

Odd Cast Struts Upon Scene of Kennedy Probe

**Prosecutor With Pendant
for Publicity Holds Center
Stage in New Orleans Case**

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NEW ORLEANS—The investigation launched here into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy involves a weird mixture of unstable witnesses, private detectives and a flamboyant prosecutor with a penchant for publicity.

For more than a week now, Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison of Orleans Parish (county) has made headlines around the world with many pronouncements that his probe has uncovered what the Warren Commission report said did not exist—a conspiracy to kill Mr. Kennedy.

So far, Garrison, 45, has not produced publicly any evidence to substantiate his claim. But this is nothing new for him. He frequently makes sensational accusations of police and political corruption without filing charges or citing proof.

Many Conflicting Statements

In a series of press conferences and interviews with scores of national and foreign newsmen attracted by his unorthodox investigation, Garrison has made numerous conflicting and contradictory statements and has astounded even his friends by saying, "I have no reason to believe that Lee Harvey Oswald killed anybody in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963."

The latest gambit of Garrison, a former FBI agent, is to finance his probe through a private fund set up by wealthy businessmen so he will not have to account publicly for expenditures. A top assistant in the probe is the owner of a private detective agency. This makes the Garrison investigative approach similar to the controversial Florida war on crime which is conducted through privately financed investigators headed by a detective agency owner.

Odd Cast of Characters

The cast of characters involved in Garrison's investigation is as peculiar and deceptively mysterious as many of the odd-ball theories that have sprung up in recent months about the Warren Commission report and the Kennedy assassination.

The characters:

David William Ferrie, 48, pilot and part-time private detective with a homosexual record, whose death Wednesday (of natural causes, said a pathologist, while Garrison contended suicide) added new fuel to the prosecutor's investigative fire and prompted him to call Ferrie "one of history's most important individuals."

Jack S. Martin, 52, a private detective and alcoholic who during the Warren investigation admitted to the FBI that he had supplied false information to Garrison's office. Martin, who once brought a civil suit against Garrison (and later dropped it), accusing him of harassment, complained two weeks ago that Garrison's men were harassing him.

David F. Lewis, 26, ex-private

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detective and now a bus station freight handler, who disappeared with his family one morning last week and then popped up several hours later at Garrison's office. Lewis claimed to know five persons meshed in a plot to kill Mr. Kennedy. He says he fears for his life.

Miguel Torres, 26, Cuban exile, a convict serving a prison term for armed robbery, questioned and later described by Garrison as "an unworthy witness." Torres lived a block from Oswald when the assassin resided in New Orleans in 1963.

Carlos Bringuier, amateur sleuth and New Orleans variety store owner, a Cuban exile who knew Oswald and told newsmen that Ferrie had told him last Monday the district attorney was harassing him and trying to frame him. Bringuier said Ferrie's grotesque appearance and mannerisms so startled him that "I didn't want to get involved with this man. His hand I didn't even want to shake." Garrison has interviewed Bringuier.

One of Garrison's top assistants in the probe is William Guervich, 41, a 31-a-year staff member

whose private detective agency has been retained by the district attorney for other investigative work. Guervich, who acts as a press aide and spokesman, holds off-the-record sessions with newsmen, assuring them that Garrison has evidence to substantiate his charges.

Behind Scenes

Martin and Ferrie, both of whom studied for the Roman Catholic priesthood, have figured most prominently in the investigation, Martin behind the scenes, Ferrie publicly.

Federal sources who discount the Garrison investigation say the district attorney is relying heavily on Martin, who called his office soon after the assassination. Martin reported that Ferrie and Oswald served together in a Civil Air Patrol unit in 1955 that Ferrie had taught Oswald how to shoot a rifle with a telescopic sight and that the two had plotted the assassination.

Martin later admitted to FBI agents he had fabricated the story while drunk.

Drinking Problem

Martin's wife told The Times her husband still has a severe drinking problem, is seriously ill, and has been hiding out in Mexico to escape the pressure of publicity.

She said she is sure her husband can not furnish "anything of value" to assist in an investigation.

"He's got this unfortunate problem of drinking," she said, "and in many ways he's extremely naive."

Martin was once a patient in a psychiatric ward of a New Orleans hospital. His wife said he was treated for alcoholism.

On June 11, 1963, Martin filed a \$50,000 damage suit against Garrison accusing him of harassing and threatening him because of information he had developed in an investigation of the district attorney. Three days later the suit was dismissed at Martin's request.

Two weeks ago Martin telephoned a law-enforcement source in New Orleans and complained that Garrison's men were harassing him.

Week of Sensation

But perhaps no one has figured more, aside from Garrison, during the week of sensation than Ferrie.

Ferrie was a shadowy, night-like figure, ever on the periphery of new careers, whose dirty apartment was cluttered with rosary beads, books on the assassination, unwashed coffee cups, littered ashtrays and cigaret butts and bottles of pills.

Ferrie, a native of Cleveland, had become so concerned about what he called Garrison's harassment, that he had launched his own little investigation to prove the district attorney's probe was phony.

Ferrie was an excellent pilot who was fired by a commercial airline because of his homosexual involvements. He lost his hair, eyelashes and eyebrows in an explosion, but instead of going about bald or wearing a toupee, he carried on his head a scraggly, crimson wig that looked as if it had been hacked out of a moth-eaten carpet. He also wore mascara and false eyelashes.

'Getaway Pilot'

Ferrie often said that Garrison had tabbed him as the "getaway pilot"—the man who was supposed to fly Oswald away from Dallas after the assassination. Garrison said no such thing as a "getaway pilot" existed.

Garrison said he had Ferrie taken into custody because he left New Orleans and visited Houston and Galveston, Tex., during the afternoon and night on the day President Kennedy was assassinated "when everyone else was at home watching television."

Beyond this, he has yet to explain why Ferrie was the central figure in his investigation.

Garrison has insisted that Ferrie committed suicide and has predicted that "more suicides" of persons connected with his investigation will occur. But after an autopsy, Dr. Nicholas Chetta, county coroner, has concluded that Ferrie died of natural causes—a hemorrhage.

Dr. Chetta plans to release a final report on an autopsy Tuesday, along with a typewritten statement which Garrison indicated was a suicide note. It

has been learned that the statement, which is undated and unsigned, is a rambling dissertation of complaints about life in general and can hardly be interpreted as a suicide note.

Garrison, the 6-foot-6, nattily dressed district attorney, of course, was the standout character of the week's dramatic events.

Garrison's three-month-old investigation has thrived not only on his method of casually dropping bombshell-like statements during news conferences, but also on the spate of books and articles casting doubt on the Warren Commission report.

He has given several reasons why he started the investigation.

The primary reason, he said, was the curiosity expressed by Sen. Russell Long (D-La.), who wondered how Oswald could have fired the shots so accurately and so rapidly with such an inexpensive rifle.

Garrison also said he found the 26-volume report lacking in any evaluation.

But why has Garrison, in face of Warren Commission findings based on exhaustive investigations by the Secret Service and FBI, persisted in his own investigation?

His critics say one reason is burning political ambitions. In the final analysis, even if he is unable to prove his case, he may be able to exploit public skepticism of the commission's findings and shape an image of a battling prosecutor who is willing to buck overwhelming odds in a search for the truth about the assassination.

Garrison, a close friend

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and public supporter of Gov. John J. McKeithen, has talked of running for mayor of New Orleans and has been mentioned by friends as a candidate for the U.S. Senate seat now held by Allen J. Ellender.

The district attorney has a way of stirring up political controversies and emerging from them unscathed, or as one local observer put it, "he can

fall in a pile of manure and come up smelling like roses."

Editor's Comment

"That's what worries people about this investigation," a newspaper editor here said. "With his luck he might come up with something that could get him off the limb—and not necessarily a court case—and make it look bad for anyone who opposes the way he's doing things."

Garrison, who as district attorney has never tried a case, frequently has been accused by other officials of making false and irresponsible accusations. He once filed charges of police brutality against nine officers, but the following day withdrew the charges.

Soon after his election, he responded with broad, unsubstantiated accusations after eight criminal court judges here blocked his using money from fines and fees for an investigation of vice in New Orleans' famed French Quarter. He said the judge's action raised "interesting questions" of "racketeering influences" over the judges.

The judges, declaring they only wanted to prevent "wild spending" by Garrison, had the Louisiana attorney general file a "public defamation" charge against him. He was convicted in a case that was upheld by the Louisiana Supreme Court, but the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the conviction on First Amendment grounds of freedom of expression.

Last year Garrison called New Orleans' metropolitan crime commission "the major obstruction" to progress in law enforcement.

Garrison promised to clean up lewd shows and vice in the French Quarter, but after a beautiful stripper was twice convicted of performing lewd dances he managed to get her a full pardon from Gov. McKeithen.

One of Garrison's own investigators was a major witness against the stripper, but the district attorney told the governor she was unjustly convicted.

Of Garrison's part in the stripper's pardon, Aaron Kohn, director of the crime commission, said, "I'm amazed that a potential big leaguer could get suckered into a bush league play."

If Garrison can now come up with convincing evidence that the Warren Commission was in error and that there was, indeed, a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy, the district attorney will have made the big leagues and assured himself of a promising political future.

But so far, most close observers agree that the investigation has been strictly bush league.