



BLUE STREAK—FINAL EDITION

THE MIAMI NEWS

*72 Years of Publishing
Miami, Florida*

Tuesday, March 5, 1968

38 Pages

EXCLUSIVE

Missing Esperti

'1 Was Offered To Kill President

Witness Says...

\$25,000

Kennedy'

Many persons have questioned the findings of the Warren Commission that Lee Harvey Oswald alone carried out the assassination of President Kennedy. Among the more prominent questioners is James Garrison, district attorney of the New Orleans parish. Garrison visited Garrison, district attorney of the New Orleans parish. Garrison visited been offered \$25,000 to participate in the assassination. In a strange coincidence, the same man is a key witness in the Esperti murder trial and he has been missing since Sunday night.

Attorney says Esperti witness offered to "get lost" for \$10,000. Story on Page 3A.

By **BILL BARRY**

Miami News Reporter

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James T. Mays, the missing state witness in the Tony Esperti murder trial, spent the weekend trying to peddle what he claims is information about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

He wanted to sell his story to New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, for \$25,000.

Mays said he had been

offered \$25,000 in 1963 to help kill Kennedy. He said he considered the offer but finally declined it.

He said a buddy of his was the main gunman in the assassination plot.

His buddy was paid \$30,000 before the killing, he said, and \$40,000 after it.

Mays said he saw the \$30,000 and he saw his buddy practicing with Lee Harvey Oswald's Mannlicher-Carcano rifle.

WHO IS THIS MAN?



NEW ORLEANS DISTRICT ATTORNEY Jim Garrison today offered a \$1,000 reward to anybody who can tell him this man's name, and \$2,500 to anybody who can lead him to the man. Garrison said the man and two others were arrested in a boxcar parked on a railroad siding behind the Texas Book Depository 20 minutes after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Two of the men were walked across Dealey Plaza to the Dallas Jail—flanked by two policemen in front and two behind. Garrison said there is no record of the arrest and, it is not mentioned in the Warren Report. The men were released. One of the men has been identified and has been questioned in Garrison's conspiracy case. The reward is the first Garrison has offered in connection with his investigation.

Garrison sent an investigator to meet Mays in Miami Saturday. Garrison himself arrived here Sunday.

Garrison left hurriedly and unexpectedly Monday — while State Attorney Richard Gerstein was frantically trying to find Mays.

Mays had been subpoenaed because he had allegedly seen Esperti and his girlfriend, Audrey Fowler, run out of The Place For Steak moments after Esperti allegedly gunned down Mafia enforcer Thomas Altamura.

Mays was trying to sell Garrison the name of his
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buddy and a map of where his buddy could be found. Garrison decided not to buy.

He said Mays' story might fit into his investigation of the assassination but that it would not provide a solid, major key to a solution.

He told his investigator: "Let's not fool around with him (Mays) any more. Let's go after the real thing."

Garrison's investigator, Bill Boxley, first met with Mays at 3 p.m. Saturday in the darkened hallway of Miami's main post office. Boxley stood by the concession stand while Mays looked him over from the other end of the hallway.

Mays then approached Boxley and identified himself. They left the post office and drove to Ye Round Table Lounge in the Dallas Park Hotel.

They sat at a corner booth, Boxley drinking orange juice and Mays drinking beer.

Mays said that in 1963 he and his buddy were living in Denton, Tex., a college town outside Dallas. They had grown up together there, they had joined the Army together there, and they had returned together there after the service.

Mays said that they used to spend a lot of time at the It'll Do club on East Commerce Street in Callas.

About 10 days before the assassination, Mays said, his

buddy told him that a man named Oswald had been talking to him in the It'll Do club. The buddy had been on the 7th Army rifle team in France, Mays said.

Oswald, Mays said, had offered his buddy \$75,000 to help kill Kennedy.

Oswald said he was looking for a shooter to back up the main gun — the backup shooter would be paid \$25,000.

Mays said his buddy offered him the job — he would be positioned behind the picket fence on top of the grassy knoll in Dealey Plaza. He would be armed with a .357 magnum pistol fitted with a sniperscope. He would fire only if Kennedy's car reached a certain point in the roadway without Kennedy having been hit.

Mays said his buddy was to be firing from the Texas School Book Depository.

Mays said he inspected the pistol but had already decided not to go in on the plot.

He said: "The whole thing looked like a bunch of junk to me. I couldn't figure anyone trying to knock off the President with such lousy plans. It didn't sound workable to me. I was supposed to shoot and then just run through the cars in the parking lot there, around the back of the Book Depository. My buddy was supposed to park his car on Commerce Street and I would just walk over there and meet him and we would drive back to Denton together as if nothing had happened . . . That place there (behind the fence) was so open, anyone could have seen me. I didn't know how many people would be standing around there. And then just running away in the open like that . . . it scared me. I told my buddy I didn't want to do it."

Mays said that his buddy told him Oswald hired the backup gun.

"He was a dark complected guy," Mays said. "Kind of like a Texas-Mexican halfbreed only maybe a little darker, like a Cuban or something. I don't know what his name was."

About three days before the assassination, Mays said, his buddy showed him a zipper bag full of money.

"It was all in 50s and 20s," he said. "It was the first payment — \$30,000. The rest he was to pick up at a drop in Dallas a few days after the job had been done."

Mays said his buddy also brought home the rifle.

He said: "He sat around the apartment dry-firing it. He was left handed and he could work the bolt pretty fast — just squeeze off the shots with his left hand and work the bolt back and forth with the other hands."

Mays said his buddy never go to fire the rifle live before the assassination.

Mays said: "He was told the rifle had been sighted for 100 yards. That sounded stupid to me. There's no trajectory in a bullet for the first 100 yards anyway. It goes flat."

Mays said: "The whole thing sounded like beer talk to me. Then I saw the money and I heard that it came from Texas people who were losing out on millions of dollars in defense contracts."

A final meeting of the plotters, Mays said, was held two or three days before the assassination. Mays said he never heard Jack Ruby's name or any other names mentioned in connection with the plot.

On Nov. 22, 1963, he said, Oswald was supposed to smuggle the rifle into the Book Depository. That morning his buddy left Denton in his 1955 green and white Chevrolet Bel Air.

"As far as I know," Mays said, "he parked the car in a lot on Commerce Street and walked over to the Depository. He had an Associated Press badge that was supposed to get him in without anybody asking questions. It was also supposed to account for his being in the building

if he was stopped later.

"He was carrying a camera and an aluminum camera tripod. He had fitted the tripod with a little ring to fit the barrel of the rifle through — to hold the rifle steady while he fired."

Mays said his buddy wore red, rubber gloves to keep his fingerprints off the rifle. After the killing, Oswald was supposed to remove the rifle from the building.

Mays said: "I was listening to the radio when the news came over. I was kind of surprised because until then I thought the whole thing might still be some kind of joke."

He said his buddy returned to Denton about an hour after the assassination.

Mays said: "As far as I know, he just walked out of the building with his camera and tripod, went through the crowd to Commerce Street and drove out Stemmons freeway. He stopped at a liquor store and bought a case of beer — it would explain what he was doing there if he was stopped. Denton is dry and we always used to go over to Dallas to buy beer. You were allowed a quart and a case so he only got a case."

Mays said his buddy left

Denton a day or two after Thanksgiving.

Mays said he went out of the country.

Boxley asked Mays why he was willing to finger his buddy.

Mays said: "For the money ... I had no politics. I'm not doing this for patriotic reasons. I think I ought to be paid the money I missed out on if what I say can do somebody else some good."

After several hours, the meeting ended. Boxley had obtained Mays' Social Security number and a Florida license issued to Mays in 1966. Unknown to Mays, Boxley also got the beer glass Mays had used — the glass retained Mays' fingerprints.

They drove back down-

town and arranged another meeting for the next day. Mays got out of the car a couple of blocks from the post office.

They meet again at 4 p.m. the next day at Mays' apartment — in the annex of the Anderson Hotel, 128 N.E. 13th St. They drove across town to the Dupont Plaza Hotel.

The coffee shop was closed so they went to the lounge. They sat at a side table — Mays drinking beer, Boxley drinking orange juice.

Mays was getting impatient. He wanted to know, about Garrison and the money. Boxley told him that he had to answer some more questions.

Mays — 6-feet, 185 pounds — had a broad, prominent, flat-planed face. His Roman nose and finely chiseled features gave him the look of good intelligence.

His delicate, restless hands belied the calm, laconic tone of his Texan accent.

Boxley wanted to know exactly what Mays' buddy did when he returned from Dallas.

Mays faltered a bit. His narrative had been smooth and tight, his reaction to trip-up questions, quick and certain. But he hesitated recalling exact conversation.

His buddy, he said, was greatly excited when he returned.

Mays said: "He said something like, 'It was easy. See what you missed out on? Nobody even looked my way. I gave 'em two-for-one. The rifle jumped, and I hit the other guy.'"

Mays said: "He wasn't supposed to hit Gov. Connally. He said he thought he got two hits and one miss. He didn't say anything about anybody else shooting and I didn't say if he was or not." what Oswald did. Oswald was supposed to be by the window with him, but he didn't say if he was or not."

Boxley hounded Mays about what his buddy did in the days after the assassination.

Mays said: "I was staying away from him. He was nervous, he thought he might get picked up, he just didn't

know so he figured he might just as well stay there in Denton as run. I stayed away because I didn't want to be with him if he was picked up."

When Ruby shot Oswald, Mays said, his buddy was relieved.

Mays said: "He said, 'See, I told you it would be okay. You could have been in on it. You missed out. Now there's nobody to tie me to it. I'm in the clear. There's nobody left around to tell about it.'"

Mays said his buddy didn't know who Jack Ruby was.

Mays said he suggested his buddy's hiding place.

He said: "I used to know this German national who was stationed with me in Germany. We used to sit around the old Nazi barracks and talk about the ones who got away from the war crimes trials. He told me where a lot of them went. So I told my buddy about it and said he ought to go there."

Mays said his buddy told people he was taking an overseas oil field job.

"We were always talking about doing something like that together anyway," Mays

said. "So nobody thought much about it. He left right after Thanksgiving."

Mays said that the only thing that disturbed him about the assassination was the fact that he couldn't watch his regular television shows for three days afterward — they were all preempted for special assassination news shows.

He said: "All those reporters running around and all that stuff saying what happened. They didn't know. But I did, so I thought that was kind of funny. At first I was astounded that it really happened. Then I thought it was kind of funny."

Boxley asked Mays what he thought would happen if Garrison paid the money and found the buddy where Mays said he would be.

Mays said: "Well, he would already have two strikes against him. There are numerous other people down there who people are looking for ... there'd be a

lot of red tape and stuff like that."

Mays said his buddy never expected that he, Mays, might squeal. He said he would testify for Garrison.

Mays said: "For a long time I didn't realize all this investigation business was going on — all this complex plots and intrigue. Then I got interested. I always thought that Earl Warren was a little pinko anyway ... I thought you guys (Garrison's investigation) were building up a big fairytale down there in New Orleans — on the basis of what I knew. All that with Clay Shaw and that guy Ferrie, the plane pilot — the elaborate plot to fly Oswald out of the country and all that. I just didn't believe it on the basis of what I did know."

Again Boxley wanted to know why Mays rejected the offer to participate in the assassination.

Mays said: "The whole thing didn't look professional to me. It didn't make any sense. Like a joke. It was about like saying you and me are going to jump up now and run out the door and shoot somebody.

"They didn't talk about silencers for the guns or anything like that. They didn't have good plans for getting away — just sort of run. There'd be a lot of bang, bang in the street with a lot of people there — shots whizzing over their heads. It would have scared the hell out of me to take a chance on something like that. The reason it happened, worked, I think, it was just unexpected, that's all."

Mays said he left Denton in July of 1966. He said he went to Long Beach, Calif. and worked in aircraft plants.

He said he came to Florida more than a year ago.

"I get money from a blood plasma program," he said. "You go in and lay on a table and let them work on you for four or five hours. You can make \$75 to \$100 like that."

Boxley said he wanted Mays to take a lie detector test.

Mays drew a blue subpoena out of his pocket, and showed it to Boxley.

He said: "I'm a witness in

that Esperti trial.

He smiled a wan smile and said: "It was just another case of being in the wrong place at the right time.

"I went out there to meet some guys. I was getting out of the cab and here comes Esperti and his girl friend running out. I didn't even know what happened until they told me later."

Mays said he would have

to be in court the next day. He said the lie test could be arranged for some time at night.

They left the lounge and drove back to Mays' apartment.

Mays said he would call the next day to say when he could do the test.

That night the manager of his hotel heard Mays on the telephone.

The manager told police that Mays said: "Have you got the money? I'll wait until 11 if you have got all the money. Don't worry, I'll get him to say all you want him to say."

Later, Mays left the manager a note with his apartment keys.

The note said: "Manager, had to leave town very suddenly."

He did not show up at the trial. A nationwide pickup order has been issued for him.

And Garrison's man, Boxley, has had his interest in Mays rekindled.

Boxley said: "I'm a little bit worried about it. I want to do some more thinking about him. I'm a little concerned about all of it right now ..."