

Russo Admits He Had Earlier Doubts On His Ability to Identify Oswald

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By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writers

NEW ORLEANS, March 15 —Admitting that he had once been under psychiatric care, Perry R. Russo said today that he was never certain he had seen Lee Harvey Oswald here until investigators for District Attorney Jim Garrison began drawing pictures for him.

But now, he declared in a long day of cross-examination, he was "absolutely sure."

Wooden and unemotional, the 25-year-old Russo has been Garrison's star witness so far in the District Attorney's investigation of President Kennedy's assassination.

Russo has sworn that he heard Oswald, free-lance pilot David W. Ferrie and businessman Clay Shaw plotting to kill the late President at a meeting in Ferrie's duplex apartment here in the late summer of 1963.

Walks Tightrope

Now an insurance salesman of Baton Rouge, Russo asserted that he had not come forward before for fear of being labeled a "screwball."

He walked a tightrope in his testimony today at a preliminary hearing on Shaw's arrest for conspiracy in the assassination of President Kennedy. At one point, he refused to identify a picture of Oswald in pain, split seconds after he had been shot in Dallas, as the "Leon Oswald" he had known as Ferrie's roommate.

"I'm not going to go out on limb," he said, looking at the picture, although it was clearly of Oswald and, in fact, half of a composite, two-photo exhibit that he had identified the day before.

"The Oswald I knew . . . was like a beatnik," Russo asserted. "He had three or four day's growth of beard."

Russo also disclosed that he never volunteered his story to authorities until the night of Feb. 22 after Ferrie had suddenly died in his apartment of a cerebral hemorrhage. He said he wrote Garrison and was subsequently interviewed by the District Attorney's investigators, first in Baton

whose hair was ruffled up. I did not honestly know Lee Harvey Oswald.

"If I was going to point an accusing finger, I wanted to be sure."

At the hearing's first day, Russo, a graduate of Loyola University, swore that he heard Ferrie outling a plot to kill Mr. Kennedy "in mid-September" of 1963 with "Leon Oswald" and "Clem Bertrand" sitting in on the meeting as willing students.

Identified Shaw

Russo dramatically identified Shaw as "Bertrand" in the courtroom Tuesday.

The witness asserted that the plot was outlined at the windup of a party at Ferrie's apartment. He said he went there with several friends, including a girl from Alabama named Sandra Moffett and a "Lefty" Petersen, but that he stuck around because his "ride" home had left.

Russo, however, was vague about how he got to Ferrie's apartment, who else might have been with him, and whom he had been expecting to take him home.

Russo blandly added that he wasn't even sure that the Dave Ferrie widely publicized as under investigation by Garrison was the Dave Ferrie he knew, although he testified at other points that he had known the pilot for years. At another point, he said he had visited Ferrie's apartment "30 to 40 times," but was unfamiliar with most of the rooms.

Shown a picture of Ferrie's bathroom, Russo said he had been there only "on one occasion."

Quizzed on Interview

Russo was also questioned sharply about a television interview he granted Feb. 24 that apparently contradicted

his testimony in court. In the interview, he said he had never known Lee Harvey Oswald "until television of the assassination." He also had said that Ferrie had talked in the summer of 1963 "about how easy it would be to assassinate the President," but that Ferrie mentioned it "just in a joking way."

Russo insisted they weren't contradictions at all. He said he knew "Leon Oswald" and that Leon Oswald and Lee Harvey Oswald were "different names to me." He also said that he didn't count September as "summertime" when Ferrie allegedly crossed the line between joking and plotting.

Russo began the day on the witness stand by describing himself as a pantheist from a bickering home who had undergone regular psychiatric care for approximately 18 months between 1959 and 1961 and occasionally after that. He did not explain nor was he asked just what his problems were.

"Rouge and later here.

Arrests Promised

This was after Garrison had promised that "arrests will be made . . . convictions obtained" in his investigation, but before Shaw's arrest.

Russo said Garrison's investigators showed him one photograph after another, but he was unable to identify Oswald positively until "they drew a composite picture . . . they added on a beard, something between a beard and whiskers."

"I said, 'That's the roommate,'"

Russo declared. "I know 'Leon Oswald,' who was lightly whiskered, who was dirty."