BACKGROUND OF KEY WITNESS

'Perry's Telling the Truth,' Older Russo Brother Says

By BILL LYNCH 3/15/67
(States-Item Bureau)

BATON ROUGE—"I do believe he is telling the truth," the brother of Perry Raymond Russo said here today.

Edwin Russo, 28, engineering instructor at Louisiana State University, was commenting on the sudden burst of spotlight on his younger brother, who yesterday was unfolded as District Attorney Jim Garrison's star witness in the New Orleans Kennedy assassination probe.

RUSSO said he was at a meeting of David Ferrie, Lee Harvey Oswald and Clay Shaw when they plotted the murder of President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

In Baton Rouge earlier, Perry Russo had stated flatly he had never met Oswald.

He had been vague and general about his association with Ferrie.

NOTING the contradiction, his brother Edwin said, "It is hard to believe because there are apparent contradictions. But I believe he is telling the truth."

Edwin said he had never been close to his brother because of the three-year age gap.

But he described him as an intelligent person even though he made slightly better than C average grades in Our Lady Star of Sea elementary school, Colton Junior High and McDonogh High School. Edwin said Perry entered Tulane in 1959 and finished at Loyola in 1964 with a degree in political science. He said that his father, a Catholic, wanted his son to change to Loyola.

"HE DID pay the bills," Edwin said of his father.

Young Russo was born in New Orleans May 14, 1941, and lived mostly in the Gentilly section.

He was interested in sports, particularly baseball and basketball. For a time, he even coached baseball at the St. Leo Catholic Youth Organization.

Although his parents were Catholic, "I don't guess he's really connected with any religion," Edwin said of his brother.

HIS FATHER, Francis, lives at 4607 Elysian Fields. He is a machinist at Champion Piston Rings Service. Perry's mother died in 1963. He also had a sister, who died at 12 in 1947 of polio.

Edwin lived at home until 1961 when he left to get married. He is now the father of three children.

Perry left home in 1966 and moved to Baton Rouge last September to take a job as a salesman for the Equitable Life Assurance Society. Prior to that time, he was employed

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PERRY RAYMOND RUSSO
Says he overheard plot.

Brother--

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in a financial division of General Electric Co. Edwin said Perry was an "extremely" popular person in school and always had friends.

"HE WAS definitely one of the gang," Edwin said. "He was active in affairs in the schools. He ran for vice-president in high school, and he got 400 votes, and the next man got 70 votes."

Edwin said Perry has studied some law and insurance courses at LSU.

He said his younger brother had never mentioned anything to him about the alleged plot, but added he had not seen him to talk for any length in quite a while.

"It was before Christmas," he said pointing to an unopened package lying on a table in their living room. "That's his Christmas present waiting there for him."

PERRY lives in a one-story frame duplex on a twisting, busy street crowded with college students.

With him lives a 20-year-old LSU student, Steve Derby, who has made the baseball team but whose association with Russo is somewhat vague.

Derby, interviewed between innings on the LSU baseball field, first described himself as Russo's stepbrother and then amended it to say he was a cousin.

"WE JUST call ourselves brtohers," he said. However, Edwin Russo said his brother and Derby are not related at all. Just friends. Derby said he has known Russo for the past five years and about four years ago saved Russo's live while swimming in Lake Pontchartrain.

He said Russo has talked to him some about the investigation in New Orleans. "They gave him truth serum and hypnotized him," he said. "It was like always being asleep and waking him up all the time and asking him questions," he said Russo told him.

Derby said Russo had a number of girl friends in New Orleans, but few in Baton Rouge. "A couple of them flunked out," he added.

A NEIGHBOR, Mrs. Elinore Durand, who lives in the other side of the duplex, said both young men appeared to be nice persons. She said they frequently had parties on Friday nights that lasted until 2 a. m. or so, but they were not rowdy.

She said the parties were

mixed and they would play records and dance. "The walls are very thin here," she said.

Perry Russo occasionally would use her phone, she said, since he didn't have one. "I would say he is not much of a big talker," she concluded.

THE MAN for whom Perry Russo works in Baton Rouge, Taylor Bernard, district manager of the insurance company, said his firm had run a routine investigation on Russo before employing him.

He described Russo as one of his better salesmen among his new employes.

"He has a willingness to work, to plan, to schedule his time," he said. "He has done a good job here."

Bernard said he would have no qualms about his coming back to work.

"I think he is a reliable person," he said.