

Strange Cast Plays Roles in New

Orleans DA's Assassination Inquiry

A White House correspondent who won a Pulitzer prize for his coverage of the Kennedy assassination went to New Orleans, to look into charges that a conspiracy to murder the President was spawned in Louisiana. Here is what he found:

By MERRIMAN SMITH

New Orleans, March 5—(UPI)—For a nation—and a world—still distressed by the assassination of John F. Kennedy, a new and dismaying chapter is being written here.

The central figure is Jim Garrison, politically ambitious district attorney of Orleans Parish. He is an enormous man who has a basso profundo/robusto voice and an investigative technique to match.

Garrison's evidence comes from some of the seamiest sides of New Orleans. It includes witnesses bedeviled by alcohol, pills and psychoneuroses.

The district attorney says his intention is to prove that a plan to kill Mr. Kennedy was hatched in New Orleans by anti-Communists, American and Cuban, in retribution for the botched-up Bay of Pigs invasion and for the

President's failure to pull down Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

Garrison's investigation produced its first arrest Wednesday night. Clay Shaw, 54, former managing director of the International Trade Mart in New Orleans, was charged with participating in a conspiracy to murder Mr. Kennedy.

Denial Made

Shaw denies that. He also denies knowing Lee Harvey Oswald and a New Orleans character named David W. Ferrie, both now dead, who are alleged to have been a part of a conspiracy.

Shaw, meanwhile, is free on bond pending a hearing later this month.

At this point, it seems doubtful that the investigation will produce much more than that some Cubans in New Orleans in 1962-63 and some American oddballs may indeed have spoken wishfully of seeing Mr. Kennedy killed.

Garrison says he has learned that Oswald sat in on such sordid councils before going to Dallas, where Mr. Kennedy was slain.

The Warren Commission

which conducted the official federal investigation of the assassination reported that it could find no evidence to contradict a conclusion that Oswald was the sole assassin and was not helped by any conspirators, foreign or domestic.

Hours of Talk

I spent hours talking with Garrison—in an old restaurant in the city's famous French Quarter and in the book-lined study of his spacious home in a new section off St. Bernard av.

Sipping an incredible mixture of cream soda and gin, the 45-year-old district attorney seemed wracked by exhaustion, but if he has any inner thoughts about the strength of his case he doesn't show it.

Almost daily, Garrison vows to say nothing more for publication until he is ready to present an ironclad case, and almost daily, he has something more to say.

"We have definitely found out how they killed President Kennedy and we're going to prove it," he told me.

Previous Statement

[At the time of Shaw's arrest, other newsmen asked Garrison whether he was claiming that the purported conspiracy in New Orleans actually resulted in Mr. Kennedy's death. He evaded the question by saying he didn't want to "get involved in semantics."

[It has been noted that the affidavit his office used to get a search warrant against Shaw did not go beyond the statement that "there was discussion and agreement to carry out this experience."

[That in itself is a crime in Louisiana and it still leaves the possibility that Oswald, even if

he had once been involved with others, could have gone ahead on his own without telling anyone else in advance.]

The case has a long way to go if Garrison is to be hailed as the man who revised history. He might be able to make some relatively minor arrests and get relatively minor convictions.

At this point, it seems most doubtful he can prove the existence of a genuine operating pilot. Nor does he seem at all close to finding or proving the existence of a second assassin.

Political Future

But his investigation could influence his own political fortunes.

There is considerable talk that his friends may push him for lieutenant governor this fall.

Of such talk, Garrison says, "I couldn't care less."

For those who do not understand the argot of politicians, this is an understatement.

His admirers express confidence he will make it all the way to the governor's chair in Baton Rouge.

More enthusiastic Garrison people see beyond the governorship. Some say that if he brings off this conspiracy case, his credentials as a high quality law-and-order man might put him on a future Democratic national ticket, possibly as vice presidential candidate.

Some 50 or more prosperous businessmen, largely in oil and automobiles, are collecting a special fund with which Garrison can finance his investigation without using public money for which there has to be public accounting. They call it "Truth and Consequences, Inc."

Unstable Witnesses

What makes Garrison supposedly so confident of arrests and convictions? The Iowa native and 1950 law graduate of Tulane University in New Orleans says his files are overflowing with evidence.

It must be noted, however, that much of this evidence is based on the words and deeds of men and women of known instability.

Here are a few of the persons who have figured in Garrison's case so far:

—An unfrocked airline pilot who was a known sexual deviate, fanatically religious, who sometimes dressed in vestments of a priest in something he called the "Orthodox Old Catholic Church of North America." This was Ferrie, who last month was found dead in bed, wearing a red wig and mascara eyebrows. He had no hair or eyebrows of his own.

Ferrie, one of the foundation

stones of Garrison's case, was labeled promptly by the district attorney as a suicide. The coroner and two doctors who conducted an autopsy attributed death to hemorrhage of a blood vessel at the base of his head.

Ferrie was in an advanced stage of hypertension which was not helped by his frequent use of stimulant, depressant and euphoric pills.

Worried Convict

—A convict of Cuban extraction with a penchant for armed robbery, burglary and pushing narcotics. This professional tough, Miguel Torres, has not behaved so pugnaciously of late. Whining for protection, he was questioned by Garrison's men in Angola State Prison, moved to the New Orleans jail, then into the jail hospital for even greater safety.

One theory is that Miguel may be more afraid of a crime syndicate than he is of Garrison or some of the alleged conspirators.

Syndicate mobsters are quite unkind toward independent purveyors of narcotics, pinball machines and girls.

—Jack S. Martin, 51, a native

of Phoenix, Ariz., also known variously as Colonel Martin and Bishop Martin (affiliation, Orthodox Old Catholic Church of North America). A self-styled expert on electronic eavesdropping, Martin describes himself as "author, a former newspaperman, professional soldier, adventurer and philosopher." Asked whether he had been known as Edward S. Suggs, he told me, "I don't want to discuss it, Martin is now my legal name."

Some of Garrison's critics say Martin is highly important to the case. Martin agrees most enthusiastically. Garrison does not. The district attorney and his staff questioned Martin countless times, as have the FBI and Secret Service.

Stories Change

Martin has told a variety of stories linking Oswald with Ferrie. One version was that Ferrie hypnotized Oswald, who went to Dallas under a spell; that Ferrie was waiting for Oswald in Dallas with a getaway plane on the assassination day, Nov. 22, 1963; and that Ferrie and Oswald were heavily influenced by W. Guy Bannister, former FBI agent, later deputy chief of the New Orleans police force, then head of a private investigation agency before his death in 1964.

Martin, an episodic drunk and no stranger to jails and mental wards, has a pattern of talking and recanting. He told the

Secret Service the story about Ferrie being the getaway pilot, then took it back as being nothing but a fantasy.

He told me in turn that the Secret Service lied, that he had taken back nothing. He also told me that Ferrie had a rifle identical to the one used by Oswald and that on one occasion Bannister pistol-whipped Ferrie over something related to the anti-Castro movement.

Worth Remembering

Before I mentioned our conversation to anyone and was sitting in my hotel room studying my notes on Martin's jumbled conversation, he was on the phone to a New Orleans TV station denouncing UPI and me for allegedly having distorted what he said.

Martin is worth remembering, however. At about the time of Ferrie's death, Martin was quite apprehensive about his own safety and left town. He told me he moved around for more than a week, finally reaching a point 1,000 miles away. We picked up reports of his presence as far away as Rosarita Beach in Mexico, more than 2,000 miles from New Orleans, and at various locations in Mississippi and Texas.

In any event, this took financing of a sort and Martin is perennially broke. Where did the funds come from? Asked whether he gave Martin walking-around money, Garrison waved off the question and said he would not be so foolish as to attach any definite importance whatever to information from this kind of source.

Still Another

—David Lewis, 26, New Orleans bus company freight handler and self-described private investigator, part of the Bannister-Ferrie-Martin set.

Lewis, too, fears for his life enough to disappear periodically. His motivation in the case seems to involve profit and status.

He rebuffs reporters with a lordly, "No comment." Moments later, however, he tries to peddle for an outrageous sum a tape recording which he made with Martin "naming names." UPI was invited to start the bidding for this tape in the neighborhood of \$1,000. It hardly seemed worth it.

What does Lewis know to connect Oswald with the assassination and/or the so-called conspirators?

"Plenty," he says to some "Nothing" to others. He is supposed to have done some investigative work for Bannister and for Ferrie, but Garrison's staff

says it doubts that Lewis was much more than an errand boy with a taste for high adventure.

In a case such as this, however, a casual relationship in 1962-63, retold many times, can blossom in the mind of the teller into something of major importance. Lewis is supposed to have overheard some of those bound together in their hatred of Castro communism by a mutual wish for Mr. Kennedy's death. But it would seem that anything he has to say in court would have to relate to the words and deeds of two dead men, Bannister and Ferris, and the mercurial moods of Martin.

And Two More

—Carlos Quiroga (who may be either in New Orleans or somewhere in Texas) and Sergio Arcacha. Both were involved in the Cuba liberation movement in New Orleans on or about the time Oswald was there. Garrison has been trying to question Arcacha, who is in Dallas. The Cuban refused.

Quiroga and Arcacha must be considerably more important to Garrison's case than some of the other publicly identified figures. Garrison does not like discussing their relationship to his inquiry, but concedes that they are prime names on his roster of persons to be questioned.

—Bernardo Torres of Miami, Fla., self-styled investigator reported to have offered his help to Garrison. Garrison is not en-

thusiastic about this Torres (who apparently is not related to Miguel) because he doesn't seem to have much to offer. Bernardo Torres has described himself rather warmly as one of those assigned to guard Pres-

ident Kennedy when he made his moving speech to survivors of the Cuban refugee brigade which was chopped up so badly in the 1961 abortive invasion and later released by Castro. The Secret Service says it has no

record whatever of Bernardo being involved.

These are only some of the 35 or more people who currently show up in Garrison's inquiry. Garrison's investigation reaches into the Cuban colony

of Miami and the Texas cities of Dallas and Houston, in addition to New Orleans. There are a number of Cubans with whom he would like to talk, but they have long since dropped out of sight.