

Central Figure in Kennedy Slaying Inquiry Found Dead

New Orleans DA, Coroner Differ on Death Cause

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NEW ORLEANS—David William Ferrie, a central figure in Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison's controversial investigation of President John F. Kennedy's assassination, was found dead in his bed Wednesday.

Orleans Parish (County) Coroner Dr. Nicholas Chetta said Ferrie died of a cerebral hemorrhage but Garrison said the 47-year-old man committed suicide.

Garrison said he had decided Wednesday forenoon to arrest Ferrie early next week. He called Ferrie "one of history's most important individuals."

Ferrie said Saturday Garrison was checking on him because "supposedly I have been pegged as the getaway pilot in an elaborate plot to kill Kennedy." He called Garrison's investigation a "big joke."

Cleared of Involvement

Ferrie, who operated a flying service, was taken into custody three days after the assassination, on the basis of a tip to Garrison's office, but the FBI cleared Ferrie of any involvement in Mr. Kennedy's death. *cut by 1124*

Dr. Chetta said Ferrie was born with blood vessel weakness at the base of the brain and suffered from high blood pressure.

"Something taken internally could not have caused the cerebral hemorrhage," Chetta said. However, he said he was withholding final judgment on the cause until he received a toxicology report because he said "there is a possibility that suicide could have been coincidental with the cerebral hemorrhage."

Another factor was that a note, bearing no date, signature, nor addressee, was found in Ferrie's cluttered apartment and it said:

"To leave this life for me is a sweet prospect. I find nothing in it that is desirable and on the other

hand everything that is loathsome." Chetta said there will be no inquest.

Statement by Garrison

Garrison, at his news conference, first stated emphatically that "based on our information I can safely say you'll find it is a suicide. From the information we have there is no reason to suppose there was anything but suicide involved." He added that he was quite certain the suicide was committed with pills taken internally.

However, when told that Dr. Chetta had found Ferrie died of a cerebral hemorrhage, Garrison referred reporters back to the coroner.

Ferrie's body was discovered at 11 a.m. with a sheet pulled over his chest. Police refused to say who made the discovery. Apparently, George Lardner Jr., a Washington Post reporter, who interviewed Ferrie from midnight to 4 a.m., was the last person to see him alive.

"Ferrie seemed in good spirits, not like a man about to kill himself," Lardner reported. He quoted Ferrie as saying "Kennedy is dead. Let's

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get on with living."

Lardner reported that he saw a brown bottle of medicine, "tablets apparently," on a worn-down piano in Ferrie's living room. Chetta said no drugs were found in the apartment except pills for treatment of vascular trouble.

Ferrie, a former commercial airline pilot and self-styled investigator, was a startling looking person. He had lost his hair and eyebrows in an explosion, and usually wore a red wig and mascara eyebrows.

Garrison's investigation has stirred international interest because for the first time it gives an air of official credence to critics of the Warren Commission's finding that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in shooting Mr. Kennedy.

More Fuel

Garrison added more fuel to the controversy by saying at his news conference:

"I have no reason to believe that Lee Harvey Oswald killed anybody in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963."

When newsmen pressed for the basis of this statement, Garrison declined comment, saying "I've said too much already." But later in the 90-minute long news conference, Garrison noted the lack of official records of Dallas police interviews with Oswald after the assassination.

Garrison said he wondered why there were no records and added, "You can imagine the records that would have been kept if there had been an admission" of guilt from Oswald.

After a New Orleans newspaper disclosed last week that Garrison had been investigating the assassination since last November, Garrison indicated he was trying to prove that Mr. Kennedy was the victim of a conspiracy. Garrison promised arrests and convictions, but has withheld details.

Garrison said he had Ferrie apprehended after the President was assassinated and then turned him over to the FBI, but said to this date he has never had any statement from the FBI concerning Ferrie.

Garrison's office questioned Ferrie again last November, and the district attorney disclosed at his news conference that his men had been keeping Ferrie's apartment under surveillance for "a long period."

Evidence Studied

"Evidence developed by our office had long since confirmed that he was involved in events culminating in the assassination of President Kennedy," Garrison said.

"Because of this, at a meeting at my house this morning, we had reached a decision to arrest him early next week. Apparently we waited too long."

Garrison said the stakeout of Ferrie's apartment and other information "had caused us to become increasingly concerned . . . about the possibility of his killing himself. We saw signs of extreme nervousness, endless pacing of the floor, comments to individuals in the last week or two relative to killing himself."

Ferrie reiterated to Lardner early Wednesday morning what he had said previously—that he never knew Oswald and had no recollection of ever meeting him.

Air Patrol Service

Oswald was reported to have served in a Civil Air Patrol unit headed by Ferrie in New Orleans, but Ferrie told Lardner they were in different units.

Ferrie also told Lardner that when Garrison's men summoned him for questioning last November, they said they wanted to go over ground he had covered with them in 1963 because their office had

lost its copy of what he said then.

Ferrie told Lardner he volunteered to obtain a copy of his statement from the FBI, but was told by Garrison's men: "No, don't do that. Don't say we sent you."

Ferrie was mentioned in the Warren Commission report in the transcript of testimony by Frederick S. O'Sullivan, a New Orleans police detective. O'Sullivan was questioned in New Orleans April 7-8, 1964, by Wesley J. Liebler, a commission attorney. He did not appear before the commission.

School Classmates

O'Sullivan said he was a junior high school classmate of Oswald in New Orleans and at that time they had both been Civil Air Patrol cadets. He knew Ferrie but was not certain who had commanded the squadron when Oswald was a cadet.

After Ferrie was arrested in 1963, O'Sullivan said he and Lt. Paul Dwyer, of the police intelligence division, checked Ferrie's airplane at New Orleans airport to see if he might have flown it recently.

"His plane was not in flyable condition," O'Sullivan said. "It had flat tires, instruments missing, needed a paint job."

Garrison said the Warren Commission report contained 40 pages of material "to do with Ferrie" and that 36 of these were classified as secret by the FBI and that he had never seen them. He said part of his present investigation involved going tediously through the index of the Warren Commission report in attempts to pick out all the names of persons who may have been connected with Ferrie.

He emphasized that Ferrie was not in Dallas at the time of the assassination but that his investigators watched the man carefully when he returned on Nov. 24, 1963, from a trip to Texas and arrested him the next day because of what Garrison called a strange order of events in Ferrie's life at the time.