Russo Story of Kennedy 'Plot' Is Marked by Discrepancies

NEW ORLEANS, La. (AP) — Perry Raymond Russo, who testified he heard Lee Harvey Oswald and two others plot to assassinate President John F. Kennedy, faces cross-examination today by defense lawyers.

Counsel for Clay L. Shaw, a wealthy businessman arrested by Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison on a charge of conspiring with Oswald and David W. Ferrie to murder Kennedy, put off their questions yesterday until they could study scholastic and business records of Russo.

Before court reopened, mystery surrounding this "confidential informant" thickened.

Tells Newsman Otherwise

There were these discrepancies:

Russo, 25, an insurance salesman from Baton Rouge, told the court he was in the apartment of Ferrie here in September 1963 and listened to the three men conspire to kill the President and escape.

But two weeks ago, shortly after Ferrie died of what the coroner termed natural causes and Garrison maintained was suicide, Russo told a newsman from New Orleans television station WDSU that Ferrie never mentioned Oswald's name to him, adding, "I had never heard of Oswald until on television. . .ahh. . .the assassination."

Russo gave detail in court of the meeting in Ferrie's apartment, saying the plot involved sacrificing one man to allow the others to make a getaway, a possible flight to Cuba, diversionary shooting and "triangulation of crossfire."

But in an interview earlier with a Baton Rouge television station, Russo said he never came forth with his information before because, "I left it to professionals...when they came out with Oswald was the man. Then I forgot it."

Russo told the court that Ferrie proposed flying the getaway plane into Mexico to refuel for a flight to Cuba. Russo said Shaw interrupted to say that as soon as the shots were fired "the world would know about it," and there would be no way to get the plane out of Mexico.

Russo quoted Oswald as telling Shaw to "shut up. Leave him (Ferrie) alone. He knows what he's talking about. He's the pilot."

But when Russo was asked by a newsman earlier whether he thought Ferrie might have had anything to do with the assassination, he replied: "Well, that I don't know and it would be just speculation.

"It's Only Conjecture"

"Dave Ferrie had the ability because of a keen mind and ability to drive an airplane. Now whether he would have used that is another thing...It's only conjecture."

Russo has said he did not get in touch with Garrison until two days after Ferrie's death—when he saw a newspaper picture of Ferrie. He said he had not then heard from Garrison.

That is the date on which Garrison announced he had "solved" the case. And Russo apparently is a major witness in Garrison's case—perhaps he's the "confidential informant" who, according to Garrison's application for a warrant to search Shaw's house, confirmed while under influence of "truth serum" that he overheard the plot to murder Kennedy.

Other ponderables: Russo told a newsman that Ferrie jokingly posed the question of assassinating the president to him, "that if he and I could do it . . . it could be done." In the same interview Russo said he first met Ferrie when he broke off Ferrie's friendship with another boy. Russo added, "At that time Dave made a personal threat against my life."

Kennedy was killed in Dallas Nov. 22, 1963—two months after the alleged meeting in Ferrie's apartment. The Warren Commission decided that Oswald was the lone assassin and there was no credible evidence of any conspiracy.

Shaw Denies Charges

Shaw is the only alleged conspirator still alive. Oswald was shot to death by Jack Ruby two days after the assassination and Ferrie died in bed Feb. 22. The coroner ruled the death due to natural causes.

Shaw, 54, a onetime Army major who was decorated in World War II, has denied taking part in any conspiracy.

Russo's name does not appear in federal records of the investigation of the assassination.

Shaw was investigated and cleared by the FBI late in 1963, according to Atty. Gen. Ramsey Clark, who said Sunday he did not think Garrison would succeed in proving a conspiracy.

Russo was the fourth witness to testify yesterday at the opening of the preliminary hearing for Shaw. The hearing is being held to determine whether the district attorney has sufficient cause to hold Shaw for trial.

Speaking so rapidly and indistinctly that court reporters asked him to slow down, Russo told his story with his eyes fixed on Garrison.

He identified Shaw as a man he knew as "Clem Bertrand" in 1963.

Under Garrison's questioning, Russo described the meeting this way:

"The party dwindled away . . . Dave Ferrie began the conversation, pacing back and forth and talking to Bertrand and Oswald . . . Ferrie wore baggy pants. Oswald was dirty, as usual, and half shaven. He wore a pullover shirt that was not a T shirt. Bertrand was the only one dressed what I'd call decent. He wore a maroon jacket."

This is Russo's account in court, basically in his own words:

Dave Ferrie began the conversation, pacing back and forth and talking to Bertrand and Oswald. The discussion centered around an assassination of

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Witness Describes a 'Plot'

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President Kennedy and how it would have to use diversionary tactics. There would be two to three people involved.

One Would Be "Scapegoat"

One person would shoot the diversionary shot and the other would shoot the "good shot." One man would have to be the "scapegoat." Ferrie talked of "triangulation of crossfire."

Bertrand listened during this phase. Ferrie talked about the availability of exits. Ferrie had two proposals—one man sacrificed would give enough time for the the others to escape. Ferrie was the pilot. He said they would go to Mexico and on to Brazil and then on to Cuba. Or they would go direct to Cuba.

Bertrand interrupted to say as soon as the shot was fired the world would know about it and they could not get a plane out of Mexico. Bertrand said he and Ferrie would have to be in the public eye on the day of the assassination.

Ferrie then said he would make a speech at Southeastern Louisiana State College in Hammond. Bertrand said he would go to the West Coast for his company on business.

It was here, after Garrison had built Russo's testimony to a high pitch, that he asked Russo to step down from the stand, walk to the man he knew as Bertrand and place his hand over that man's head.

Russo strode firmly around the defense table, stopped behind Clay Shaw and placed his hand palm downward about eight inches over Shaw's head. Shaw, holding a cigarette, gazed straight at the judges' bench. He was slumped in the chair, but rigid. The court recessed.

After the three-judge panel of Criminal District Court judges reconvened, Russo continued this story, backtracking under Garrisons' questions:

Oswald took part in the conversation about exits. Ferrie was talking about where and what stops would be made on the way to Brazil or Cuba. Bertrand said they couldn't leave the country because the world would know of the assassination.

Oswald said, "Oh, shut up. Leave him (Ferrie) alone. He knows what he's talking about. He's the pilot."

Bertrand answered, "As far as I'm concerned, he's a washed-up pilot."

Tells of "A Solution"

Ferrie offered a solution that the people involved should be in the public eye and be around a lot of people who could testify later they were at such and such a place at such and such a time.

Bertrand said he would be on the West Coast. Oswald said nothing else.

Garrison stopped this testimony to ask whether Russo ever saw Oswald again. Russo said he saw Oswald twice more.

"The first time we met," Russo said, "Oswald made a crack about not wanting me up there (during the conspiracy discussion). He seemed disturbed about the fact I was there.

A Rifle Is Presented

"The first occasion I saw Oswald (after the meeting in Ferrie's apartment), he was wiping or cleaning a rifle—bolt action. It had a sight on it—for hunting it looked like."

Garrison stopped Russo, drew a rifle from beneath the prosecution table, and placed it on the table before Shaw's attorneys, F. Irving Dymond, William Wegmann and Edward Wegmann. The lawyers inspected the weapon.

"Tell us whatever similarities you may or may not see between this rifle and the one Oswald was holding," Garrison asked Russo.

"The difference to my mind," said Russo, "is one end of the sight (on Oswald's gun) was not nearly so bubble-shaped as this gun. It had the same bolt mechanism. This is a polished brown stock and Oswald's gun was a dull brown."

Russo said the last time he saw Oswald, he walked into Ferrie's apartment and Oswald was telling Ferrie about some trouble with Oswald's wife.

"Ferrie was telling Oswald, 'Don't worry, I'll handle it.' And I excused myself and left."

The hearing recessed after the defense filed three motions for writs of subpoena. Those subpoenaed were the registrar at Tulane University, where Russo did some undergraduate study; the registrar at Loyola University, from which Russo received his bachelor's degree and studied law for one year; and the personnel manager for Equitable Life Assurance Co., Russo's employer.