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Russo Asked Why He Waited on Story

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—Perry R. Russo, the insurance salesman turned star witness in the Kennedy assassination conspiracy case, today faced further tough cross-examination at the preliminary hearing on whether businessman Clay L. Shaw must go to trial.

Shaw, 54, a wealthy retired executive, chain-smoked and watched impassively as his lawyers tried yesterday to destroy Russo's credibility.

Why did Russo wait three years to tell authorities about an alleged conspiracy to kill President John F. Kennedy, defense attorney F. Irvin Dymond asked.

Why didn't Russo recognize Lee Harvey Oswald, the one-time New Orleans resident named as the assassin, from television and newspaper photographs shown at the time, Dymond asked.

Claims Plot in 1963

Russo, 25, of Baton Rouge, had told the three-judge criminal district court panel he was present in mid-September 1963 when Shaw, Oswald and David W. Ferrie plotted to kill the President.

Kennedy was shot about two months later in Dallas.

Shaw, booked but not formally charged with conspiracy to murder, has said he never knew Oswald or Ferrie. Free under $10,000 bond, he is the only man of the three named by Russo still living.

Ferrie, 49, a free-lance pilot with a record of morals offenses, died Feb. 22 while under investigation by Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison. The death was officially listed as due to natural causes.

Oswald was killed in Dallas by Jack Ruby after the assassination.

Russo, said Oswald had seemed vaguely familiar when he saw photographs of him in 1963, but it wasn't until "they put whiskers on him" that he knew Oswald was the same man he had seen in Ferrie's apartment.

"Who put whiskers on him?" Dymond asked.

"One of the artists," replied Russo. He pointed out a man seated with a cluster of assistant district attorneys at the prosecution table. Garrison was not present.

Asst. Dist. Atty. James L. Alcock rose and handed over a picture of a rather shaggy Oswald. "Perhaps this will help the court." At this point, the hearing adjourned, ending its second day.

Talk of the Two Oswalds

Russo agreed under cross-examination that he must have seen photographs of Oswald many times since the assassination.

"What finally succeeded in making you sure that Lee Harvey Oswald and Ferrie's roommate were one and the same?" demanded Dymond.

Russo said the pictures he had seen were of a neat Oswald, whereas the "Leon Oswald" he had seen at Ferrie's cluttered apartment "was half shaven, his hair mussed. He was a beatnik."

After contacting Garrison by letter last month, he added, an agent arrived and began showing him various photographs of Oswald.

"That's Ferrie's Roommate"

Russo said he stopped the process, after being shown in picture of Oswald dishelved, and told the agent: "That's not Oswald. That's Ferrie's roommate."

It was after this that Russo came under full interrogation by Garrison's staff, including the use of sodium pentothal — the so-called "truth serum," a controversial term among some psychologists who say it often does not really guarantee true statements.

As to why he didn't come forward with his report of a conspiracy in 1963, Russo said he was involved in school work at the time — a reply that left Dymond apparently aghast.

His Further Reasoning

Besides, said Russo, Oswald was shot to death by Ruby in a Dallas police station two days after the assassination — and the Warren commission said no one else was involved in the assassination.

"I didn't know Ferrie was being investigated until I saw a story on the Garrison investigation in the newspaper," said Russo.

This statement made some observers wonder whether Russo really was Garrison's legal ace in the hole.

After the first reports of the investigation were disclosed, Garrison said he was certain of arrests and convictions in his probe — which started last October.

Last Saw Oswald in October

During cross-examination, Russo said he last saw Oswald at Ferrie's apartment in early October 1963.

"Are you aware that Oswald left New Orleans on the 25th of September to go to Mexico and never returned here?" said Dymond.

Asst. Dist. Atty. Charles R. Ward promptly objected. Oswald's departure had never been proven in this court, he said.

Dymond signaled and assistants began producing cardboard boxes.

"You are not going to introduce the Warren commission report are you?" asked Judge Bernard Bagert.

"Yes." said Dymond.

"You're not serious are you?" the judge said, raising his voice.

Dymond said he was.

"You're wrong! You're overruled!"

The Warren commission report documents in great detail Oswald's departure from New Orleans and subsequent relocation in Dallas, where his wife and child were living.

In Dallas, Oswald's widow said yesterday she never heard of Ferrie or Shaw while she lived in New Orleans.