

Inside Story of JFK 'Plot'

(Editor's Note: In one of the most picturesque and historic of American cities a bizarre chapter in the story of assassination of President Kennedy is boiling up more than three years after the fact. District Attorney Jim Garrison, a flamboyant and sometimes sensational figure in New Orleans politics has started a new investigation of what he calls "The Conspiracy" which preceded the actual assassination. UPI assigned a five-man reporting team to put together a comprehensive assessment of Garrison's probe. This is their report.)



Associated Press Photo
DAVID LEWIS
Feared for his life

NEW ORLEANS, Feb. 24 (UPI)—On Nov. 25, 1966, a man named Louis Ivon took a trip to San Francisco which cost the taxpayers of New Orleans \$933. That trip, three years and three days after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, helped bring to light one of the strangest sequels to the assassination ever graced by official sanction.

Louis Ivon was on the business of Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison, a combative prosecutor given to conservative dress and gaudy style.

Garrison was embarked on an investigation of what he later came to call "The Conspiracy"—an alleged plot against Kennedy's life in New Orleans in the months before the actual assassination, an alleged plot somehow overlooked by the Warren Commission.

"I accepted the Warren Commission report until last November, when out of curiosity I began reading and studying the case," he said.

Later he talked it over with U.S. Sen. Russell B. Long, D-La., the Senate Democratic Whip, and the son of Louisiana Gov. Huey Long, who himself was assassinated in 1936. Long told him he had his own doubts about the Warren report, notably the "sequence of firing" of the shots that killed Kennedy Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas.

SOLE ASSASSIN

The Warren Commission had concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, whom it said the evidence indicated was the sole assassin, fired three shots from his bolt-action mail-order rifle in a time period which could have been as short as 4.8 seconds.

Working with his own staff and 10 police officers permanently assigned to him, Garrison started his probe in silence.

By Christmas, 1966, Garri-

son let Louisiana Gov. John J. McKeithen in on his doubts about the Warren report and his plans to investigate. McKeithen kept it under his hat. Garrison asked for no help.

Otherwise the investigation proceeded in secrecy for about three months. But Louis Ivon's trip was a matter of public record, and the records of such trips began piling up. Reporters started digging into them, and asking questions. On Feb. 17—a week ago today—the New Orleans States-Item broke the story.

OTHER TRIPS

Every few days, starting with Ivon's trip to San Francisco, the States-Item said, another expense entry showed up. Investigator John Volz went to Miami on Dec. 2. Other assistants, investigators, and even a member of the Florida Parole and Probation Commission, Russell W. Buckholt, made subsequent trips.

Then a strange and pathetic figure popped up—David W. Ferrie, 49, once dismissed from an Ohio seminary as unfit to be a priest and fired from his job as an Eastern Air Lines pilot. His hair and eyebrows once were burned off in an explosion and he wore a red toupee and false eyebrows.

Ferrie was mentioned several times in the Warren report but cleared of any complicity in the assassination after it was revealed he was in New Orleans when Kennedy was killed in Dallas and his airplane apparently would not even fly.

Ferrie shed some more light on Garrison's probe.

"Supposedly I have been pegged as the getaway pilot in an elaborate plot to kill Kennedy," he said.

In Dallas, Dist. Atty. Henry Wade, who agrees with the Warren Commission conclusions, said he knew of nothing substantial on Ferrie.

"Rumors were flying around that he (Oswald) was supposed to go to an airport and somebody was supposed to fly him away (after the assassination), but as far as I know, there was nothing but rumors," Wade said.

Garrison said nothing when the first disclosure of the investigation was made. Then he began to talk. He held several news conferences in rapid succession—three last Saturday alone.

Each statement was more positive, specific and finally, more sensational, than the last.

"It's very possible that such an investigation is being conducted," the district attorney said Friday.

On Saturday, he criticized the newspapers for breaking the story. They had created "obstructions" Garrison said, "in gathering the relevant facts."

'FIND THE MEN'

Later Saturday, he went further. The investigation would result in arrests, charges and "convictions obtained."

By Monday, he was talking about a conspiracy, and two days later he would be calling it that.

"All we want to do is find the men involved in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and we are going to," he said.

"There will also be, again in my judgment, convictions of individuals for being accessories after the fact, for having substantial knowledge of the conspiracy and withholding it and in other ways abetting it."

On Wednesday the strange figure with the red wig and false eyebrows, David W. Ferrie, was found dead in his apartment in a two-story frame apartment house in an upper-middle class neighborhood of New Orleans.

Garrison called it apparent suicide. The coroner said Ferrie suffered a cerebral hemorrhage caused when a congenitally weak blood vessel ruptured at the base of the brain. But whether this was triggered by something else—possibly drugs—would not be known for a week.

At any rate, it put the seal to what Garrison was now saying publicly.

'WAS INVOLVED'

"The apparent suicide of David Ferrie ends the life of a man who, in my judgment, was one of history's most important individuals," Garrison said.

"Evidence developed by our office had long since confirmed that he was involved in events culminating in the assassina-

tion of President Kennedy."

Then he said:

"I have no reason to believe at this time that Lee Harvey Oswald killed anybody in Dallas on Nov. 22." He offered no elaboration on that startling statement or any indication of what, if any, evidence he based it on.

As interest mounted in Garrison's investigation, new names came to light.

FEARS FOR LIFE

David Lewis Jr., 26, a baggage handler in a bus station who said he used to be a private detective, said he knew of five persons involved in "The Conspiracy," that he had given the names to Garrison, and that he feared for his life.

"There was a plot," he said. "I know about it, and I know the people who were involved."

After Ferrie's death, Lewis disappeared, but showed up in Garrison's office yesterday, being interviewed for television.

Miguel Torres, a convict in the Louisiana State Prison, was said to be a major informant.

Torres was transferred to New Orleans from the state prison, presumably to guard against attempts on his life. But he declined to be moved to even greater safety in a private cell in the county prison.

TURN FACTS OVER

Louisiana counterpart in the House, Rep. Hale Boggs, D-La., a member of the Warren Commission, said Garrison should turn over anything he has to federal authorities.

Garrison declined, leads become lost among truck-

In Washington, the Justice Department and the FBI would make no comment. But UPI was told by Washington sources that Ferrie and his possible complicity in a plot were thoroughly investigated by the Warren Commission and disproved.

What has Garrison got? In the opinion of many, little or nothing.

Whatever Garrison has or does not have, it has made him the most talked-about district attorney in the country. And it has not hurt what some observers consider a possibility that he is maneuvering to run for Lieutenant Governor in 1968.

NEW ORLEANS, Feb. 24 (AP)—A "conspiracy investi-

gation" fund has been created by New Orleans businessmen to underwrite Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison's pledge to prove that there was a conspiracy in the assassination of President Kennedy.

"It would amount to a blank check that would pay the cost of the investigation for months and even years," one of the

businessmen sponsors said. "We are prepared to back Jim Garrison all the way . . . five years if necessary."

The prime mover behind the fund raising is Joseph M. Rault Jr., president of Rault Petroleum Corp. of New Orleans.

Rault confirmed the fund's existence, but declined to give any dollar amount.