

# Ex-CIA Agent Tells His Role In Garrison's Conspiracy Probe

Aging newspaper reporters – even if they've worked for the CIA – usually carry two dreams with them into retirement.

One is they fantasize editing their own newspaper, able to write – within reason – whatever they'd like.

They also dream of uncovering the big one – "The Story of the Century" – the blockbuster that brings Pulitzer Prize fame and the bridesmaids of riches.

I lived one of those dreams – as editor and executive vice president of The Houston Tribune, a metropolitan weekly in a booming, seam-bursting city covering what seemed like half of southern Texas.

Then, "along came Jones" – the reporter's second big dream – in the person of Jim Garrison, who had just announced that he had solved the killing of John F. Kennedy and that arrests were imminent. The Story of the Century was waiting just across the border in New Orleans like a succulent Gulf oyster on the half shell.

I made contact with Garrison's office through a mutual acquaintance in the Louisiana State Police who had been to Houston to check out leads in a case. I likewise managed to disengage myself from a final four months of an employment contract with the Tribune (much to the relief of its more conservative stockholders, as it turned out) and by mid-April, 1967, I was undergoing a two-hour interview with the Jolly Green Giant himself.

GARRISON LISTENED to my here-and-

there history like a cartoon character

watching a table-tennis match – sports

writer, infantry officer in World War II,

investigative reporter on both daily

newspapers in Denver, more than two

years as an operations officer for the  
Central Intelligence Agency (where I

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*WILLIAM WOOD, aka Bill Boxley, a former CIA agent, worked for 19 months as a chief aide to New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison in the latter's investigation of the JFK assassination conspiracy.*

served overseas and in Washington as an instructor in covert operations), then private investigator, polygraph examiner, and newspaper editor.

"When can you start, and do you mind

using an alias for operational purposes?" Garrison asked.

"How about the first of May and what would you like to call me?"

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By WILLIAM WOOD

Special to the National Tattler

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"May first will be fine. What name would you like to use?"

"How about 'Ward'? It's close enough to my true name that if I should run into an acquaintance in the field, his calling me 'Wood' might not blow it to womever I was interviewing at the time."

"WE HAVE A WARD already," Garrison mused (and later I learned that it was fortunate for the DA's office that he did for Charles R. Ward, Big Jim's chief assistant, knew how to tend to the store while Jim was trying to crack the big one). "Let's make it Boxley," he said as if struck by some special notion.

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## 'For the next 19 months I whirled into the wildest ride of my life'

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That's all there was to it – or so it seemed at the time. But, what I was hearing were the first low notes of the calliope as that merry-go-round began grinding into gear. For the next 19 months it whirled at an ever-increasing speed into the wildest ride of my life. (Better I should have tried to beat Evel Knievel to the Snake River jump—)

Fifteen months after he hired me, Jim Garrison was introducing me to Peter Kihass of the New York Times as a man he had found "while looking for someone who had been with the CIA, but still cared about the United States."

And four months after that, Jim Garrison was explaining to a national media press conference that he had fired me on charges of 'infiltrating' his office for the Central Intelligence Agency.

"HE WAS NOT ONLY A CIA agent," Garrison characteristically intoned to the throng of media representatives. "He was on a very high level!"

If Garrison possesses one trait greater than his tremendous sense of humor, it has to be his ego. He never could have stomached the thought of having been penetrated by a mere GS-11, which was the highest level I reached in the CIA.

It probably doesn't matter to the CIA one way or another; present CIA director Mr. Colby is having other problems at the moment. But, in fairness to truth, it should be stated for the record that I resigned from the agency in 1953, never to be re-employed, re-assigned, or re-contacted by that organization or anyone on its behalf to

this day – at least not to my knowledge.

To rehash the firing would be "counter-productive," to use one of Garrison's favorite expressions. It is the 19-month ride I had on the runaway merry-go-round that counts, and here are a few of the ups and downs:

GARRISON INITIALLY assigned me those volumes of the Warren Commission report testimony concerning the White Russian emigre circles in Dallas – the ethnic group into which Lee Harvey and Marina Oswald were almost immediately swept upon the arrival from Russia, to which Oswald had fled earlier, denouncing the United States.

From private investigation cases during the earlier sixties, I had a few contacts in Dallas with businessmen, including an acquaintance with Paul Rothermel, then security chief for the late billionaire H.L. Hunt and who, until 1957, worked for the FBI.

When the name "Lee Odom, P.O. Box 19106, Dallas, Tex." in a Clay Shaw notebook came to Garrison's attention after he had indicted Shaw for conspiring to kill President Kennedy, and he

(Garrison) remembered an identical number in Oswald's notebook (preceded by what some claimed were Russian language symbols, but also bore a strong resemblance to slightly altered English initials of P.O.), Garrison sent me off to Dallas like a Nike missile. Thereafter I criss-crossed the country from San Francisco to Miami, Los Angeles to New York on special investigations of leads, rumors, theories, and, upon occasion, rantings of lunatics.

From June or July of 1967 until Dec. 8, 1968, I averaged approximately 20 days per month on field investigation outside of New Orleans, returning every week or two for three- or four-day debriefings by Garrison and reassignment into the field again.

I began with liaison among two or three Dallas assassination researchers, developed covert informants for Garrison who were to "penetrate" various political, social and business circles in Dallas and a few other major cities across the nation, and conducted interviews.

Unlike the Nixon administration, which kept an "enemies" list, Garrison compiled a "friends" list, composed mainly of well-wishers around the country who had written his office and offered to assist his investigation. Many of them contributed worthwhile information and performed valuable services.

AFTER THE PERJURY conviction of Dean Andrews (a colorful assistant district attorney of Jefferson Parish,

Louisiana, charged with perjury in connection with his knowledge about Clay Shaw and "Clay Bertrand"), Garrison turned the normal district attorney's office functions over to his no-nonsense chief executive assistant, Charles Ward, and devoted himself wholeheartedly and almost exclusively to dismantling the Warren report.

He regularly spent 20-hour days, turning like a cougar pursued by hounds to snap back at his detractors and critics, while still lunging toward the safety of a solution to the assassination conspiracy.

Few men in American political history have drawn the firepower that bombarded Jim Garrison throughout his investigation – and since.

On the other hand, he seemed to have a proclivity for inviting more. He seldom missed an opportunity to insult, and whenever possible, subpoena or file charges against members of the nation's news media.

But, unlike the jury that acquitted the late Clay Shaw in less than an hour, history is more ponderous in rendering its verdicts. When historians finally agree on a conclusion to the assassination of President Kennedy, Jim Garrison may well be in its foreword instead of in a footnote.

DESPITE THE TOTAL cratering of his case against Clay Shaw, Garrison's assault upon the Warren Commission's report and its nonsupporting 26 volumes of testimony and exhibits may yet form the foundation upon which a joint congressional committee could begin.

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## 'If Garrison has one trait greater than his sense of humor, it's his ego'

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The task facing Garrison was humanly impossible. His "special investigation team" of only six assistant district attorneys compared with 6,000 federal agents who worked the case originally. When ordered to trial on the Shaw charges by the U.S. Supreme Court decision of Dec.

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TATTLER INVESTIGATIVE SPE

9, 1968, Garrison still held a top priority list of unworked or unfinished leads culled from the thousands that had poured into the office since the probe became public knowledge.

Die-hard supporters of the Warren Commission continue to sing the same old nine-word stanza: "No one has come up with any new evidence."

But evidence is like a prism. Its colors depend upon the angle from which it is viewed.

As surely as testimony constitutes evidence, the cross examination of witnesses in an adversary hearing would produce new evidence. Answers to questions left unasked would be new evidence.

**GARRISON'S INVESTIGATION** produced filing cabinets full of new evidence by reinterviewed witnesses who had testified or whose statements had been taken without their having been called before the commission. It also revealed an endless stream of contradictions between

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## 'Garrison was like a cougar, snapping back at his critics and detractors...'

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what their statements contained in the Warren Commission volumes and what they told Garrison investigators they actually had said to government agents. Witnesses were discovered from whom no statements had been taken.

None of this was procedurally admissible in the trial of Clay Shaw, because the statements concerned the murders of John Kennedy and J.D. Tippit, neither of which crimes were basically at issue in the Shaw trial.

But, between whirls to fight off attacks from government and media critics, Garrison sent me into new areas, some of which involved:

- **LARRIE SCHMIDT** and Bernard Weisman's ties to ultra-conservative Dallas political circles, which produced connections for them into anti-Castro Cuban exile areas of Dallas with elements of organized crime, which had an overall tie to the conspiracy and the assassination itself.

- Spin-off evidence from the Lee Odom post office box that led to unanswered questions involving persons in the Hunt oil empire with Jack Ruby's close friend who

managed the Adolphus Hotel at the time of the assassination and later the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans during the Garrison investigation.

- Close ties between right-wing political extremists and Mafia figures in Dallas, all "super patriots" in the words of the slain President, with mutual admiration for the American free enterprise system.

- An in-depth study of the "Winnipeg Airport Incident," in which a Canadian citizen reported to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police fragments of an early 1964 conversation at the Winnipeg terminal between two men - one of whom he repeatedly identified as the late David Ferrie. The fragmented conversation included fears of the two men as to how much Marina Oswald might know about the assassination and mention of a man named Isaacs, who had failed to dispose properly of an automobile after the JFK-Tippit slayings.

**PURSUIT OF ISAACS** took me into a darkened suburb of Houston, where a cooperative and somewhat inexperienced police chief located Isaacs through his municipal water meter registration. The chief went with me shortly before mid-

night to Isaacs home, where the door finally was opened and we found ourselves staring down the twin barrels of a sawed-off shotgun.

Isaacs was hospitable enough to ask us in, and to discuss his former residence in Dallas, as well as that of his cousin, whose name appeared in Jack Ruby's notebook. He told us much more than I'd hoped to learn and agreed to see me again with more specific information in 10 days.

"You know, I maybe should have said something to him about that sawed-off shotgun," the police chief reflected as we walked away.

Perhaps he should have, because, within a week, Isaacs had sold his business in Houston, abandoned the home where we talked, and vanished into the chemical fog that enshrouds Houston and its environs.

- **DISCOVERY OF a FRANKLIN-exchange** telephone number recorded by Oswald twice in the last pages in his notebook, which had apparently been ignored by commission investigators and subsequent research critics. The number led to the home of a bus driver of 15 years service exclusively on the Dallas-to-Shreveport run, who shared his home and telephone during the fall of 1963 with a close relative - Detective Joe Cody of the Dallas police department.

Cody appeared to be the only Dallas policeman to file a gratuitous statement in the Commission exhibits explaining why he was away from Dallas at the time of the

assassination: he had been detained in a no-injury light aircraft mishap near Shreveport.

Joe Cody also owned a marine and scuba-diving business in Dallas named "Aqualand," and we couldn't restrain a curiosity as to whether that might have been a place where Loran Hall could have left an oxygen tank and face mask with which he had once departed Los Angeles for Miami, but which never reached its Miami destination. (For more on Loran Hall, see several stories in this issue concerning him.)

The curiosity persists, as does that over why Oswald had made note of the number twice - particularly on successive pages.

- **UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORTS** to trace persons living at 1026 North Beckley with Oswald at the time of the assassination. A list supplied our office by the Dallas research underground identified the roomers as: Buddy Joe Palmer; C.C. Lehmann; Roy Samuel Cleghorn; Floyd Degraffenred or De Graffenred; Hugh



*JIM GARRISON ... 'when historians finally agree on a conclusion to the assassination of President Kennedy, he (Garrison) may well be in its forward instead of in a footnote.'*

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Slough; Jack Cody; George Gibboney; Donald Green; John Carter; James Watson; and Herbert Lee.

It's interesting to note that O.H. Lee does not appear on this document nor have Dallas researchers been able to locate any of the above names at that address in the 1963 or 1964 directories. Apparently no effort was made to interview any of Oswald's co-roommates by the FBI or other law enforcement agencies.

Investigation did uncover that a Bobby Palmer was a Dallas city policeman in 1963 and a James Watson was a detective.

During the Garrison investigation, we were able to find only a photograph and brief interview with John Carter among those names, which appeared in an early edition of the Fort Worth-Star Telegram following the assassination. One other name on the list has been located, but remains uncontacted to date. If any of the others would make their whereabouts known to The National TATTLER, they will be guaranteed anonymity and complete confidentiality if they will consent to an interview concerning the conditions and life-style in the Oswald rooming house at the time of the assassination.

● **ADDITIONAL INVESTIGATION** into the late columnist Drew Pearson's story that is being resurrected in various quarters of today's renewed interest in the JFK case. The story concerned an aborted plot against Fidel Castro by the Kennedy Administration and CIA officials through Mafia intermediaries. Pearson's original column was long, but vague as to individual identities.

With the recent murder of Sam Giancana, his widely reported connections with the CIA and a plot against Castro, more names are surfacing before Sen. Frank Church's subcommittee investigation of the CIA.

Garrison, like Ted Sorenson, was inclined to discount the rumor's authenticity, but we probed far enough to come up with four high-level administration names, including the late Robert Kennedy, who allegedly met secretly at the Guantanamo Naval Base and the names of U.S. Military personnel and anti-Castro Cubans who were said to constitute the operating level of the plot.

● **A LENGTHY STUDY** of the life and times of Guy W. Bannister, one of J. Edgar Hoover's favorite special agents, who left the choice assignment of Special Agent in Charge for Chicago in 1957 to begin an

official and then private police career in New Orleans, which he used as cover for operation of an underground intelligence network.

Witnesses placed Oswald with Bannister on numerous occasions. Some of Oswald's Fair Play for Cuba Committee leaflets were stamped with an address adjacent to Bannister's office.

Some of Bannister's files apparently were microfilmed and forwarded to a branch of his network in Atlanta; others were burned by his wife in an irate mood; the remainder were combed by investigators from the FBI, the Louisiana State Police and Garrison's office - in that order.

But enough remained to prove conclusively that Bannister was using a post office box mail drop under the names of cover organizations, recruiting informants for the Office of Naval Intelligence in New Orleans, running deep penetrations into Latin and South American countries - all strongly suggesting that his FBI "retirement" and entry into police work were merely stages of "sanitizing" him from government affiliations and establishments of an operational cover for newer and much broader-ranging duties than those offered a Special Agent in Charge of the Chicago FBI office.

● **ACCOMPANYING** Jim Garrison on two major "incidents" of his investigation:

The first involving a trip destined for rest and brainstorming in Palm Springs, Calif., which never came about because he paused en route for a week in Los Angeles where he exploded another miniature hydrogen bomb in the form of conspiracy-to-murder-President-John-F.-Kennedy charges against Edgar Eugene Bradley, an enigmatic man whose past indicated U.S. intelligence work in Latin America during World War II, and went on to include spear-heading a short-lived California campaign to nominate J. Edgar Hoover for President in 1964 - as well as much longer and more extensive international travels on behalf of a New Jersey evangelist.

As if that week was not busy enough, Garrison charged through it under the cloud of a rumored "Mafia contract" on his life, which had been tipped to Harold Weisberg, an original Warren Report critic, assassination writer, who happened to be in New Orleans at that time. In the long run, the week's events seemed to work out about evenly:

The Mafia apparently cancelled its "hit

contract" on Garrison and Garrison dropped the charges against Bradley – although the two actions were totally unrelated.

The second Garrison-Boxley trip involved me preceding him to Miami for interrogation of an equally enigmatic man – one James T. Mays, who had contacted the New Orleans office of the DA through attorney Mark Lane with an offer to tell us the name and location of Oswald's shooting companion of Nov. 22, 1963 – all for a mere \$25,000.

**GARRISON WAS A** big spender when he had it – but he always liked to inspect the menu first. I put Mays through the rickets for two days of decreasingly optimistic interrogation, while Garrison waited patiently at the Doral Hotel with his good friend, Richard Gerstein, States Attorney for the City of Miami.

Mays' story began springing leaks and by Sunday night, March 3, 1968, he decided to abandon ship rather than support his story with a lie detector examination.

On Monday morning, Mays was nowhere to be found, which was good news for Garrison's office fund – but pretty disheartening for States Attorney Richard Gerstein.

Mays had told me and Bill Barry, a

reporter for the Miami News who had accompanied me on all contacts with Mays, that the reason he couldn't take a polygraph test Monday was that he just happened to be States Attorney Gerstein's "key witness" in a gangland slaying trial that opened that Monday.

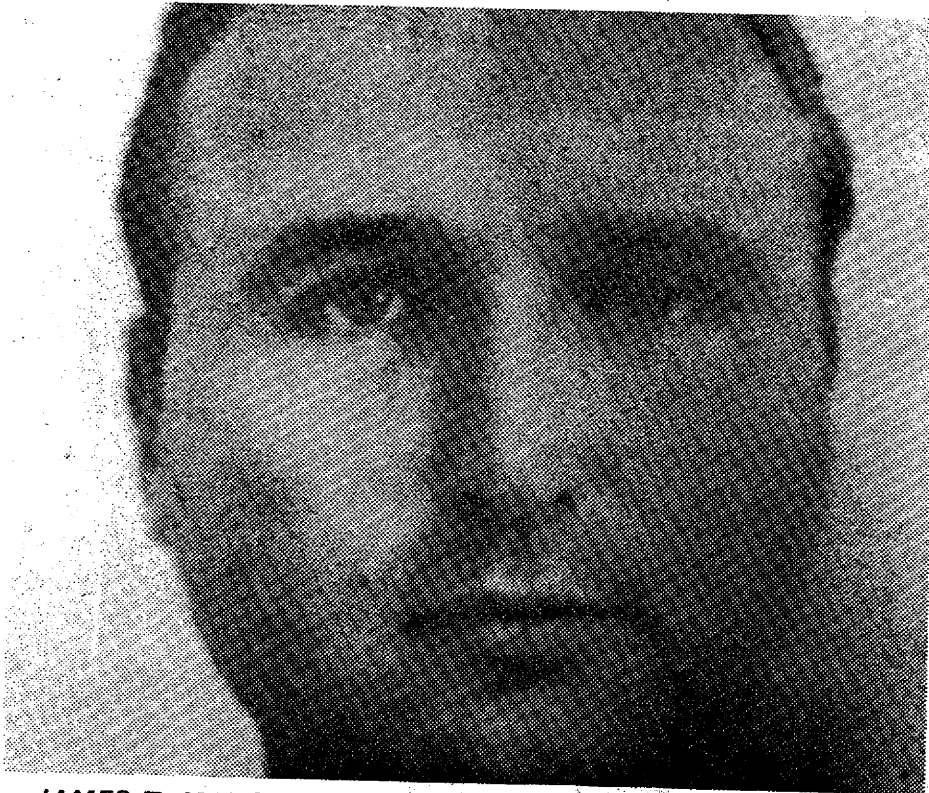
**THAT LEFT BILL BOXLEY** and Bill Barry staring at each other across a coffee table, and it wasn't even in the plush Doral Hotel.

We did say good-bye, however, and Barry flew to the Virgin Islands to try to identify a man there as one of the tramps in a Dealy Plaza photograph that was taken the day John Kennedy was killed. I flew back to New Orleans to ask Garrison a question, which had been bugging me for a long while:

"Jim, how did you ever happen to decide upon the name 'Boxley' for my operational alias?" I asked him.

He swirled his favorite drink – a bull-shot – around in its old-fashion glass for a moment. Then he told me:

"Well, Box, I can best answer your question with a little story. St. Peter once asked God how He happened to name an elephant 'elephant,' and God replied, 'Well, St. Peter, the elephant just looked like an 'elephant' to Me.'"



**JAMES T. MAYS ... he had agreed to give Garrison the name and location of Oswald's shooting companion.**