Court ruling of the day before barely rated one wire ser-

vice paragraph in most papers. Garrison's statement rated one paragraph less.

Ten days later a Xerox copy of the forlorn statement arrived in the mail at The Voice. On the top of the first page was a handwritten note: "Local press not interested. Perhaps you will be. J. G."

I was interested. I was particularly interested in names. In the six years since his investigation became public, Garrison had named a few names, even indicted two people as middle-level conspirators. But he had never, to my knowledge, named the men at the top and the bottom of the conspiracy he said he had uncovered—the men at the top who plotted and ordered the assassination, and the men at the bottom, the ones who actually fired the shots in Dallas on November 22, 1963.

In this farewell statement Garrison does name certain names; he hints at others, and he leaves certain others pointedly unnamed.

David M. Shoup, retired general of the Marines, is one name named. According to Garrison's statement, President Kennedy was murdered upon the direct orders of "the powerful military chieftains of the Pentagon—with the notable exception of the Marine Commandant General David Shoup who remained loyal to him—in concert with the dominant elements of the Central Intelligence Agency." (Italics mine.)

Garrison does not, however, go on to name the names of these "powerful military chieftains of the Pentagon" at the pinnacle of the conspiracy. Nevertheless by declaring General Shoup innocent, Garrison implicitly points his finger at the remaining four generals who comprised the Joint Chiefs of Staff in November 1963.

Then there is the name Lee Harvey Oswald. Oswald is mentioned in passing in Garrison's statement, but only as a "scape-

goat planted in the Texas School Book Depository . . . the instrument by which the government drew the eyes of the world away from its professional assassins."

And those "professional assassins." Garrison does not name them. From his statement it seems there were at least four of them: two riflemen firing from the grassy knoll in front of the President's limousine, and two firing from behind.

The names of those four Joint Chiefs of Staff are in the public domain. According to the World Almanac of 1964 they are: Maxwell Taylor, Earl Wheeler, Curtis Le May, and David McDonald.

But now that his last case is closed, the names of those four "professional assassins" are the private property of Jim Garrison.

On December 12 I placed a call to Garrison, hoping that, among other things, he would tell me the names of the men who pulled the triggers.

The first thing I did, however, when Garrison returned my call, was clear up the identity of the "powerful military chieftains." Were they in fact the Joint Chiefs of Staff sans Shoup? If so why didn't Garrison come right out and name them in his statement?

"Yes it was the Joint Chiefs," Garrison told me promptly. "It's been apparent to me that they've obviously been the instigating source. I don't name 'em by indi-

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viduals because any time I do that gives them an excuse to file \$5 million law suits against me all over the country. You can't imagine how that complicates your existence."

Garrison proceeded to develop for me his thesis that the Joint Chiefs ordered Kennedy's execution because he was standing in the way of their plans to expand the American venture in Vietnam. Their decision to murder Kennedy became final, according to Garrison, in the summer of 1963 when Kennedy browbeat General Maxwell Taylor and Defense Secretary McNamara into announcing pub-

licly that the U. S. was about to end its military commitment to South Vietnam, a policy which was reversed, Garrison believes, just 72 hours after Kennedy's funeral.

And the men who did the actual shooting, those "professional assassins": I confessed to Garrison that I was less interested in the global motivations of the four Joint Chiefs than I was in the worldly ambitions of the four hired killers he mentions in his statement. Who were they, and what had become of them?

"Well actually there were more than four," he told me. "You had four gunmen, but each one had an assistant gunman, and you had to have a man in charge, and you had to have a communications man, and—I didn't bother to go into it, but you had two people who created a diversion just as the parade rounded from Main."

Well, what about the man who fired the fatal shot? What was his name and what became of him?

"Well I have no way of knowing any of them down now. If I gave you, off the record, the name of one of the two who was firing from the grassy knoll, which is where the fatal shot came from, maybe you could track him down all right?"

"Okay," said I.

"All right?" said Garrison.

"Uh huh."

"I don't want it surfacing."

"Okay."

"All right. One of the men on the grassy knoll was named

"Um hum."

"_____ is a nickname. His full name is _____."

He carefully spelled the first and last names for me, explaining that the name is mentioned several times in the 26 Volumes of the Warren Commission Report, and misspelled more than once.

"Now the reason I mention that," he further explained, "is that quite often when they encounter key persons in the 26 volumes of the Warren Commission they will intentionally misspell his name to lead you astray. For example if you look in the index—just a quick example—Dave Ferrie is spelled F-a-r-r-i-e in the index. If you get that far then they refer you to the wrong volume. It's like swimmin' through molasses. So remember _____'s name is spelled ----- not ----- Now if you find him, you come to me and I'll tell you more about him."

Garrison did consent to tell me a little more about Mr. _____ any way, concluding by cautioning me that Mr. _____ may no longer still be alive.

"You see it's customary, at least through history it has happened, that in really major assassinations, the government has subsequently disposed of the actual assassins—put an end to them. But that would only be conjecture. I would think there would be

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an equal chance he's retired comfortably for life."

What about the other riflemen, I asked Garrison—does he know their names and what's become of them?

"As for the other names of the riflemen, we don't have the other names of the riflemen. We didn't push too hard to get the other names of the riflemen, because I knew there was not much I could do with them once we got them."

But as far as Jim Garrison is concerned there are no real mysteries left.

"Well I'm finished really," he told me. "Finished investigating long ago. There's no mysteries. Oh no, there are really none. When I began investigating I thought the problem was going to be to find out who killed Kennedy. I thought the problem was going to be to find out who killed him and that's not the problem at all. It wasn't that hard. You didn't have to be a genius to solve it. We just dug into this thing real deep. It wasn't so much we were geniuses, it was _____ we were the only game in the country. There just wasn't

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anyone else trying, so we had to end up finding out what happened. To make a long story short, for example, we came across—just to give you a rough idea—such things that seemed to be mysterious, like the Tippit slaying, cease to be mysterious. That was _____ again."

"_____ again?"

"Not Oswald. That was _____. And they describe him perfectly. But the people who describe _____ are not brought down to the identification to see Oswald

"Was _____ the one who fired the fatal shot?"

"I cannot say. Because I only

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Know that he was one of the two riflemen at the front."

Jim Garrison's term as district attorney has two more years to go. He was re-elected in 1970, even after he lost his case against Clay Shaw, but he lost a race for a State Supreme Court judgeship last June. Not long after the vote was in on that loss, Garrison's wife filed for a divorce. Close friends of Garrison believe his health is failing. He faces, this spring, a trial of Clay Shaw's \$5 million suit against him for malicious prosecution. Then there is a strange federal bribe-conspiracy indictment, still pending despite the recantation and mysterious behavior of Pershing Gervais, the chief informant against Garrison in the case. Garrison discusses troubles such as these with a fair degree of equanimity. "I don't know, maybe there's something wrong with me. They seem to have a way of scaring the hell out of everyone else. Of course I still got to go through with this fuckin' trial" (the Clay Shaw suit) "but hell, I knew they would charge me a price when I realized who was involved. But that's what the price is. So I'll pay the price."

It is only when Garrison talks about what he calls his "communication problem" that a note of helplessness, even despair, enters his voice. What he means by "communication problem" is that almost no one believes him

any more. No one even listens to him any more. He is paying the price for nothing. "I don't know anything more frustrating I'd rather not know what happened and have communications facilities available than know what happened and find that the national press does not want to hear. . . . I know the facts so clearly, you know what I mean, it's not my guess, it's not my feeling, it's so clear that—it's so goddam clear, and all of a sudden I find that you can't communicate it."

For the most part he has given up trying. For instance, he is very reluctant, he told me, to attempt to contact General Shoup, the man he cites as the lone innocent in the Pentagon cabal. "No," he told me. "No, I can't tell you what the government does to you when you get in their way. They do such a discreditation operation that I'm reluctant to try and contact a guy like that—he doesn't know me and all he does know is what a bum I am and so on. They're very efficient at that."

Nor will he make any attempt to reach the Kennedy family. "I've leaned over backwards to avoid contacting the Kennedys, because I feel like so many nuts have. . . ."
Garrison no longer trusts most of the private assassination investigators, the so-called "assassination buffs." At one point in our hour-long phone call, Garrison referred me to some point in "Heritage of Stone," his own book on the assassination, which led him to warn me about other books by critics of the Warren Commission. "Now my book is different from the other critics' books," Garrison told me. "My book led you somewhere—it told you basically where the cause lay. The other books—well, you've got to be very careful of books like Sylvia Meagher's book that do nothing but make things more confusing for you and take you nowhere."
Sylvia Meagher, for the umpteenth time, wrote "Accessories After the Fact," a detailed internal analysis of the 26 volumes of the Warren Report, an analysis admired by one school of assassination investigators as a most thorough and devastating compilation of the inaccuracies and inadequacies of the Warren Report evidence that Oswald was the lone assassin. Garrison warned me that preoccupation with that kind of research traps the unwary into a morass of details, condemns him forever to swimming through that swamp of molasses in pursuit of elusive details which lead only to further, murkier details, and never to the Truth. The Truth, Garrison told me, is reached only when near-sighted fascination with mere detail is abandoned, and events are looked at in "perspective" or in "context."
"You look at the assassination of Kennedy in the context of the Cold War and Vietnam and his throwing himself in the path of the war machine and you come to the conclusion that it had to be the Joint Chiefs who ordered it, just as you look at the shooting of Wallace in the context of the Democratic primary and the election and you begin to see what's behind it. . . ."
Garrison even hints that in their single-minded concern for details some of the assassination inves-

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tigators may be either consciously or unconsciously serving the CIA-Pentagon cabal. "They don't mind a book that's full of these details. In fact, looking back it's pretty clear that in the killing of Kennedy they wanted a certain amount of sensing on the part of people—they wanted certain details to leak out so that certain people in Washington, Congress, would know who was involved behind the whole thing—not in a clear way but enough so they could have the proper degree of fear, enough to induce them to accept the Warren report quietly rather than go where the real probabilities lay."

I confessed to Garrison my affection for details, a desire to climb slowly up the chain of evidence detail by detail. I confessed I wanted to know more details about, for instance Mr. _____, the man Garrison believes may have fired the fatal shot. Garrison accepted this confession with an air of genial tolerance for a human failing he was confident I would learn to regret. He even invited me down to New Orleans to look at his files and discuss such matters as Mr. _____ in greater detail.

Before our conversation came to an end I asked Garrison whom, among the private assassination investigators, he still did trust. "Well certainly Vincent Salandra. He's a remarkable man. In fact, I just got a letter from him today. . . . Yes, Vincent's solid. Let's see, Mark Lane is solid. Mort Sahl is solid. And particularly Cyril Wecht. I just got a letter from him today. "Cyril Wecht?"

"The Coroner, from Pittsburgh"

"Oh, the one who discovered Kennedy's brain was missing from the National Archives—it was in the Times."

"Yes, I just got a letter from him today. I sent a copy of the statement to him. Now listen to this, he's really developed tremendously. . . ."

Garrison read a passage from Wecht's letter. Wecht, a noted forensic pathologist, describes his inability to get the national press to follow up on the findings Wecht made in his study of classified assassination evidence in the National Archives. Wecht compares his troubles to Garrison's differently in getting the press to cover his farewell statement. Wecht, who is relatively new to the assassination investigation, tells Garrison that from his recent experience he is beginning to believe that this failure of the press to take his findings seriously is not attributable merely to apathy, but rather to a "deliberate and on-going purposeful attempt to give no national forum to responsible Warren Commission critics"—in other words a conspiracy.

"That's what I mean developed tremendously," exclaims Garrison, interrupting his reading of Wecht's letter. "I mean Wecht was good from the very beginning, but I mean the breadth now, the scope. . . ."