

OBITUARIES

La. Judge Jim Garrison Dies; Film 'JFK' Based on His Ideas

By J.Y. Smith
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Jim Garrison, 71, a former New Orleans district attorney and Louisiana state judge whose theories on the assassination of President Kennedy were the basis of the controversial movie "JFK," died Oct. 21 at his home in New Orleans.

The cause of death was not reported, but news agencies said Mr. Garrison had heart ailments. He had been in declining health for the past year.

Mr. Garrison, a former Army pilot who flew combat missions in World War II and later served as an FBI agent, gained a reputation as a flamboyant and hard-hitting prosecutor in the early 1960s after winning an upset electoral victory to become district attorney of New Orleans.

In 1973, while still serving as district attorney, Mr. Garrison successfully defended himself against federal charges that he had taken bribes to protect pinball operators. He lost his bid for reelection as district attorney in 1974, and he later lost a bid for a seat on Louisiana's Supreme Court.

But in 1978 he was elected to Louisiana's 4th Circuit Court of Appeals. He served on the bench until last year, when he reached the mandatory retirement age of 70.

Mr. Garrison will be remembered, however, for his claims that President Kennedy was killed on Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas as the result of a conspiracy carried out by the CIA to keep the war going in Vietnam. He spent years attacking the work of the presidential commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren that gave the official report of the tragedy.

The Warren Commission found



JIM GARRISON

that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone when he killed the president and that Jack Ruby, a Dallas nightclub owner, had acted alone when he in turn gunned down Oswald in the Dallas jail two days after the assassination.

The subject has tantalized many Americans since the assassination occurred, and polls show that a majority of citizens believe that there is more to the story than the Warren Commission reported. Many questions have been raised by students of the assassination, many of whom believe that there was a conspiracy of some sort. But none argue that Mr. Garrison uncovered it.

In 1969, Mr. Garrison prosecuted a New Orleans businessman named Clay Shaw on charges of taking part in an alleged CIA plot. Highlights included the refusal of several witnesses to testify to events they had described earlier to Mr. Garrison's investigators.

One witness, a psychologist, told the jury that he regularly took his daughter's fingerprints to assure himself that conspirators had not replaced her with a look-alike spy. Another witness had been hypnotized. In the end, the jury took less than an hour to find in Shaw's favor.

Undeterred by this setback, Mr. Garrison elaborated his conspiracy views in three books, the last of which, "On the Trail of the Assassins," formed the basis for "JFK," the Oliver Stone film starring Kevin Costner in the role of Mr. Garrison and Mr. Garrison himself in the role of Earl Warren.

Critics attacked the film for using old film clips and other "docudrama" techniques to present as fact a view in which virtually the entire government is part of a plan to kill Kennedy. They found it particularly ironic that Chief Justice Warren, a figure held in great esteem, was played by a man whom many regarded as a self-promoting fraud.

Mr. Garrison was born in Denison, Iowa, and reared in New Orleans. After World War II service in the Army Air Forces as the pilot of low-flying observer planes in France and Germany, he went to Tulane University, where he received a law degree. After law school, he was an FBI agent in Seattle.

In the 1950s, Mr. Garrison returned to New Orleans and established a law practice. He ran unsuccessfully for a judgeship in 1960 but gained public office two years later when he became district attorney.

Mr. Garrison is survived by his wife, Leah Elizabeth Ziegler Garrison; five children; and a grandchild.