

Jim Garrison, 70, Theorist on

By BRUCE LAMBERT

Jim Garrison, who as District Attorney in New Orleans made startling assertions of a widespread conspiracy and cover-up in President John F. Kennedy's assassination, died yesterday at his home in New Orleans. He was 70 years old.

The New Orleans coroner, Dr. Frank Minyard, a longtime friend, said the exact cause of death would be determined in a routine autopsy today. Mr. Garrison had been bedridden with heart disease.

His widely disputed accusations, which were revived in the recent hit film "J.F.K.," drew worldwide attention when he first made them in 1967. He asserted that Lee Harvey Oswald, whom the Federal Warren Commission identified as the lone assassin in the President's 1963 death, was not the killer and had "never fired a shot."

Announcing that he had "solved the assassination," Mr. Garrison accused

The man who said he solved the President's assassination.

anti-Communist and anti-Castro extremists in the Central Intelligence Agency of plotting the President's death to thwart an easing of tension with the Soviet Union and Cuba, and to prevent a retreat from Vietnam.

In 1969 he prosecuted Clay Shaw, a New Orleans businessman, as a conspirator. But the 34-day trial was widely described as a circus, and the jury acquitted Mr. Shaw after deliberating less than an hour.

Adviser on 'J.F.K.'

Many public officials and assassination experts dismissed Mr. Garrison's theories as bizarre, irresponsible and an effort to get publicity. But interest in his accusations continued among assassination buffs as doubts grew about the accuracy and completeness of the official findings.

Suddenly last December, Mr. Garrison burst back into national prominence with the release of Oliver Stone's movie, "J.F.K."

The movie, based largely on Mr. Garrison's views, portrays him as a quixotic hero fighting an evil establish-

ment involving the Government, the military, the mob, politicians and spies. Kevin Costner played the District Attorney.

The film grossed \$195 million in box office receipts and an undisclosed amount in sales and rentals of videotape cassettes.

Mr. Garrison served as an adviser to the film, which drew heavily from "On the Trail of Assassins," one of three books he wrote about the case. In conjunction with the release of the movie, Time Warner published a paperback edition of the book, which promptly jumped to the top of best-seller lists.

Mr. Garrison also landed an acting role in the film, playing Chief Justice Earl Warren, the head of the commission whose very conclusions Mr. Garrison had denounced as "totally false."

Indicted in '73

The period between the original events and the release of "J.F.K." were troubled years for Mr. Garrison. Initially he sought to try Mr. Shaw on new perjury charges, but the courts stopped him from proceeding.

Then, in 1973, Mr. Garrison himself was indicted on Federal charges of taking bribes to protect illegal pinball gambling. Conducting his own defense, he won acquittal.

But the trial hurt him politically and left him only a month to campaign for his fourth term as the New Orleans District Attorney. He lost that bid for re-election by 2,221 votes, ending his 12 years in that office. The victor was Harry Connick Sr., father of the singer Harry Connick Jr. Mr. Garrison next ran for State Supreme Court judge and lost.

Resurrecting his public career in 1978, he won election to a seat on Louisiana's Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. He remained on the bench until last year, when he quit three weeks before the mandatory retirement age of 70 because of failing health.

An imposing figure, Mr. Garrison was 6 feet 6 inches tall, spoke in a booming voice and had a slightly wall-eyed look.

His Kennedy assassination case took many turns. Johnny Carson devoted an entire "Tonight Show" program to interviewing Mr. Garrison and talking about his accusations of a guerrilla band, mysterious figures on the grassy knoll at Dealey Plaza in Dallas, the possibility of shots from a sewer, photographic analysis and the involvement of the Dallas police, Federal Bureau of Investigation, C.I.A., Secret Service and Texas oil millionaires.

Strange Characters

The Clay Shaw trial involved strange

characters. One key witness died under mysterious circumstances. Others refused to repeat on the stand the statements that Mr. Garrison's investigators had attributed to them. One witness, a psychologist, testified that he had regularly fingerprinted his daughter to make sure a spy had not taken her place.

Several students of the Kennedy assassination said that even though Mr. Garrison's investigation might have been seriously flawed, he served as a positive force in focusing attention on the inadequacies of the Warren Commission and in pressing for the release of many still-confidential documents.

Congress passed legislation on Sept. 30 to authorize the release of hundreds of thousands of pages of secret Government documents regarding Kennedy's death. The bill, which President Bush is expected to sign, would create an independent commission to review the papers and release all but those that compromise national security or invade a person's privacy.

James C. Garrison was born in

Kennedy Death, Dies

Dennison, Iowa and later legally changed his first name to Jim. He was a graduate of Tulane University Law School.

He served in the National Guard, Army and Army Reserve and served in Europe during World War II. In 1951 he briefly went on active duty.

Newspaper reports in 1967 said he was under psychiatric care from 1950-55 and quoted a military assessment saying that he was discharged as unfit because of "a severe and disabling psychoneurosis of long duration" that "has interfered with his social and professional adjustment to a marked degree." He neither confirmed nor denied the report.

As a relatively obscure assistant district attorney for the parish of New Orleans, Mr. Garrison was known for bar hopping along Bourbon Street, often wearing a white dinner jacket. Then, in 1962, he resigned suddenly, denounced Mayor Victor Hugo Schiro as being soft on crime and challenged the incumbent District Attorney, Richard Dowling, for his post.

Mr. Garrison derided Mr. Dowling as "the great emancipator; he let everybody go free." Saving his campaign money for a last-minute barrage of television commercials, Mr. Garrison was the upset victor.



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Jim Garrison

As the first local politician to make effective use of television, he made frequent raids on French Quarter vice dens and gambling joints, accompanied by an entourage of cameras, technicians and reporters.

He is survived by his wife, the former Leah Elizabeth Ziegler; three sons, two daughters, a sister and one grandchild.