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New Orleans Plot

Key Figures In JFK Probe Dead, Missing

NEW ORLEANS La. (AP) — David Lewis, who said last Monday he feared for his life because of what he knew about a local probe into the death of President John F. Kennedy, was reported Thursday to have left town with his family for an undisclosed location.

The disclosure came after a routine check for Lewis for comment on the death of David W. Ferrie, a key figure in the investigation directed by Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison. Ferrie was found dead in his apartment Wednesday.

Lewis, 26, a bus station baggage clerk, formerly was a private detective. In that role he claimed to have met New Orleans-born Lee Harvey Oswald, named by the Warren commission as the Kennedy assassin.

Employees at the bus station said, "We don't know where he is and don't know when he will be back — and that's official."

Garrison hinted today that W. Ferrie carried to his grave some secrets about President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Ferrie, 48, described himself as a psychologist and private detective as well as a flyer.

Garrison, the 6-foot-6 gun-toting prosecutor, called the death "apparent suicide."

The coroner, Dr. Nicholas Chetta, said tests were not complete but death seemed due to a massive brain hemorrhage, with no sign of suicide except a curious, unsigned, undated note saying death was a "sweet prospect."

Ferrie was on the brink of producing information that could have been important, said Garrison, whose assassination probe — started long after the Warren Commission finished its

work — has created an international sensation.

"We felt that he was really now ready to talk candidly, to contribute to this important investigation," said Garrison. "Now he's gone and it will be much harder to make the connections between certain people. But I'm sure we'll make them anyway."

"I'm just as optimistic today as I was two days ago."

Two days ago, Garrison was insisting that his effort to prove a conspiracy in the assassination of President Kennedy will result in arrests and convictions.

Garrison said his office had planned to take Ferrie into custody early next week. Because Ferrie had expressed fears for his life, Garrison said he provided him a temporary hideout at a motor hotel here.

"Evidence developed by our office had long since confirmed that he was involved in events culminating in the assassination of President Kennedy," Garrison said.

The nude body of Ferrie, who operated a flying service here, was found in the calm posture of sleep, covered to the chest by a bedsheet.

His second floor apartment was in disarray and disorder. An American flag was in the living room. Although 15 bottles of various pills were on a table, the coroner said no drugs were found other than those used for vascular disease. He said Ferrie was born with a weak blood vessel at the base of his brain. It ruptured, producing a massive cerebral hemorrhage, Chetta said. Ferrie also suffered from high blood pressure and recent-

ly told a friend he had encephalitis (sleeping sickness).

An unsigned, undated note was found on the dining room table. The first paragraph said: "To leave this life is, for me, a sweet prospect. I find nothing in it that is desirable, and on the other hand everything that is loathsome."

Dr. Chetta said the time of Ferrie's death had to be before 4 a.m. Wednesday because of the rigor mortis condition. However, a newsmen for the Washington Post, George Lardner, said he had visited with Ferrie in his apartment until that hour.

Garrison said the conflicting statements constituted "one of the mysteries we don't understand."

In a copyrighted story appearing in today's Washington Post, Lardner said Ferrie "seemed in good spirits, not like a man about to kill himself" at the time they talked.

"Ferrie said he never knew Oswald and had no recollection of ever having met him," Lardner reported. He said Ferrie told him that, Garrison's inquiry would turn out to be a "witch hunt."

Ferrie was brought into the scope of the assassination probe within 72 hours after Kennedy was slain Nov. 22, 1963. Garrison said he pulled Ferrie in for questioning at that time and subsequently turned him over to the FBI, which took a statement and released him.

A New Orleans florist, Edward Voebel, had seen Lee Harvey Oswald's picture on television and reported that he and Oswald had served in a Civil Air Patrol squadron under Ferrie. When authorities sought to

question Ferrie, they found he had gone to Texas.

Ferrie told a newsmen recently that he and two friends took a short vacation trip to Texas the day of the assassination "on the spur of the moment." He said they visited Houston, Galveston and Alexandria, La., before returning home. They did not go to Dallas, he said.

And Ferrie said he and Voebel were in separate CAP squadrons. Ferrie said he never knew Oswald. A native of New Orleans, Oswald lived in New Orleans the summer of 1963.

Garrison said Ferrie's name figures in 40 pages of Warren Commission material — 36 of which he said are classified secret and unavailable. In Washington, it was reported that 19 of the pages were available for public examination.

Although Garrison said he considered Ferrie's death a suicide, he added, "I am not ruling out murder. I'm not ruling out anything. We have gone far beyond the point of the Warren Commission. We have made more progress in three months with a handful of men than the Warren Commission with 3,000 men made in three years."

A New Orleans police detective, Frederick S. O'Sullivan, told the Warren Commission he knew of no evidence that Oswald was acquainted with Ferrie. However, the district attorney hinted that he was close to finding a thread connecting Ferrie and Oswald.

Asked if he believed Oswald alone killed Kennedy, Garrison said: "I have no reason to believe that Lee Harvey Oswald killed anyone in Dallas. This is my personal feeling."

Ferrie had termed Garrison's investigation "a big joke." He said Garrison had him "pegged as the get-away pilot in an elaborate plot to kill Kennedy."

Ferrie was described in sympathetic tones by Garrison as a man who had suffered private

pain and was tortured by his appearance. He had lost his hair and eyebrows in an explosion several years ago, Garrison said. He did not reveal the details. Ferrie wore a shaggy toupee and mascara eyebrows.

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Ferrie resided in New Orleans the last 15 years. In 1961, he lost his job as an airline pilot after being arrested on a morals charge in suburban New Orleans. He was never tried on the charge.

There was no indication of burial plans. The body remained in custody of the coroner's office.