

Defense Hits Witness in JFK 'Plot'

Compiled from AP and UPI

NEW ORLEANS — A defense attorney for Clay L. Shaw today launched an attack pegged to God and psychiatry to try to discredit a witness who identified Shaw as a conspirator in a plot to kill President Kennedy.

Attorney F. Irvin Dymond questioned Baton Rouge, La., insurance salesman Perry R. Russo about his belief in God, psychiatric treatment he underwent in the past, and his

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conduct as a high school and college student.

Russo was revealed during yesterday's opening session of a preliminary hearing for Shaw as Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison's "confidential informant" to a conspiracy against Kennedy two months before the President was assassinated in Dallas Nov. 22, 1963.

Russo testified that Shaw, 54, former managing director of the New Orleans International Trade Mart, conspired with Lee Harvey Oswald and David W. Ferrie to kill Kennedy in September of 1963.

Security precautions were tightened drastically inside and out-side of the courtroom today because of what police called "threatening telephone calls."

As Russo took the stand today for cross-examination Dymond approached the witness chair and asked point blank: "Do you believe in God?"

"It would depend on definition," Russo said.

"How do you define God?" Dymond asked.

"I define God as the entity of the universe," said Russo.

Dymond asked Russo what was the significance of the oath he took to tell the truth in accordance with his religious beliefs.

"It would be to tell the truth . . ." Russo replied.

Twenty deputies guarded the courtroom. And further security precautions were added after a man identified officers as James R. Liscombe, 30, was arrested yesterday in the criminal court building where the hearing is being held.

Police said he was seen pushing newsmen around and jostling bystanders and had telephoned officials to say he "intended to make national headlines in New Orleans."

Sheriff Louis A. Hude Jr. said there had been other telephoned threats, and a small pistol was found hidden behind the wheel of a truck at a service station where Shaw and his attorney parked their cars yesterday.

Asked by Dymond whether his religious beliefs were unusual, Russo replied: "I don't know that mine are any more particular than anyone else's."

Russo, under questioning by Dymond, also testified his father and mother did not get along well. He said he thought his father had been married previously but was not sure.

"Have you ever undergone psychiatric treatment?" Dymond then asked abruptly.

Russo replied he had for perhaps two years, "maybe a year and a half," from about mid-1959 to late 1960.

The consultations . . . ended in late '60 or early '61," Russo said.

Russo said he had discussed personal and social problems with psychiatrists during 1967 but not on a professional basis.

"When I felt I wanted to talk about previous things in my past that he (presumably his psychiatrist) knew about," Russo said, he would either call or talk to the doctor. He said he last remembered seeing a psychiatrist as late as November, 1965.

Although Dymond never got around to making his point, he questioned Russo extensively about whether he got into trouble in high school for saying he did not believe in God and whether he ever testified falsely in a court case while at Tulane University.

At one point, Judge Matthew Braniff, one of three judges in the extraordinary panel, broke in to tell Dymond to "get on with it."

Dymond argued he was trying to shake the credibility of the witness and his questions were necessary but Braniff replied, "You have not contradicted him on any major point of his testimony."

The questioning failed to provide any answers to the mystery surrounding the "confidential informant." The riddle:

Russo, 25, an insurance salesman from Baton Rouge, told the court he was in the apartment of David W. Ferrie here in September

that Ferrie never mentioned Oswald's name to him, adding, "I had never heard of Oswald until on television . . . ahh . . . the assassination."

—Russo gave details in court of the meeting in Ferrie's apartment, saying the plot involved sacrificing one man to allow the others to make a getaway, a possible flight to Cuba, diversionary shooting and "triangulation of cross-fire."

Yet in an interview earlier with a Baton Rouge television station, Russo explained he never came forth with his information before because "I left it to professionals . . . when they came out with Oswald was the man. Then I forgot it."

—Russo told the court that Ferrie proposed flying the getaway plane into Mexico to refuel for a flight to Cuba. Russo said Shaw interrupted to say that as soon as the shots were fired "the world would know about it," and there would be no way to get the plane out of Mexico. And Russo quoted Oswald as telling Shaw to "shut up. Leave him (Ferrie) alone. He knows what he's talking about. He's the pilot."

But when Russo was asked by a newsmen earlier whether he thought Ferrie might have had anything to do with the assassination, he replied:

"Well, that I don't know and it would be just speculation. Dave Ferrie had the ability because of a keen mind and ability to drive an airplane. Now whether he would have used that is another thing . . . it's only conjecture."

—Russo has said he did not get in touch with Garrison until two days after Ferrie's death — when he saw a newspaper picture of Ferrie. He said he had not then heard from Garrison.

That is the same date on which Garrison announced he had "solved" the case. And Russo apparently is a major witness in Garrison's case — the "confidential informant" who, according to Garrison's application for a warrant to search Shaw's house, confirmed while under influence of "truth serum" that he over-

heard the plot to murder Kennedy.

Other ponderables: Russo told a newsmen that Ferrie jokingly posed the question of assassinating the President to him, "that if he and I could do it . . . it could be done." But in the same interview Russo said he first met Ferrie when he broke off Ferrie's friendship with another boy. Russo added, "at that time Dave made a personal threat against my life."

Russo was the fourth witness to testify yesterday at the opening of the preliminary hearing for Shaw. The hearing is being held to determine whether the district attorney has sufficient cause to hold Shaw for trial.

Speaking so rapidly and indistinctly that court reporters asked him to slow down, Russo told his story with his eyes fixed on Garrison.

The plotting was done, he said, at the end of a party where there was "drinking and talking." He said Lee Harvey Oswald was introduced to him as "Leon Oswald," and Clay Shaw gave his name as "Clem Bertrand."

This is Russo's account in court, basically in his own words:

Dave Ferrie began the conversation, pacing back and forth and talking to Bertrand and Oswald. The discussion centered around an assassination of President Kennedy and how it would have to use diversionary tactics. There would be two to three people involved.

One person would shoot the diversionary shot and the other would shoot the "good shot." One man would have to be the "scapegoat." Ferrie talked of "triangulation of crossfire."

Bertrand listened during this phase. Ferrie talked about the availability of ex-ists. Ferrie had two proposals

— one man sacrificed would give enough time for the others to escape. Ferrie was the pilot. He said they would go to Mexico and on to Brazil and then on to Cuba. Or they would go direct to Cuba.

Bertrand interrupted to say as soon as the shot was fired the world would know about it and they could not get a plane out of Mexico. Bertrand said he and Ferrie would have to be in the public eye on the day of the assassination.

Ferrie then said he would make a speech at Southeastern Louisiana State College in Hammond. Bertrand said he would go to the West Coast for his company on business.

It was here, after Garrison had built Russo's testimony to a high pitch, that he asked Russo to step down from the stand, walk to the man he knew as Bertrand and place his hand over that man's head. Russo strode firmly around the defense table, stopped behind Clay Shaw and placed his hand palm downward about eight inches over Shaws head. Shaw, holding a cigarette, gazed straight at the judges' bench. He was slumped in the chair, but rigid. The court recessed.