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ASSASSINATION PROBE WITNESS Novel Is 'Too Slippery

FIGHTS EXTRADITION

to Stay Caught'

By JAMES RICHARDS
Of The Dispatch Staff

Gordon Novel, the 29-year-old former New Orleans night club owner wanted as a witness in the Kennedy assassination probe, would appear to be a man in a trap.



Novel

April 1 on the Louisiana charge of conspiracy to

But, by his own description, he is too slippery to remain caught.

"I'M LIKE mercury, man. You can put your thumb on me but I don't stay under."

Novel bubbled forth with the story of his life Tuesday in an exclusive interview with The Dispatch. He was arrested in Gahanna

commit simple burglary. He is living in Columbus and says he will fight any extradition move.

Controversial New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison has called the fugitive a "most important witness" in the assassination probe.

NOVEL PAINTED his own portrait as a financial whiz kid who wheeled and dealed himself to and through several small fortunes. "I'm not lily white," he frankly admitted as he devoured a small filet mignon.

Brash and boastful, he projects an enormous ego as he describes his personal exploits. Yet, there is something likeable and believable in his verbal torrent.

By words alone, Novel has created a minor political scandal in Baton Rouge, La. He has claimed he was a close confidant of Louisiana Gov. John Mc-

Keithen and that the governor purchased from him electronic bugging equipment.

THE GOVERNOR first denied knowing Novel, then was caught by a Baton Rouge newspaper with his canceled checks showing.

• McKeithen lent credence to Novel's charges Monday.

The governor, on the pretext of discussing the next governor's conference, telephoned Governor Rhodes. Since Rhodes was out of the city, McKeithen settled for John McElroy, administrative assistant.

IN AN ALMOST unheard of move, McKeithen asked McElroy to expedite the extradition of Novel back to Louisiana as soon as possible. The extradition has not even been officially requested.

Novel's major theme since becoming a fugitive

about three weeks ago has been: "Garrison is a fraud, and his investigation is a farce."

Novel told The Dispatch he first met Garrison at a party for "all the bunnies" in New Orleans' French Quarter during May of 1966.

"We discussed matters concerning Garrison's framing electronically of high state officials," Novel related.

NOVEL, through his firm of International Dynamics Corp., manufactured, sold and installed electronic bugging equipment. He takes great pride in describing his surveillance and anti-surveillance equipment as the "finest in the world."

"I refused to work for him," Novel continued, "I didn't like him. During the 1966 election, I worked against him."

Early this year, Novel asserted he was invited to

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Garrison's home. At that time, Novel indicated, "I thought he was real."

"ON AND OFF, I worked for Garrison for about two weeks."

Garrison and his staff have insisted Novel never was employed by them.

Meanwhile, Novel admitted he was privately working for another New Orleans group which was intent upon exposing Garrison.

"GARRISON turned on me when he found out I had collected enough evidence to expose him," he charged.

Novel said he was challenged by Garrison in a face-to-face showdown on the steps of the courthouse on the final day of Clay Shaw's preliminary hearing.

Shaw, wealthy New Orleans businessman, has been in-

dicted for conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy.

NOVEL DECLARED, "Garrison told me, 'I'm going to put you in this up to your ears. You've been working for the other side.'"

Novel has yet to reveal, at least on the public record, just how he can "expose" Garrison. However, he has hinted broadly that "Garrison's plot" is bigger than any assassination plot.

The most effective restrainer on Novel's glib tongue is his Columbus attorney, Jerry Weiner.

WEINER WALKS his own personal tightrope. On one side is the bar association, waiting to snip the wire if Weiner breaks one of the canons concerning pre-trial publicity.

On the other side is Novel, the client, trapped in part

by his flamboyant proclamations.

Novel believes he needs a public forum. He fears he cannot get a fair hearing in New Orleans. No court in Ohio is involved in the New Orleans probe.

THE ONLY issue here is extradition on a charge of conspiracy to commit simple burglary, filed by Garrison the day before Novel's arrest in Gahanna.

Novel was born in New Orleans on Feb. 7, 1938. His father died when Gordon, an only child, was about 2.

Novel recalled his mother worked as a secretary in a prisoner-of-war camp for Germans in New Orleans during World War II.

HE DESCRIBED his childhood as average. He played quarterback on the football team, tinkered with cars and

mainly, "I was interested in 'broads.'"

After four high schools—"I didn't like discipline"—he was graduated from New Orleans' East Jefferson High in 1956.

From high school he went west, to Northrup Aeronautical Institute of Technology in Englewood, Calif.

That sojourn into engineering was brief . . . "I got to foolin' around with a movie star."

He moved on to the University of Southern California.

AFTER ONE semester, he tried motion picture directing

at the Pasadena Playhouse, meanwhile, picking up a few extra dollars by contributing "detective reports for Confidential magazine."

In 1958 there was a quick fling in New York City, still on the fringe of the theatrical world, then back to New Orleans.

For most people, two years in and near the Hollywood arena would have been enough excitement for a lifetime. Not Gordon Novel.

AGAIN HE gave college a try, the New Orleans campus of Louisiana State University. Then he met his future, and now former wife, beauty queen Marlene Mancusco, at that time Miss New Orleans. About a year later, his college career ended, Novel, in his words, "Got smart and found an angle."

Novel teamed up with Ranny Ehlinger, who since then also has been implicated by Garrison in the assassination investigation.

IN 1960, Novel and Ehlinger parlayed a \$500 investment in a drag racing strip in Hammond, La., into a small fortune.

"The first day's receipts were \$40,000," he boasted. "We took it home in a trunk by helicopter. Brinks wouldn't come and get it."

At the end of the summer, the then 23-year-old promoter

"retired to Lake Tahoe (Nev.) with an enormous bundle."

After a couple of months, he grinned, "We blew it playing five hands of blackjack at one time."

LATE IN 1960 he produced auto shows in New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Atlanta.

There is in early 1961 a brief void, a period about which Novel says he cannot talk. Curiously it coincides with the first Cuban crisis, the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

Novel opened that door while testifying in a Columbus Municipal Court hearing about two weeks ago. But, just as he began a statement concerning "that Cuban business," Attorney Weiner shut him up.

HIS COMMERCIAL interest of that year was involvement in the design of the fastest unlimited sports car in the world at Bonneville Salt Flats.

He took time out to accompany Miss Mancuso, then Miss Mississippi, to the Miss Universe Contest in Miami.

A promotion scheme in 1962, involving an advertising balloon, marked Novel's entry into politics. He sold 10 of the gimmicks to one of the candidates for mayor in New Orleans.

HE HIT "the big time" in 1963 when he developed, with

New Orleans associates, the Louisiana Pavilion at the New York World Fair, the largest commercial pavilion in the extravaganza.

During the fair, Novel became involved in a much publicized controversy with Robert Moses, fair director.

During this period, Novel was riding high. He claims his worth, on paper, exceeded \$1 million. On Jan. 7, 1964, he married the beauty queen. "We lived in a lavish apartment in New York."

THEN THE "fair exploded," Novel angrily added. He said he lost everything—money and wife. But, he is quick to accept blame for the failure of the marriage. "She was just a young kid. She didn't know what was going on."

Novel maintains that he took the rap financially and protected his associates in the pavilion group from a fraud and scandal expose.

Broke, he went back to New Orleans, sold used cars to keep alive and taught himself the electronics business.

By 1965, Novel was in the "fulltime bugging business," eavesdropping on politicians, diplomats and big businessmen.

He organized a "financial holding company," International Dynamics Corp. He manufactured, sold and installed electronic listening

devices. He is most proud of his anti-bugging gadgets.

A teetotaler, Novel designed and built a Ramparts St. supper club, the Jamaican Village.

HE ADMITTED the night club primarily was a "cover" for his other enterprises.

His fortunes again were on the rise. His divorce from the beauty queen concluded, he hopped to a new romance, New Orleans Playboy Club "bunny" Abby Mulligan, a 23-year-old Columbus girl, now living with her parents at 226 E. Oakland Ave.

The new girlfriend sparked his trips to Columbus during 1966, which led to his electronics and restaurant connections here. *what restaurant?*

NOVEL SAID he was planning, with the backing of a New Orleans financial syndicate, a motor resort complex at Baton Rouge when Garrison's ax fell.

In six short weeks, Novel again has fallen to the bottom of the heap, broke, in a strange city, in need of a job, and his romance fading.

Novel contends Garrison has "tied up" his bank account and has impounded his electronic equipment.

STILL he is basking in the spotlight. He says:

"When I walk into Columbus restaurants, people come up and shake my hand; they wish me luck."