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Witness Says He Heard Oswald, Shaw, Ferrie Plot Assassination

UPI Telephoto
PERRY RUSSO

Garrison's 'Informant' Describes Alleged Conspiracy

New Orleans, March 14 (AP)—Jim Garrison's "confidential informant" told a three-judge criminal district court panel today he heard Lee Harvey Oswald, Clay Shaw and David Ferrie plotting to assassinate President Kennedy.

Perry Raymond Russo, 25, an insurance salesman from Baton Rouge, testified he was in Ferrie's apartment here in September, 1963, and listened to a discussion of how to kill President Kennedy and make a gateway.

Use Of Scapegoat

Russo said the plot involved "triangulation of crossfire," diversionary shooting, a possible flight to Cuba and the sacrificing of one man as a scapegoat to allow the others to escape.

Kennedy was killed in Dallas November 22, 1963—2 months after the alleged meeting in Ferrie's cluttered apartment not far from New Orleans' elegant Garden district.

The Warren Commission said Oswald was the lone assassin, and there was no credible evidence of any conspiracy.

Of the three alleged conspirators, only Shaw is alive. Oswald was killed by Jack Ruby 2 days after the assassination, and Ferrie died in bed February 22.

Shaw Denies Charge

Shaw has denied taking part in any conspiracy to kill the President, and the Attorney General in Washington said the FBI investigated Shaw late in 1963 and cleared him of any link to the assassination.

Russo, a part-time college student who lives with a younger cousin near the campus of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, was described as "a nice young kid" by a neighbor. A fellow student at L.S.U. said he was "a quiet type who is interested in politics."

Russo was first publicly connected with the Garrison probe February 24, when he told newsmen he knew Ferrie.

Called Him "Leon"

Under the questioning by Jim Garrison, district attorney, Russo said Oswald was introduced to him as "Leon Oswald" and Shaw as "Clem Bertrand."

Shown a photograph by Garrison, Russo identified "Leon" as Lee Harvey Oswald, the man the Warren Commission named as the assassin.

Asked if "Clem Bertrand" was in the courtroom, Russo pointed at Shaw. At Garrison's direction, he stepped from the witness chair, walked around the defense table and held his hand over Shaw's silvery white hair.

Has Denied Charge

The 54-year-old Shaw, calmly smoking a cigarette, did not move. Former managing director of the International Trade Mart here, he has denied any part in an assassination conspiracy.

President Kennedy was killed by high-powered rifle bullets in Dallas November 22, 1963, some 2 months after the alleged meeting here.

Russo said that, after the party, he next saw Lee Harvey Oswald in Ferrie's apartment, and that Oswald was "wiping or cleaning a bolt action rifle. It had a sight on it for hunting."

Garrison showed Russo a rifle

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UPI Telephoto
CLAY SHAW

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and asked if it had similarities to the one Oswald held in Ferrie's apartment.

Russo said: "The difference to my mind is that this end [front] was not nearly so bubble shaped." He said the weapon had the same bolt action, but a shinier stock, and its telescopic sight was larger than the one on the rifle Oswald had.

Russo said he had seen Bertrand in May, 1962, when President Kennedy dedicated a new wharf in New Orleans, and said "New Orleans must trade or fade."

"I was in school," Russo said. "The President was coming down to make a speech. At that time I saw 'Bertrand.' While the President was speaking I was looking around. 'Bertrand' was one of the few not looking at the President."

Estimated 20,000 There

Police estimated 20,000 persons attended the dedication.

Russo said that after he contacted Garrison following Ferrie's death, the district attorney took him to "a house on Dauphine street." Shaw lives at 1313 Dauphine street. "He stuck his head out the door and I said, 'That's the man,'" Russo said, referring to "Bertrand."

The hearing recessed at 3.30 P.M. until 10 A.M. Wednesday. The defense issued subpoenas for Russo's school and employment records.

The rare three-judge criminal district court panel was called to hear the preliminary case and decide whether there is enough evidence to warrant formal charge and trial for Shaw, now retired.

Shaw was arrested in Garrison's office March 1. He was booked — but never formally charged—with conspiring to kill the President. Such procedure is common under Louisiana law.

Shaw, one-time Army major, was freed on $10,000 bond shortly after his arrest.

Ferrie, a former airlines pilot, was found dead in his bed Febuary 22. The coroner ruled death resulted from natural causes.

After leading Russo through a brief summary of his educational background and present job, Garrison asked if he knew Ferrie.

"Open Book Invitation"

Russo said he not only knew Ferrie but had an "open book invitation" to visit Ferrie's apartment at any time.

He said that it was in the summer of 1963 that Ferrie "indicated to me that he was obsessed with Kennedy." This drew an immediate objection as being a conclusion reached by the witness. The Court sustained the objection.

"Don't tell us your conclusions," Garrison resumed. "What did Ferrie say to you in regard to Kennedy?"

This drew a new objection, also sustained.

Party At Apartment

Garrison then switched the testimony to the apartment party with this query, "Do you recall anything unusual happening at Ferrie's apartment in 1963?"

"Sometime around the middle of September I went to the house and at that time there was some sort of party in progress. There were eight or nine people there. As the party dissipated it narrowed down to three people beside myself because I had no ride home."

At this point, Garrison drew from Russo testimony regarding the identification of Oswald and Shaw as "Leon Oswald" and "Clem Bertrand."

Said Ferrie Did Most

Russo testified that Ferrie, 49, a free-lance pilot who was under investigation by Garrison at the time of his death, did most of the talking about the proposed assassination.

Ferrie, pacing the floor, said the attempt should have three gunners in order to provide "a triangulation of cross-fire," Russo testified.

He quoted Ferrie as having said that one man would have to be sacrificed as a scapegoat.

Ferrie, Russo added, was to be the get-away pilot, flying into Mexico to refuel for a flight to Cuba.

Objections were raised by Bertrand, Russo said. He said Bertrand argued that as soon as the shots were fired "the world would know about it" and once the plane landed in Mexico there would be no way to get out.

The crowd in the stuffy paneled courtroom included 74 reporters—leaving just a few seats for spectators. All of them were carefully checked in and out of the courtroom by 20 sheriff's deputies assigned to maintain tight security. A device to detect metal objects was used to screen everyone entering the courtroom.

Russo's testimony brought vehement objections by the defense that it contained hearsay. The objection was sustained by presiding Judge Bernard Bagert, with qualifications.

James Alcock, the assistant district attorney, argued that hearsay is admissable at a preliminary hearing—which seeks only to establish probable cause. The defense, however, said any testimony taken at the preliminary hearing could then be introduced at a subsequent trial and defense lawyers would have no grounds on which to argue against it.

The defense attorney, F. Irving Dymond, said the main purpose of a preliminary hearing—called by Garrison in this case—was to get hearsay testimony past the normal legal barriers against it at a court trial.

Informant Gives Opposite Story

New Orleans, March 14 (AP)—Perry Russo, the "confidential informant" in Jim Garrison's probe of the assassination of President Kennedy, told a television interviewer he had never heard of Lee Harvey Oswalk until he was linked with the presidential assassination.

WDSU-TV of New Orleans broadcast an interview tonight it made with Russo shortly after the death of David Ferrie two weeks ago. Garrison described Ferrie as a central figure in the assassination probe.

"I never heard of Oswald until on television [after] the assassination," Russo said in the interview. He said Ferrie never mentioned Oswald's name.