

Dallas View: Hands Off Garrison's JFK Probe

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DALLAS—New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison's probe into President Kennedy's assassination since my December-January articles from New Orleans regarding Lee Harvey Oswald brings me back to Dallas.

In the face of the fast-breaking New Orleans contentions, I wanted the views now of the chief federal and local officials personally in command of the investigating teams that supplied the material here for the Warren Commission Report.

For years it has been a federal offense to threaten the life of a president. Never, until after President Kennedy's assassination, has it been a federal offense to kill our chief executive.

Accordingly, the statutory responsibility fell here. And the man it fell on is J. Will Fritz, homicide bureau chief of the Dallas Police Department. The regional FBI, Secret Service, United States postal inspectors, etc., and additional teams sent from Washington all worked through Captain Fritz.

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IT IS an eerie feeling to sit alone with him in his small, 14-by-9½-foot office where he led the questioning of Oswald for 12 hours. "I didn't have trouble with him," Captain Fritz said, "if we just talked quietly like we are talking now, until I asked him a question that meant something, a question that would produce evidence. Then, every time, Oswald immediately said he wouldn't talk about it."

The interrogations broke into five sessions during the 45½ hours Oswald was under arrest. He was in this small room for two hours and later five hours after he was brought in at 2 p. m. Friday from the Texas Theater; an hour beginning at 10:25 Saturday morning; two hours that afternoon after he vainly tried several times to reach on the telephone in New York lawyer John J. Abt, a frequent defender of alleged Communists; two hours Sunday before Oswald left Captain Fritz's office at 11:15 and was shot downstairs at 11:21.

The regional FBI chief here is veteran investigator J. Gordon Shanklin, famous in the bureau. Says his special agent James W. Bookhout, whom Shanklin placed at most of Fritz's interrogations: "Any time you asked a question pertinent to the investigation Oswald refused to discuss it." Oswald handled the Secret Service local agent in charge, Forrest V. Sorrels, and Secret Service Inspector Thomas J. Kelly and U.S. Postal Inspector Harry D. Holmes the same way.

Yet this is the Lee Harvey Oswald that William Manchester has the unmitigated gall in "The Death of a President" to falsely state "we know" went insane at 9:30 the previous night. This is the cool, canny Communist that millions have been led to believe was a "crackpot."

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I FIND that none of the investigation participants here are in touch with New Orleans District Attorney Garrison. Not one. Captain Fritz tells me he has not closed his own investigation. Nor, I find, has the FBI. But the men who know the most about the horror here Nov. 22, 1963, remain today absolutely convinced that Oswald performed alone.

They do not know Garrison's case, being "hands off" about what's happening in New Orleans. But they do know Louisiana law, much of which comes uniquely from French Napoleonic roots.

The Louisianan claims a conspiracy. Under Louisiana law Garrison has only to prove that conspiratorial discussion did in fact occur, whether anybody did anything about it or not. He does not have to prove participation in President Kennedy's assassination.

Should Garrison be able to take an additional long step beyond this, of course, and prove that Clay Shaw or any alleged conspirator paid or otherwise abetted Oswald, and can prove Oswald was the assassin, the abettor could be convicted as an accessory to the murder.