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A Page about PEOPLE

The Canadian in the 'Kennedy case'



BUSINESSMAN Richard Giesbrecht sits in the same seat in Winnipeg airport where he claims he once heard two men in 1964 discuss the three-month-

old assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy. He claims David Ferrie was one of the two men. Giesbrecht is now key witness in Garrison probe.

By EARL McRAE
Star staff writer

WINNIPEG

Richard Elvin Giesbrecht says he was sitting in the airport here one day in early 1964 when he overheard two men discussing their involvement in the assassination of President John Kennedy.

It's probably the most significant claim he'll ever make.

Because if Richard Elvin Giesbrecht *did* hear what he says he heard then, it confirms the charge by New Orleans' district-attorney Jim Garrison that conspiracy was involved in the president's murder.

Giesbrecht is sticking to his guns. So is Garrison. And that's why Richard Elvin Giesbrecht is being flown south sometime this spring as one of Garrison's key witnesses in the trial of Clay Shaw.

Clay Shaw is the former managing director of the New Orleans International Trade Mart and the only person so far arrested and charged by Garrison with conspiring to kill President Kennedy.

It's hard not to believe Dick Giesbrecht.

He's married, has four children, has lived here since 1945 and is a moderately successful agent for Globe Life Insurance Co.

He's of medium height, but overly fat. His smiling red face is topped with close-cropped brown hair. He wears heavy black-rimmed glasses.

He speaks slowly and softly, measuring each statement, never overplaying his hand and—if the fear that made him clam up for almost four years has vanished—the suspicion hasn't.

"I can't talk on the phone," he told me, "my line's tapped."

He removed his dark overcoat, sat in a chair, lit a cigarette, and I asked him where he was the day Kennedy was murdered.

"I was in a business office downtown seeing a client. I remember it well. There was a radio playing and they said it on the radio. I felt awful like everybody else. It's a day I'll always remember."

Another day he said he'll always

remember is Feb. 13, 1964—less than three months after the assassination in Dallas.

"I phoned a prospective client the day before and arranged to meet him to discuss a life insurance sale. He works at Bristol Aerospace near the airport, which was new at that time. We agreed to meet at either the plant security gate or in the airport over his 3 p.m. coffee break. I was to call him before the coffee break and we'd decide where."

Approach

The next day—the 13th—Giesbrecht said he arrived at the airport at 1:45 p.m. "because it was new and I wanted to look around."

He said he went into the second-level Horizon Room, sat at a table near the window, ordered a Moscow Mule drink, took out a notepad and began planning his sales approach.

"I went to the phone at around 2:30 to call the client and confirm our appointment and also to say that I was in the Horizon Room. He didn't think the coffee break would give him enough time and said he would meet me in the Horizon Room at 4 o'clock instead."

Giesbrecht refused to name the client. He said he was a machinist "with a brother named Wally." Bristol is about 1½ miles from the airport. Machinist coffee breaks are 15 minutes long. For a machin-



NEW ORLEANS district attorney Garrison will have Giesbrecht testify to alleged plot to kill JFK.

ist to leave the plant, he must get a pass explaining why he wants to leave. This takes time. Being hourly rated, he is docked time if he leaves the grounds.

Giesbrecht continued his story: "I went...back into the Horizon Room after calling the client and sat at the same table and ordered a 7-Up drink. There were more people in the room now. Some women were sitting about 25 feet away and giggling. And there were two men sitting at a table behind mine who weren't there before. I took out my note pad again and wondered how I was going to kill time."

In the Winnipeg Free Press of May 2, 1964, Giesbrecht, with his identity not revealed, said the two men were already in the room when he entered the first time.

Giesbrecht said he was working over figures in his notepad and listening to Muzak when he suddenly caught these words from one of the men behind him: "How did Isaacs ever get mixed up with a psycho like Oswald?"

Giesbrecht tuned in.

He said he shifted in his chair to get a look behind—and said he saw the man known today as David Ferrie, former Eastern Airlines pilot found dead in his New Orleans apartment last year after Garrison pegged him as the get-away pilot in the assassination.

Description

Jim Garrison says he has uncovered definite evidence that David Ferrie was in Winnipeg Feb. 13, 1964.

"The man I think was Ferrie had eyebrows that looked like heavy moustaches," Giesbrecht went on. "They looked like they were stuck on with glue. His hair, I couldn't say if it was a wig or what, but it started away back and looked phony. It was shiny. There were burn scars on his forehead."

The colorful description of Ferrie quoted above by Giesbrecht was first revealed publicly by Jim Garrison in early 1967. In the May 2, 1964 Winnipeg Free Press story, Giesbrecht described the man he now claims was Ferrie as having "bushy, pronounced eyebrows . . ." That was the limit of his facial description.

Giesbrecht said "Ferrie" was

talking across the table to a man with a heavily pockmarked neck and chin "and the guy with his back to me had a hearing aid or something in his right ear. He had an accent like Desi Arnaz sort of. Sort of Latin."

Giesbrecht said the men were "talking about when they were going to get together in Kansas City at the Town House Motel or Hotel. There was to be a meeting March 18. They were to register under a textile firm."

Giesbrecht said he had been making notes of the conversation in his pad. He said the Latin then said something "about having a film which showed this guy Isaacs standing near the Kennedys when they landed in Texas. He was seen near Kennedy and his wife. They seemed concerned about this."

All the while, Giesbrecht said he strained to hear over the Muzak and occasionally shifted for a glance at the two men.

"The Latin then asked Ferrie how much Oswald had passed on to his wife. The Ferrie guy said Oswald wasn't talking to his wife. He said something about Isaacs being at a party where Oswald was with a black woman. He called her a black bitch.

Loose ends

"The guy right behind me asked Ferrie if all the loose ends had been cleaned up and Ferrie said there was a 1958 Dodge, I believe it was a Dodge he said, and that it would be looked after when a Hoffman or Hochmann speaks to Isaacs at this meeting.

"I got the impression that the car was seen or used at the assassination."

Giesbrecht said they also discussed "an aunt or aunty coming in from San Francisco to the hotel meeting. Then Ferrie asked if there was merchandise coming out of Nevada. The other said Mercury has been closed. He also said they have more money at their disposal now than at any other time.

"He said there was a good shipment of something coming in to Caracas from Newport. Ferrie seemed happier at hearing this. I don't know what they were talking about."

Giesbrecht said he heard the name "Romaniuk or Romuck" mentioned several times but, was

unable to determine if this was a third person being discussed or the name of the Latin "because Ferrie was always saying it."

New Jersey was mentioned a few times, too, but Giesbrecht couldn't catch the drift.

The Town House Motor Motel in Kansas City, Kansas, says its registration records go back only to 1965. It's had three owners since March, 1964. A spokesman denied knowledge of the case.

The Schimmel Hotel Co. of Lincoln, Neb., which ran the Town House in 1964 says it has no records for the period either "and they've probably been destroyed.

The May 2, 1964, article in the Free Press quotes Giesbrecht mentioning the names Hoffman and Isaacs and Romaniuk. The name Isaacs is mentioned in the Warren Commission report. The report was not made public until seven months after the Free Press story when the name Isaacs was revealed for the first time.

A Garrison investigator has located a Harold Isaacs in Texas who admits he owned a 1958 Ford which was crushed a few years ago in a wrecking yard.

The names Hoffman or Hochmann are not mentioned in the commission volumes but the closest is Hoffer. The signature of one Good Hoffer was referred to briefly. He signed Oswald's Selective Service System registration certificate.

The names Romaniuk or Romuck are not mentioned in the volumes. The closest is Romack. James Elbert Romack was a Dallas truck driver. He told the commission he was on his lunch hour watching the Kennedy motorcade when he heard three shots ring out from near the Texas School Book Depository building. (vol. 6-pages 277-284).

Mercury is the name of a small town (pop. 300) in Nevada about 60 miles southeast of Las Vegas. It is not mentioned in the commission volumes.

Fantastic

Suddenly Giesbrecht asked, "Has it ever occurred to you that Bobby Kennedy is the man controlling the strings of Garrison the puppet?" A fantastic theory — but he left it at that.

Sen. Robert Kennedy's press secretary said "baloney" to the suggestion. Garrison investigator Louis Ivon said "positively not."

Later we drove to the airport and Giesbrecht pointed out the table

in the Horizon Room where he said he sat that day almost four years ago.

"They were saying all these things when the conversation suddenly died off and took on a different sound altogether. The Ferrie one looked out at a small two-prop plane parked outside and said 'oh, there's a plane like the one I told you I flew back home during the war.'"

Giesbrecht said he felt uneasy and began to put away his pad when he suddenly became aware of a third man staring hard at him from a table about 20 feet away.

"He was looking at me in a dead stare. It was like there was some contact between him and the men at the table like he was warning them to tone down."

Garrison is speculating the hearing aid may have been a transceiver.

Giesbrecht said he left the room to find the police. He asked the lady at the cigarette counter outside where the police were situated in the building. She pointed over his shoulder. He turned and saw the third man staring at him from a stairway over a bridge.

Giesbrecht turned and asked the lady where the phones were.

Earlier Giesbrecht had no trouble finding the phones to call his client.

Giesbrecht said he phoned RCMP headquarters and spent about 30 seconds trying to tell a Cpl. Pollack what was going on. He said the officer didn't seem to believe him.

"Then I turned and saw the big bruiser standing about two feet from me just staring at me not saying anything."

Giesbrecht said he hung up in mid-conversation, brushed past the third man, left the building, got in his car and drove away.

Giesbrecht said he drove about a mile, stopped his car, took out his notes, ripped them up, burned them and threw them away.

"I thought they may have got my license number. I didn't want to be caught with the notes on me."

Corporal Ross Pollack of the RCMP remembers the call.

"He didn't say anything about an airport or where he was. He said he had some information about the Kennedy assassination, I remember that. He seemed in a hurry to get off. I asked him to come down

and tell us all about it, but he said he had a client to see about a sale and hung up.

"If he had said anything about people at the airport talking about killing Kennedy you can be damned sure we would have had the building surrounded in no time flat."

Giesbrecht said he wrote out his notes again at home.

When I asked to see them he said he didn't know where they were.

That night, Giesbrecht said he phoned his lawyer. The lawyer called back the next morning, said he had been in touch with U.S. consul John Morris who, in turn, had contacted the FBI.

But, Giesbrecht refused to name his lawyer "because I don't want friends dragged into this."

The lawyer was Harry Backlin. He's serving seven years in Stony Mountain Penitentiary for illegal possession of \$350,000 worth of gold bullion stolen March 1, 1966 from Winnipeg airport. He was unavailable for comment. His wife Janet refused to talk.

Uninformed

Says Consul Morris: "I know nothing about the case. I never spoke to a lawyer about it or phoned the FBI or anything else. I have no idea what this is about. I didn't even know Giesbrecht's name until now."

FBI agent Merle Nelson came up from Grand Forks, N.D. and went to the airport with Giesbrecht and his lawyer.

"Nelson kept saying, 'this is the break we've been looking for,'" said Giesbrecht. "He said it was 'too big' and 'we can't offer you protection in Canada.' He told me to keep quiet."

Agent Merle Nelson confirms the meeting. "I was called in by Mr. Morris, the American consul in Winnipeg." Nelson said his report went to headquarters in Washington and then to the Warren Commission. Asked if he wrote off Giesbrecht, Nelson said: "I didn't—I guess Washington did."

In late April a friend convinced Giesbrecht he should tell his story to the papers in hope others might have information that would shed light on the affair. Thus, the May 2, 1964 story in the Free Press with Giesbrecht's identity protected.

For the next three years Richard Elvin Giesbrecht kept his story to himself. Then, in early 1967, he was visiting a former boss in the hospital. There was a newspaper on the bed with a front page picture

of the late David Ferrie.

"I saw the same face staring up at me that I saw sitting in the airport that day," he said. "I asked my boss if I could read the story and he said yes. I told him about it then."

Giesbrecht refused to name the boss.

P. J. Thiessen, manager of Montreal Life Insurance Co. says he was the boss. "I had just bought the paper and Dick came in to see me. I thought he was going to faint. He turned white when he saw that picture. I asked if he was all right. He read the story and then told me what had happened. I'm positive it was no act."

And Giesbrecht denied he read about Ferrie in the papers earlier in the day.

The Free Press ran another story, this time using Giesbrecht's name. The paper contacted Garrison's office.

Giesbrecht said he's learning to live easier again.

"There's frustration and I still don't like being interviewed but, I feel safer now."

He looked out at the snow-swept tarmac of the airport, smiled wryly and said: "Actually, I'm somewhat of a celebrity now. Teachers told their kids that here is a Canadian who's going to make history some day."



DAVID FERRIE was once in Winnipeg and discussed plot to kill John F. Kennedy, Giesbrecht says.