

Writer Tells of Russo's Fears

By Preston McGraw
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NEW ORLEANS, Feb. 26—A magazine writer testified today that State witness Perry Russo had admitted he could not identify Clay L. Shaw as a conspirator in the death of President John F. Kennedy, but that the witness was afraid to change his story because he feared recriminations from District Attorney Jim Garrison.

Writer James Phelan said Perry Raymond Russo, Garrison's key witness in his case against Shaw, had refused an offer to meet Shaw and identify him.

Phelan quoted Russo as saying:

"I knew that if I got into a room and talked with him (Shaw) I knew I would know he was not the man. And if I knew he was not the man what could I do . . . I could not live with myself."

Phelan said Russo told him that if Garrison heard of plans to arrange a meeting with Shaw, Garrison "would clobber me."

Key Witness

From the start of Garrison's investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy, Russo has been his key witness. His testimony makes up much of Garrison's case against Shaw, who is charged with conspiring with Lee Harvey Oswald and the late David W. Ferrie to assassinate Mr. Kennedy.

Russo testified earlier in

the trial that he saw Shaw, who he said was using the name "Clay Bertrand," plotting Kennedy's death with Oswald and Ferrie.

While in New Orleans working on a story concerning Garrison's investigation, Phelan said he talked with Russo who told him he could not identify Shaw.

'Fear of Reprisals'

"Did Mr. Russo ever express fear of reprisals from Jim Garrison," defense attorney F. Irvin Dymond asked Phelan. "Yes, he did," Phelan said. "What did he say," Dymond asked.

"He said he kept agonizing, he replied that he was sorry he had ever come forward as a witness. But he said if he changed his story Mr. Garrison would charge him with something and he was afraid of losing his job."

Defense lawyers, attacking frontally the State's charge that Shaw conspired under the name "Clay Bertrand" or "Clem Bertrand" to kill Mr. Kennedy, also put a handwriting expert who testified in the Lindbergh kidnaping case on the stand today.

Sciambra Memo

He testified Shaw was not the man who signed a guestbook in New Orleans airport "Clay Bertrand" in 1966.

And a friend of Shaw's who took his mail during a 1966 trip to Europe contradicted earlier State testimony that letters to "Bertrand" were delivered there.

Phelan, who was working on a story on the Shaw case for the Saturday Evening Post, said Garrison gave him a memo from Assistant District Attorney Andrew Sciambra. The memo detailed Sciambra's first interview with Russo, who was later to testify he saw Shaw. Lee Oswald and David W. Ferrie plotting the President's death in 1963.

Writer's Testimony

Phelan said he went to Garrison and told him the discrepancy between Russo's testimony at a preliminary hearing on the memo. Garrison summoned Sciambra and William Gurvich, also an investigator for Garrison.

"I told Mr. Sciambra that in his report on his interview with Russo in Baton Rouge there was no information whatsoever about an assassination plot, about Shaw knowing Lee Harvey Oswald and about Russo saying he knew Clay Shaw as 'Clem Bertrand' or 'Clay Bertrand,'" the slender, balding Phelan testified.

The handwriting expert, Charles A. Appel Jr., a special FBI agent from 1924 to 1948, broke the Lindbergh kidnaping case by identifying specimens of Bruno Richard Hauptmann's writing as the same as that on the Lindbergh kidnap note.

Signatures Different

He said he was testifying in the Shaw case free because he thought he could help prevent "an injustice" from being done although his usual fee as

a private consultant is \$250 a day.

Appel showed the jury blow-ups of a page from the airport guestbook with the name "Clay Bertrand" written on it, and the same name as written by Shaw.

A hostess at the airport earlier testified she saw Shaw writing the name "Bertrand" in the book.

Appel said the manner of writing of the two exhibits was so dissimilar that almost every letter was different.

"The entry in the book was made by some other writer entirely," he said.

Business Friend

Arthur Jefferson Biddison, a tall, athletic looking man with wavy, dark-brown hair and a resonant baritone voice, testified he and Shaw had been business and social friends for 23 years and he had never known Shaw to be called "Clay Bertrand" or "Clem Bertrand." Postman James Hardiman had testified earlier as a State witness that in the summer of 1966, Shaw signed a card to have his mail temporarily delivered to Biddison's address at 1414 Chartres st. in the French Quarter while Shaw was in Europe.

Hardiman said he had delivered several letters addressed to "Clem Bertrand" to the Charters Street address.

Biddison testified that he looked at every piece of mail because he sent important letters on to Shaw in Europe and none was addressed to "Clem" or "Clay Bertrand."



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Handwriting expert Charles Appel who testified yesterday in the Shaw conspiracy trial relaxes with a pipe.