

# Jim Garrison Plugs

by Peter Birge

In March of 1967, New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison announced he had arrested and charged Clay Shaw with conspiracy in the assassination of President Kennedy. Garrison claimed to have uncovered a plot hatched by a faction of anti-Castro CIA informants and agents, and he promised that the Shaw trial testimony would include a detailed account of the events surrounding the tragedy in Dealey Plaza. Garrison, however, could never deliver on his vow: two years later, Shaw was acquitted by an Orleans Parish jury which not only failed to find a motive, but was also unable to discern any coherency in the state's arguments.

Garrison's coup d'etat case centered on the activities of three individuals: David Ferrie, a former commercial airlines pilot and gunrunner; Clay Shaw himself, the retired director of the New Orleans Trade Mart; and Lee Harvey Oswald, whom Garrison alleged had been the fall guy in a vendetta engineered by Bay of Pigs veterans seeking to retaliate against Kennedy for his failure to provide air support for their abortive invasion.

As the trial wore on, it became increasingly clear that Garrison lacked the conclusive evidence he had promised to provide. Instead, his charges grew more flamboyant, his 'Conspiracy' more wide-ranging, his contentions more convoluted. The national press turned against him when state witnesses recanted testimony or claimed Garrison had coerced them.

Warren Commission critics, meanwhile, flocked to New Orleans to join Garrison's research staff in the belief that he really had the goods. They were to become disillusioned by what New Times writer Robert Sam Anson later called a "grotesque charade." Many left after the

trial, labelling it a political hoax perpetrated by Garrison to insure his re-election. But the damage had already been done; historians of the assassination agree almost unanimously that the Shaw trial discredited other conspiracy theorists for several years to come.

After the trial, Garrison had troubles enough of his own. He was indicted for bribery and tax evasion. Though he beat those raps, his reputation was shattered and he lost his bid for renomination two years ago. Since then, he has written a novel and continued his attack on the CIA. Last week, while on a promotional tour for his book, *The Star-Spangled Contract*, he visited the Phoenix and offered his views on a wide variety of assassination-related topics.

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**Q:** Mr. Garrison, weren't you defeated recently in your bid for re-election as New Orleans district attorney?

**A:** Yeah, after 12 years. Nobody before that ever lasted more than four; that's SOP (Standard Operating Procedure). It's a custom since time immemorial for DAs in New Orleans to go down in flames. I don't know how I lasted that long. Even when I finally did lose two years ago, the difference was only one percent, and my opponent spent approximately \$500,000, while I only had \$30,000 to spend. I'm still amazed that the New Orleans press never has shown any curiosity how he could come up with 10 times as much money as I, the incumbent, had. Losing the office, though, finally gave me an opportunity to concentrate on writing the novel I'd been postponing for years. Getting beat is the best thing that ever happened to me — assuming the novel's successful.

**Q:** Though you are no longer a law enforcement official, we understand you still

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# Away

have a strong interest in matters pertaining to the Kennedy assassination. What was your opinion of the recent CBS-TV report, 'The Assassinations'? Did it answer any questions?

A: The CBS series consisted of two parts. In the first show, they went down the chute just as they did years ago — totally in the tank. Calling black white and white black, changing facts quite casually to allow them to continue to support the government position. In the second part, they prepared for themselves a 'fallback' position because of the new things (new evidence) that have begun to show up here and there. VAHID ROUNT.

The Central Intelligence Agency itself has perceived since last year that they are beginning to lose some credibility. So they, too, have been preparing a 'fallback.' Its essentials are: to adopt a little bit of the truth which will take care of questions that have arisen, but not so much truth as to lead anybody to them. The plan has been to admit that there were assassination plans in operation, all right, and that there were assassination teams (marksmen) being trained — but for killing Castro, not Kennedy. Then what they (presumably CBS) do is put in an additional clause, saying in effect: 'And it is possible that Castro, having learned of this operation, struck back against Kennedy' — which is a lot of bullshit, because, just prior to his death, Jack Kennedy had a pretty good rapport with Castro. Kennedy was the last man in the world to want Castro executed; he had a liaison man negotiating toward possible detente with the Cuban leader. So all that isn't true, but it's a good 'fallback.' They may now admit that there were assassination teams, but they never, never tell you one important fact because it would be a step closer to the truth. That opera-

tion (the training of assassination teams) is directly related to Jack Kennedy's death, and its people were connected with what I call the Bay of Pigs alumnae. That sector of the agency was involved, and those individuals hated Kennedy as much as they hated Castro if not more. If you add that factor, the training of those teams becomes significant. It becomes a central matter — the diversion of one of those teams to Dallas, the one town that the CIA controls more than any other town in the country.

Q: To make a long story short, then, CBS manipulates the truth.

A: And NBC.

Q: A Phoenix writer recently reported, too, that the ITEK Corp., which CBS allowed to be their final authority on the Zapruder film, also ...

A: Also does work for the government.

Q: Correct. He reported that top executives at ITEK include ex- and current Agency personnel.

A: They're also closely connected with Life. The Luce operation was a CIA operation.

Q: Can we go back for a moment to your phrase, 'The Bay of Pigs alumnae'? Are you saying you believe that only one sector of the CIA was involved in Kennedy's assassination? Who are these 'alumnae'?

A: You have to appreciate that the CIA is structured so that one part doesn't always know what the other is doing. That's for security reasons. The whole architecture of the CIA is more tightly compartmentalized than any other operation I know. My point is that those involved in raids on Cuba — those at the tactical level — the people in that compartment took part in Kennedy's assassination. Even though I thought I had made that clear at

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the outset of my investigations, the press across the country made it seem as if I was envisioning John McCone (former CIA director) issuing an order to the whole organization: 'Get Kennedy.' That was, of course, unbelievable, but that's the way they presented it and it made me unbelievable, too.

**Q:** *Maybe the American people simply couldn't deal with the subtlety of your charges, that part of the agency could have liked Kennedy while another part killed him.*

**A:** That's the way it was, though. I'm sure that John McCone, head of CIA, cared a great deal for John Kennedy. And the press, by converting what I said and making me look ridiculous, almost completely buried the investigation for many years. But I've kept pounding away whenever I've had the chance. I never have let up on the CIA yet.

**Q:** *Even assuming that there was a thoroughly containerized conspiracy and that the entire CIA was not involved, isn't there a problem keeping an awful lot of people quiet forever? Hasn't the Water-gate scandal proved that if too many people are in on a secret, the beans eventually get spilled?*

**A:** Wait a second — that's quite a statement to skate over. I'm not so sure there were so many people involved in Kennedy's murder. All the principals were triple-hatting like (Jack) Ruby, doing double-duty. Triple-hatting is an intelligence phrase which the agency uses. In any operation of importance, everybody triple-hats to reduce the numbers. For example, a witness we interviewed said she saw Ruby in a traffic jam (shortly before the President's motorcade ar-

rived) and watched a young man get out of his truck carrying a rifle case. The next morning when she saw Ruby shoot Oswald on TV, she screamed, 'That's the man who was driving the truck.' The point is, Ruby accomplished the additional function of eliminating the scapegoat, thus making it impossible for Oswald to say how he had been set up.

By triple-hatting, by using Ruby not only for this major function later but also to deliver a gunman, you eliminate one man right there. If you systematize the operation, you can cut men down all over the place. So you don't have that many individuals; we didn't have that many in New Orleans. Outside of Guy Bannister (an ultra-rightist, ex-FBI agent who allegedly stockpiled munitions for the Bay of Pigs invasion), Shaw, and David Ferrie, well, that's about all it took to manipulate Oswald and keep him under control. The whole team in New Orleans for setting up the scapegoat probably included no more than six people. Then you have the rifle teams. Who are they going to tell? They know they're going to get killed if they talk. Besides, what they've done is so forbidden, who could they tell? Their families?

**Q:** *While we're on the subject of ratting on the Organization, do you think there's any merit in Seymour Hersh's crack that somebody involved will come forward to claim complicity once the statute of limitations expires — and then write a million-dollar bestseller?*

**A:** Oh, that's ridiculous. They'd make a million dollars and then some guy who wouldn't normally hurt a fly would blow their heads off. A lot of people cared for John Kennedy, and they would have to bump into them sooner or later. But go back for a moment to the Dallas operation and remember how smoothly it functioned. The main thing was demobilizing the Dallas police by getting hold of a handful of individuals who would make it

all possible and give the conspirators assurance. That made it a no-risk operation. And they also had key individuals — who, we will not name — at key places in the press; individuals who would not surface necessarily for some time until after the government's mythology (the Warren report) had been announced, but who would participate in a broad-based response: 'There seems to be a responsible inquiry going on and we have to compliment President Johnson on his election,' blah, blah. The CIA had that insurance lined up like the insurance you get before you board a plane.

**Q:** *Do you believe there is any hope of the government's reopening the assassination investigation? Or is it a dead issue now?*

**A:** I think it's a dead issue as far as the government is concerned and that, of course, is where it's at. As far as getting *anyplace*, I don't think it's a dead issue as far as bits and pieces of additional information gradually continuing to develop. And I can say with the same confidence I said nine years ago, that the agency was in on the assassination. The bits and pieces of genuine evidence which surface from time to time will just steadily and more steadily point to that part of the agency I've described. That's how it will happen, because there won't be people breaking away from the team (assassination conspirators) and saying, 'I can't stand it anymore, I must tell you about it.' If they were that sensitive, they wouldn't have been in the operation. But other individuals who have marginal knowledge, other Victor Marchettis (former CIA official who, with Jon Marks, wrote *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*) will come along from time to time. And I think that that part of the press which is curious and those people who do want to know and are inquiring will be able to develop a general understanding. But they may not have the satisfaction of

seeing the government do something.

We'll probably end up with a curious situation in which most of the thinking people in the country recognize that reality is quite different from the history that the government is announcing. After all,

isn't that a 20th century phenomenon? That's the way it is in Russia. All of the countries east of the Iron Curtain rewrite history and the people there *know* better, but they can't get the government to do any better. I'll give you an example of how some possible sophistication may develop on the part of some people in America — you see it in the Kennedy family. For a long time, I didn't understand why the Kennedys didn't try to do more. Then, finally, I began to realize that these people are not only intelligent people but extremely sophisticated — infinitely more sophisticated than I was when I went in with my naive thinking that if I showed the government the truth, perhaps I could bring 'em around to my way. I think the Kennedy family is sophisticated enough to know that government's never going to do anything and they know you can't fight the government. They know that all that money wouldn't mean a thing if a senator (Robert Kennedy?) could just disappear.

**Q:** *For years, Warren Commission critics and assassination skeptics have been charging that your New Orleans trials lacked any substance — that they were trumped-up, politically inspired hoaxes to guarantee your re-election. Now that additional evidence has been uncovered, do you feel vindicated?*

**A:** Oh, enormously! Of course, I couldn't anticipate it, not after watching them penetrate my office and manipulate the press down in New Orleans . . .

**Q:** *By 'them' do you mean the CIA?*

**A:** I presume the CIA. That's an assumption. Actually, it might not have been necessary for the agency to go to all that trouble. The establishment down there felt — and the press was dancing

VERY PERCEPTIVE

\* WHY DID SHAW HAVE TO LEAVE N.O. ?

with the establishment — they felt it was an insult to the city for the DA to question the federal government's integrity. That's a position they've never abandoned. But the people-at-large don't take that attitude, of course. Still, after watching the agency manipulate the press and run some guy against me with a lot of money, I never expected any vindication from history. I knew I was right, but now that a series of public vindications is occurring, I find it most pleasant. Yesterday, for example, when I was at McGraw-Hill, the editor-in-chief had just talked to somebody who earlier that day had seen some article picking up the fact that it had now been brought up by former CIA men that Clay Shaw and Ferrie were both CIA, and he said something to the effect, 'How do you feel to have history catch up with you?' And, you know, I said, 'Well, it's a great feeling if you live long enough,' which I never expected to

*Q: What do you mean?*

A: Well, I mean I never expected to. During the investigation, I just assumed I would be killed once I knew it was the government. I just assumed that. It was only in retrospect that I realized that I had stumbled out into the spotlight too far with my specific pinpointing of the CIA, and they're very practical people. But I didn't realize that for several years, and I just assumed I would be eliminated. I didn't give a damn, because I knew we had stumbled across a *coup d'etat*. I happened to like Jack Kennedy. Besides, even if I hadn't, there was a principle involved.

Up until several years ago, since the trials, I felt that they had really put the concrete over the grave, because it looked like everything was dying. Then suddenly came the breaks in the dike, and some

of the facts about the true CIA have surfaced.

*Q: How do you deal with Commission critics who still label your investigation in New Orleans a hoax?*

A: Well, if that's the case, I think I deserve some kind of prize, because if that was a political hoax . . . keep in mind that it was nine years ago this February that I said that an element of the CIA was involved in Jack Kennedy's murder. Now within the last 24 months, Victor Marchetti, the former right-hand man of (CIA) director Richard Helms, has announced in the most specific terms that Clay Shaw was a former (CIA) agent. So, that right there would seem to answer that question. What a longshot that charge is, that I have a hoax, that I'm craving conspiracy. So I seek this man here (Clay Shaw), this poor fellow (sarcastically) — he was a member of the establishment! He had been patting wealthy ladies' behinds for years, he was on the cocktail circuit, invited to places I never was! I wasn't the establishment's man, he was. When I grabbed him, I knew I'd start hearing everybody screaming. If I were going to hoax, I'd pick some raggedy-ass guy and they'd say 'Fine, Hoorsy.' You know, some poor fellow with no money. Then everything would be hunky-dory.

*Q: But I think that the charge against you, more specifically, was that you failed to show any real link between Clay Shaw and the Kennedy assassination.*

A: We showed his connection with Lee Harvey Oswald and we had him in specific conversation about the assassination, even up to such detail as where he would spend the day when it was going to happen. Ferrie said that he would go to a university — he had one in mind — and sure enough that's where he ended up.

THIS MAKES NO SENSE.

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Shaw said that he would make arrangements to make a speech — and sure enough, he did schedule a speech at the World Trade Center, I think that's the approximate name, in San Francisco, for noon on the 22nd of November. So I contacted the Center in the course of the case and asked them how that date had been selected. They informed me that a friend of Shaw's wrote them and said that Shaw (managing director of the Trade Mart in New Orleans) was going to be in the vicinity about that time and would be happy to speak to businessmen if they would set it up. I asked them if they would send me a copy of the letter and, to my surprise, they did. And the letter's got a beautiful phrase in it. It says, 'My friend Clay Shaw will be in San Francisco between Nov. 21 and Nov. 23rd. Have you ever heard anybody describe a date like that? In other words, he can't say Nov. 22. You speak about a Freudian problem, a block... it merely confirmed what we had been able to develop earlier.'

These people who make these criticisms of me simply don't have the facts; they don't know what they're talking about. A person criticizing me (Garrison asked us not to mention names when he discussed his disagreement with other Commission critics) has got some incredible smears in one of his *New Times* articles. He said that all I seemed to have developed down there was the fact that Shaw was a homosexual. This is the same guy who admits later on (in a recent book on the Kennedy assassination) that a lot developed out of the Shaw trial. As a matter of fact, my instructions to my staff, in keeping with the policy of our office, was that no evidence of any kind would be introduced in front of a jury that indicated that Clay Shaw was a homosexual. I thought that was his own business and

had nothing to do with the case. And I didn't want a conviction if we had to prejudice it. I could have probably gotten one if I had wanted to, but I wouldn't let anything in like that and I never did. I don't expect a parade to be held in my honor because that should be normal procedure for a district attorney to protect the rights of a defendant.

*Q: As I understand it, you also had a difficult time proving Shaw's links with the CIA. Is that correct? Did the agency mask that connection to shield Shaw?*

*A: Yes, Shaw received protection. Victor Marchetti brought this fact out. He's told about meetings at which (former CIA director) Richard Helms told him, 'We've got to do something to help Shaw down in New Orleans 'cause he's our man.' If Helms had only been accommodating enough to let us in on that nuance — we knew about it, but we didn't know that anyone was admitting it in a room in Washington — it would have solved our problem with the jury.*

*Q: Proof of that connection would have changed the verdict?*

*A: Yes, I think so. Because individual jurists told people after the trial that we had shown the conspiracy and that we had shown Shaw had some kind of relationship to it, but that we hadn't found a motive. My staff had discussed it and finally decided against bringing up the subject of domestic intelligence, because the jury wouldn't have known what it meant. They would have thought we were talking about flying saucers. Now, of course, they would understand. So my staff agreed that we would just show them the ineluctability of Shaw's involvement, saying in effect: 'We can't explain for you the reasons, but we hope that you will understand them.' The two alternate jurors vo-*

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