

Five Years Later: The Kennedy Probe

Story by JACK WARDLAW



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He launched an investigation, which remained under cover until Feb. 17, when The States-Item disclosed it in a copyrighted story by Jack Dempsey, Rosemary James and David Snyder.

THE ATTENTION of the national and international press was attracted, but the reporters sent in had considerable trouble analyzing the situation and were about ready to give up when Ferrie spiced things up by mysteriously dropping dead. (The death was from natural causes, it later was ruled.)

Garrison dropped his next bombshell March 1 by arresting Shaw, a respected businessman. There followed a sensational preliminary hearing which resulted in Shaw being bound over for trial. Legal haggling held up the trial for nearly two years, but it finally occurred and Shaw was acquitted March 1, 1969.

Garrison's version of the assassination emerged by bits and pieces during this period, he maintaining that Shaw

evidence would be a serious mistake . . . We saw the verdict as pointing up the impossibility of presenting an espionage case in an American court of law. The burden of proof is too heavy for the state to carry. The average American juror knows little about espionage . . ."

ESPIONAGE? One has to be well into Garrison's logic to figure where the espionage comes in. There was no testimony about espionage at the Shaw trial. The state's inability to introduce such evidence destroyed its case, Garrison says.

How did a case that once had the world's news media beating on our door get reduced to quibbling about espionage and rules of evidence and autopsy reports? It is difficult even now to see it in perspective. But here's how the story unfolded:

One could date the origins of the tale from Oct. 18, 1939, when a boy named Lee Harvey Oswald was born here. After an unhappy childhood in which he was shunted in and out of orphanages and to various members of his family, he attended Warren Easton High school and was part of a Civil Air Patrol unit in which he may or may not have met a man named David W. Ferrie.

OSWALD ENTERED the U.S. Marine Corps in 1956, beginning a bizarre chain of events that was to lead him to Dallas on that fateful Nov. 22. His travels took him to the Soviet Union and back to the U.S., with another period of residence in New Orleans from April, 1962, until September, 1963. From this period sprang the Garrison investigation.

Oswald was arrested in Dallas shortly after Kennedy was shot and two days later was shot down himself in a Dallas police station by nightclub operator

Jack Ruby. Meanwhile, in New Orleans, Ferrie was arrested 72 hours after the assassination because he had made a mysterious trip to Texas and back that week. He was questioned and released. Ferrie was found dead Feb. 23, 1967, five days after the Garrison investigation became public.

From these slim threads began the Garrison drama. The DA says he became interested in the assassination after U.S. Sen. James Eastland, a Louisiana Republican, questioned the Warren Commission's

DA HERE LAUNCHES FULL JFK DEATH 'PLOT' PROBE

So read the banner headlines in The States-Item five years ago today, breaking a story that attracted worldwide attention and then ignominiously petered out.

Now and then a loose end will reappear, such as one day last month when a New York physician got a look at the cloistered photos of the JFK autopsy records and made momentary headlines.

But for practical purposes, Dist. Atty. John Garrison's probe of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy died in the early morning hours of March 1, 1969, when a jury acquitted Clay L. Shaw of a charge of conspiring to kill the President.

GARRISON HIMSELF admitted last year in a federal court hearing that the probe is no more. He feels, however, that he accomplished much in drawing public attention to what he said were the inadequacies of the Warren Commission Report and to what he considers to be the federal government's attempts to stifle discussion of the issue.

But one could make a case for the opposite view, that Garrison, by staking the reputation of his investigation on the guilt or innocence of Shaw, effectively destroyed the credibility of all Warren Commission critics, forever ensuring that controversial document as the final word on what happened in Dallas Nov. 22, 1963.

Garrison's view, as expressed in his book, "A Heritage of Stone", (Putnam's, 1970) is that "to misconstrue this verdict (the Shaw acquittal) as an acquittal of the federal government in its involvement in the assassination of the president and its suppression of the

was not the result of the affair, that there would be no secrets and no disclosures. In the end, only Shaw was arrested and Garrison's elaborate critique of the Warren Commission went down with his Shaw charges.

AS IT EMERGED, Garrison's view of the assassination was that it was engineered by a combination of Cuban spies unhappy over the Kennedy administration's lack of action against Fidel Castro and certain elements connected with the Central Intelligence Agency deeply involved in anti-Castro activity.

Oswald, in this framework, was not a defector as the Warren Report said, but a CIA man sent to Dallas for the reasons and in the way stated in the assassination plot.

Further, Garrison charged, was conspiring with the CIA and Ferrie further some of the key phase of operations, the purpose of which was never really made clear. It was his charge that the New Orleans jury had no time in rejecting the Warren Commission.

Garrison contended, joined with the FBI and CIA in a vast coverup operation to keep the American people from learning the horrible truth — that an arm of the government, the CIA, was deeply involved in the assassination.

THE KEYSTONE of the Garrison argument was not the alleged Shaw-Ferrie-Oswald plot, but the events in New Orleans. He sought to show that the Warren Commission had the love and respect of the Warren Report and the Warren Commission. In fact, Garrison charged, from the rear, the Warren Commission was probably involved.

It was his charge that Dr. John K. Lattimer, a well-known physician who has written and lectured extensively about the assassination, addressed himself last month.

Dr. Lattimer became the first person not under government auspices to inspect the Kennedy autopsy records being held in the National Archives in Washington.

Dr. Lattimer, of Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, said the photographs "eliminate any doubt completely" about the validity of the Warren Commission's conclusion that Oswald fired both the shots that struck the president.

HE AGREED with Garrison only on the point that the Warren Commission's experts should have consulted the records before reaching their conclusion.

Dr. Lattimer said the first bullet, which passed through the president's body, did so at a distinctly downward angle, much more so than shown in the drawings released with the Warren Report. In order for the assassin to have shot from the front, he said, he would have had to have been squatting on the floor of the car in front of Kennedy.

The second wound, which killed the president, he said was shown by the photos to be definitely an entry wound, proving it also came from the rear.

During the Shaw trial, then assistant Dist. Atty. Alvin V. Oser contended there were three gunmen firing at Kennedy, at least two of them in front of him, and that the fatal wound was inflicted from the front.

THE MATTER of the shots coming from the front was central to Garrison's thesis about the events in Dealey Plaza. The Shaw charges were central to his thesis that there was a New Orleans-based conspiracy. Taken together, the jury's verdict and Dr. Lattimer's opinions, if valid, would seem to show the whole thing apart.

There are many questions that will not probably never be answered. What were Ferrie and Oswald up to in New Orleans? Even if fired from the rear, how could a single bullet have passed through JFK's body, badly wounded then Texas Gov. John Connally and escaped intact? What, after all, motivated Oswald and Ruby? It is now almost certain we will never know.

It is interesting to note what has happened to the principals in the case after five years. Oswald, Ferrie and Ruby are all dead. Here is what has happened to some of the others:

—GARRISON, re-elected as DA in 1968, suffers from a back ailment and is seldom seen in public. Last year, he was indicted by a federal grand jury on bribery charges in connection with phabell gambling operations. He says this is federal persecution stemming from the Kennedy probe.

—SHAW has rehabilitated himself as a civic leader, taking on an important French Market development post under Mayor Moon Landrieu.

—JAMES L. ALCOCK, chief prosecutor in the Shaw case, was appointed to a Criminal Court judgeship but was defeated at the polls.

—EDWARD A. HAGGERTY JR., presiding judge in the Shaw trial, was removed from office after being caught in a vice raid, though he was cleared of criminal charges. He sought re-election but was defeated in the same race as ALCOCK.

—CONNALLY is now Secretary of the Treasury and was seen in the courtroom during the trial.



Clay L. Shaw



Jim Garrison

—JAMES PHELAN, the writer who in the Saturday Evening Post exposed the famous "Sciambra memorandum" is now a key figure in the Howard Hughes-Clifford Irving scandal. Assistant DA Andrew "Mum" Sciambra interviewed the state's key witness in the Shaw trial, Perry Raymond Russo, extensively and wrote Garrison a memo without mentioning Shaw, Phelan revealed. Testimony subsequently substantiated this.

Shaw still has a damage suit pending against Garrison and the U. S. Supreme Court still has not ruled on whether Garrison can prosecute Shaw for perjury in connection with his testimony at the trial.