

History Of JFK 'Death Plot' Probe

By WILLIAM E. CLAYTON JR.

NEW ORLEANS (UPI) —

On Nov. 25, 1966, a man named Louis Ivon took a trip to San Francisco which cost the taxpayers of New Orleans \$933. That trip, three years and three days after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, helped bring to light one of the strangest sequels to the assassination ever graced by official sanction.

Louis Ivon was on the business of Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison, a combative prosecutor given to conservative dress and gaudy style.

Garrison was embarked on an investigation of what he later came to call "the conspiracy" — an alleged plot against Kennedy's life in New Orleans in the months before the actual assassination, an alleged plot somehow overlooked by the Warren Commission.

"I accepted the Warren Commission report until last November, when out of curiosity I began reading and studying the case," he said.

Later he talked it over with U.S. Sen. Russell B. Long, D-La., the Senate Democratic whip, and the son of Louisiana Gov. Huey Long, who himself

was assassinated in 1936. Long told him he had his own doubts about the Warren Report, notably the "sequence of firing" of the shots that killed Kennedy Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas.

The Warren Commission had concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, whom it said the evidence indicated was the sole assassin, fired three shots from his bolt-action mail-order rifle in a time period which could have been as short as 4.8 seconds.

Working with his own staff and 10 police officers permanently assigned to him, Garrison started his probe in silence.

Silence was an unfamiliar position for the New Orleans district attorney. Garrison has made a loud noise throughout his career, first as a crusader against vice in 1962, then as a combatant with three judges of the New Orleans Criminal District Court, who were so irritated by his criticism that they secured a defamation conviction against him.

Garrison took the case to the U.S. Supreme Court and won a decision that has become a landmark in the modern development of laws protecting freedom of speech and

criticism of public officials.

By Christmas, 1966, Garrison let Louisiana Gov. John J. McKeithen in on his doubts about the Warren Report and his plans to investigate. McKeithen kept it under his hat. Garrison asked for no help.

Otherwise the investigation proceeded in secrecy for

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small world



NEW DIRECTION?

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about three months. But Louis Ivon's trip was a matter of public record, and the records of such trips began piling up. Reporters tarted digging into them, and asking questions about what they meant. On Feb. 17—a week ago today—the New Orleans States-Item broke the story.

Every few days, starting with Louis Ivon's trip to San Francisco, the States-Item said, another expense entry showed up. Investigator John Volz went to Miami on Dec. 2. Other assistants, investigators, and even a member of the Florida Parole and Probation Commission, Russell W. Buckholt, made subsequent trips.

Then a strange and pathetic figure popped up—David W. Ferrie, 49, once dismissed from an Ohio seminary as unfit to be a priest and fired from his job as an Eastern Air Lines pilot. His hair and eyebrows once were burned off by an explosion and he wore a red toupee and false eyebrows.

Ferrie was mentioned several times in the Warren Report but cleared of any complicity in the assassination after it was revealed he was in New Orleans when Kennedy was killed in Dallas and his airplane apparently would not even fly.

Ferrie shed some more light on Garrison's probe.

"Supposedly I have been pegged as the getaway pilot in an elaborate plot to kill Kennedy," he said. In Dallas, Dist. Atty. Henry Wade, who agrees with the Warren Commission conclusions, said he knew of nothing substantial on Ferrie.

Rumors were flying around that he (Oswald) was supposed to go to an airport and somebody was supposed to fly him away (after the assassination), but as far as I know, there was nothing but rumors," Wade said.

Garrison said nothing when

the first disclosure of the investigation was made. Then he began to talk. He held several news conferences in rapid succession—three last Saturday alone.

Each statement was more positive, specific and finally, more sensational, than the last.

"It's very possible that such an investigation is being conducted," the district attorney said Friday.

On Saturday, he criticized the newspapers for breaking the story. They had created "obstructions" Garrison said, "in gathering the relevant facts."

Later Saturday, he went further. The investigation would result in arrests, charges and "convictions obtained."

By Monday, he was talking about a conspiracy, and two days later he would be calling it that.

"All we want to do is find the men involved in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and we are going to," he said.

"There will also be, again in my judgment, convictions of individuals for being accessories after the fact, for having substantial knowledge of the conspiracy and withholding it and in other ways abetting it."

On Wednesday the strange figure with the red wig and false eyebrows, David W. Ferrie, was found dead in his apartment in a two-story frame apartment house with peeling paint at 3330 Louisiana Avenue Parkway in an upper-middle class neighborhood of New Orleans.

Garrison called it apparent suicide. The coroner said Ferrie suffered a cerebral hemorrhage caused when a congenitally weak blood vessel ruptured at the base of the brain. But whether this was triggered by something else—possibly drugs—would not be known for a week.

At any rate, it put the seal

to what Garrison was now saying publicly.

"The apparent suicide of David Ferrie ends the life of a man who, in my judgement, was one of history's most important individuals," Garrison said.

"Evidence developed by our office had long since confirmed that he was involved in events culminating in the assassination of President Kennedy."

Then he said:

"I have no reason to believe at this time that Lee Harvey Oswald killed anybody in Dallas on Nov. 22." He offered no elaboration on that startling statement or any indication of what, if any, evidence he based it on.

As interest mounted in Garrison's investigation, new names came to light.

David Lewis Jr., 26, a baggage handler in a bus station who said he used to be a private detective, said he knew of five persons involved in "the conspiracy," that he had given the names to Garrison, and that he feared for his life.

"There was a plot," he said. "I know about it, and I know the people who were involved."

After Ferrie's death, Lewis disappeared, but showed up in Garrison's office Thursday, being interviewed for television.

Miguel Torres, a convict in the Louisiana State Prison, was said to be a major informant.

Torres was transferred to New Orleans from the state prison, presumably to guard against attempts on his life. But he declined to be moved to even greater safety in a private cell in the county prison.

Sen. Long added some fuel to the interest in the Garrison investigation

"He (Garrison) may have some statements by persons saying they talked about killing Kennedy with Lee Harvey

Oswald before the assassination," Long said.

"If he turns up evidence of a conspiracy, it could lead to all sorts of possibilities, including the one that Oswald was the fall guy and the real killer is still free."

Long's Louisiana counterpart in the house, Rep. Hale Boggs, D-La., a member of the Warren Commission, said Garrison should turn over anything he has to federal authorities.

Garrison declined, saying that would be to convert it "into a colossal fact-gathering enterprise in which relevant leads become lost among truckloads of trivia."

In Washington, the Justice Department and the FBI would make no comment. But UPI was told by Washington sources that Ferrie and his possible complicity in a plot were thoroughly investigated by the Warren Commission and disproved.

What has Garrison got?

In the opinion of many, little or nothing.

"If he can find one person who says he heard somebody say they were going to kill the President, or if he can find one new fact, he can say he did what he said he would do," says a source close to the scene.

Speculation about what Garrison has also includes a tale about a plot by Cuban exiles to assassinate Fidel Castro, plans that were converted to assassinating President Kennedy in the hope that his successor would look more favorably on a subsequent invasion of Cuba. The story, and others circulating in New Orleans, are unsubstantiated.

Whatever Garrison has or does not have, it has made him the most talked-about district attorney in the country. And it has not hurt what some observers consider a possibility that he is maneuvering to run for lieutenant governor in 1968, after a political setback of sorts suffered when, despite

his image as a crusader against vice, he helped arrange a parole for Linda Brigitte, one of the French Quarter's most beautiful strippers, who had been convicted in 1966 of giving a lewd performance.

And whatever Garrison has, the fact that New Orleans was Lee Harvey Oswald's hometown has had some impact on public interest.

Oswald was born here Oct. 18, 1939, and spent much of his life in New Orleans until his mother moved the family to Texas in 1955.

From there he went into the Marines, came home, and showed up in Russia in 1959, spouting Marxism and announcing he wanted to be a Soviet citizen.

After returning from the Soviet Union, Oswald came back to New Orleans, formed a "Fair Play for Cuba Committee" of which he was apparently the only member, got into a street brawl with anti-Castro Cubans and debated them on the radio.

He moved back to Texas in October, 1963, and on Nov. 22, Kennedy was assassinated by rifle shots from the Texas Schoolbook Depository Building in Dallas.

Whatever the conspiracy which existed or did not exist in New Orleans in the summer of 1963, the beautiful old city has carried a tinge of intrigue since its founding in 1718.

New Orleans was settled by the French, bought by Spain and then swapped back to Napoleon before President Jefferson acquired it in the Louisiana Purchase.

Its early days were replete with pirates and various shifty figures. Jean Lafitte favored nearby Grand Isle as a base, but came through to supply artillery for Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815.

Mexico revolutionary Benito Juarez lived in New Orleans

while the French occupied his country under the banner of Maximilian.

The Mafia operated as early as 1890, when Black Hand

gangsters gunned down Police Chief David Hennessey.

And whatever the outcome of the current pronouncements from New Orleans em-

anating like the brassy blare of Bourbon Street, only Jim Garrison at this point seems in control of what will happen next.