NEW ORLEANS
RECORDING TODAY'S STORY

Listen to The States-Item Chimes at 9, Noon and 5

STATES-ITEM
OF PROGRESS

RED COMET

VOL. 90—NO. 236

The Associated Press, North American Newspaper Alliance, NEA Service and AP Wirephoto

TIGHTEN

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 1967

Second-Class Postage Paid at New Orleans, La.

HEARING

PRICE 10c

GUARD

States-Item 3/15/67

Only Shaw's Eyes Betray Emotion

Heat Hones Tensions at 'Plot' Hearing

By ROSEMARY JAMES

It was hot.

Even before the hearing got under way, you knew it was going to be hot.

You could conjure up an image of what it was going to be like inside Section H of Criminal District Court before you ever gained entrance . . . Like the inside of a sardine can—a tight squeeze and sticky.

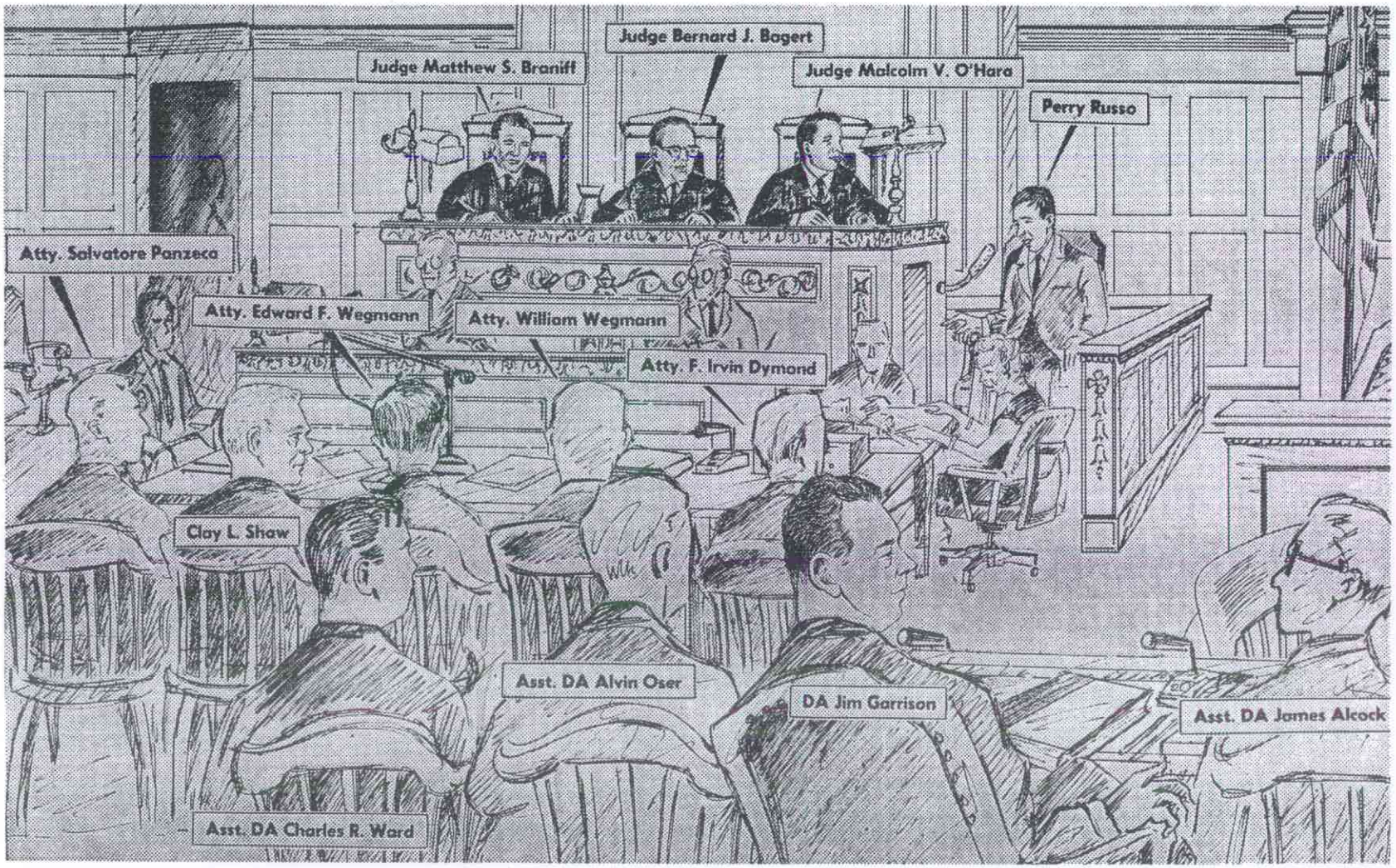
IT WAS HOT in the halls. It was hot on the steps outside. And it was going to get hotter.

The heat was on in more ways than one yesterday at the preliminary hearing for Clay L. Shaw, the respected, retired New Orleans businessman accused of conspiring to murder President John F. Kennedy.

The perspiration dampening brows shirts and dresses was a result of more than just a hot March day and little or no air-conditioning.

THE TENSION that makes you sweat was there; you felt it yourself and saw it at work on others.

Outside, on the wide steps leading to the courthouse entrance, a throng of cameramen, their coats already off, mopped their faces with wilted linen, smoked, cracked jokes



—Composite sketch by artist Louis Benedic.

STATES-ITEM ARTIST'S CONCEPTION OF SHAW HEARING COURTROOM SCENE

Based on basic sketch drawn prior to court's ruling against sketches in courtroom

and complained about the weather, all the time their eyes en garde searching for a subject to rush with their cameras.

Occasionally, a television interview or a still photograph of a minor figure in the proceeding would be set up against a backdrop of newsmen and the columned entrance, the only saving grace of the dingy old stone building.

DOTTED AMONG the clusters of working press were spectators who obviously had no hope of getting inside the courtroom . . . several women in slacks and shorts . . . a woman with her hair screwed up tight in curlers . . . a woman in a house dress carrying a tiny baby . . . a middle-aged man with a Brownie taking a picture of his wife, who had an airline zipper bag slung over her shoulder . . . several excited, giggling teenagers . . . courthouse regulars taking in the spectacle and generally chewing the fat . . . laborers in work clothes playing hooky.

Later, a hawker with multicolored, bunny-shaped balloons showed up, newsmen rested sprawling on the grass or sitting on the steps, courthouse employes brought out their brown bags for lunch.

The heat, the picnickers, the Duke's mixture of people, the excitement . . . It could have been the scene of a summer political rally in any Southern town . . . Except for the waiting, the anticipation, the big question mark hanging there.

INSIDE, REPORTERS ambled down the marble hall, past the coffee stand, up the stairs and past the newly installed telephones, past the newly installed big brass letters spelling JIM GARRISON, down the hall past Section H and down the stairs again, stopping here and there to interview another reporter or just to chat.

Spectators with assured passes to the courtroom exuded delight over their good fortune, while those with sort of tentative passes just waited and those with no passes at all complained about the size of the courtroom.

The cameramen saw him first. They saw Clay Shaw and his attorneys coming and they began to move while Shaw was still walking through the Tulane ave. traffic.

BY THE TIME Shaw reached the curb, he and his attorneys were at the center of a churning mob of newsmen. Deputies accompanying him had to shout repeatedly, "Move Back, Move Back!"

Shaw, with not a comment, with not a smile, moved up the stairs through a human corridor. At the entrance, cameramen fell back. No cameras were allowed in the building. Shaw and his attorneys were ushered into an elevator for the short ride to the second floor while reporters raced up the stairs in time to catch him entering the courtroom.

He carried a large book under his arm and casually puffed on a cigarette.

THE COOL dignity of this man, whose physical appearance can only be described as startlingly attractive, remained intact. Only his eyes betrayed any sign of emotion. They revealed pain.

By the time Shaw entered the courtroom, most of the lucky reporters and spectators were in their assigned seats.

The second grand entrance of the day was made moments later by District Attorney Jim Garrison, who startled the world when he said that he solved the Kennedy assassination.

HE DISARMED the crowd of reporters yesterday with his deep-red, sensitive-looking sunburn and peeling nose. Garrison said he had been questioning a witness out in tne sun and got so interested he forgot about the time.

Garrison appeared confident, if not jolly, and the giant strode through the crowd with his size 14 feet pacing off the steps at an easy gait.

Inside the courtroom it seemed cool at first. It seemed cool until you sat down and sat there for a while, arm to arm, nine bodies to a short bench. Then, it got stuffy and, then it got oppressive.

AT ONE POINT during the morning, Judge Bernard J. Bagert asked if the air conditioning was working.

The question of comfort was more on the mind during the earlier part of yesterday's session, however. After a brief recess, the moment came.

The identity of Garrison's mystery informant was revealed. Perry Raymond Russo, an insurance salesman from Baton Rouge. He began his testimony and the pace of the pencils and pens picked up, racing for every word.

HE KNEW David Ferrie, Leon Oswald and Clem Bertrand, he said. At a party he said he heard them plot to kill the President.

When he identified Clay Shaw as the man he knew as Clem Bertrand, he was calm. Garison was calm. Shaw was calm, he eyes glued on his accuser.

A woman began to get pale. She was about to faint. She was grabbed by strong arms and rushed out of the courtroom, where she collapsed, choking. Coroner Dr. Nicholas P. Chetta administered smelling salts.

INSIDE THE pencils scratched frantically as Russo told his story. Shaw kept his eyes on Russo and he smoked.

Russo remained calm, but he talked fast and it was hard to understand him at times.

And Garrison continued his questions and his words were clearly heard.

THE QUESTIONS were interupted by long legal debates over hearsay.

And then it was time for the lunch recess. The reporters and spectators emerged from the tightly guarded room, some with puzzled expressions, some smiling, some looking stunned, and those outside wondered what had happened.

Then a mad dash for telephones. One reporter pulled a muscle racing down the marble floor.

STORIES WERE being phoned and telecast all over the world.

After the race to get the news out first, reporters and spectators washed down unappetizing sandwiches with

soft drinks and coffee and jabbered to other reporters and spectators.

Those who had been inside rehashed among themselves or related to those less fortunate.

TV newsmen wiped their faces and combed their hair and spruced up a bit for their audiences.

FOR A MOMENT the tension seemed to disappear.

Something had happened, after all.

As the time neared for the afternoon session, though, ou could hear, from group to group, the questions beginning again.

"WILL HE stand up as a witness?"

"Can the defense find a flaw?"

"Why did he wait so long to tell his story?"

In the afternoon, Russo took the stand again. He answered the questions easily again and he talked too fast again and had to be stopped and slowed down so that everyone present could hear him report his story again.

GARRISON WAS still calm and his voice was still the most clearly understood of the lot.

Defense attorney F. Irvin Dymond touched off a moment of humorous relief with his handling of an exhibit, a rifle. Judge Bagert questioned, "Have you verified that thing is unloaded, Mr. Dymond?"

Clay Shaw continued to stare at the witness and he continued to smoke.

And it continued to be hot.