

JFK Plot Informer Grilled by Defense

NEW ORLEANS — (UPI) — A defense attorney for Clay 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 conduct as a high school and college student.

The 25-year-old 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.

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

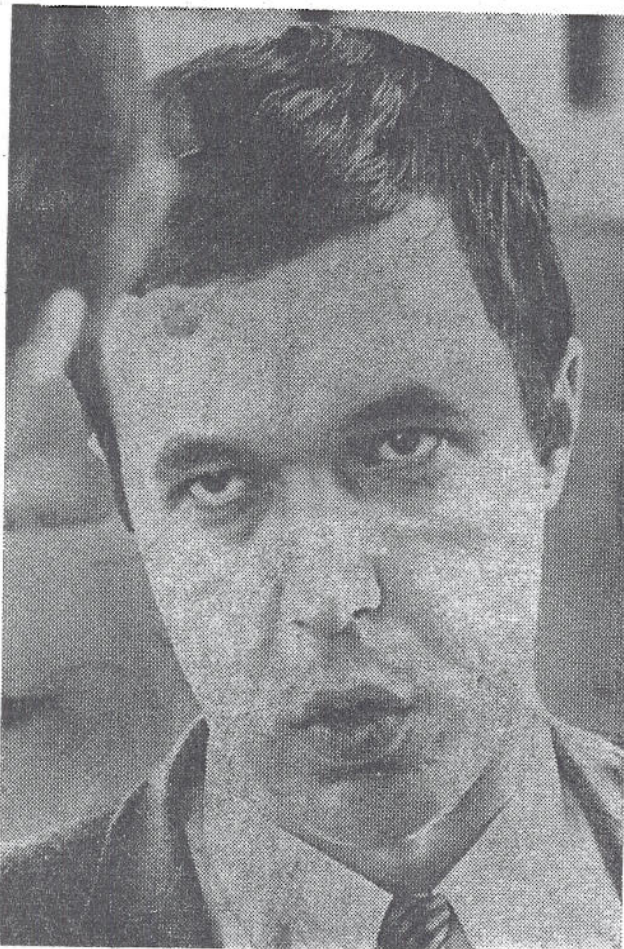
"It would depend on definition," Russo said.

"How do you define God?" Dymond asked.

ENTITY

"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.



CLAIMS HE HEARD JFK MURDER PLOT
Perry Raymond Russo, who says he was there at time
—AP Photo

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

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

Russo, 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.

And then another abrupt question:

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

UNDER TREATMENT

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."

Dymond was prepared to lead Russo through a discussion of Russo's first meeting with David W. Ferrie, the former plane pilot and mystery man in Garrison's case.

Left unanswered were several as-yet unasked questions about Russo's startling testimony yesterday, including:

- Why did Russo wait more than three years after Kennedy's assassination to come forward with his story linking Shaw?

- Why did he wait until last February to say that he once heard Ferrie threaten to "get" Kennedy?

- Why did he say two weeks ago he had never heard of Oswald until he saw him "on television"?

• And why did he not say at that time what he testified yesterday: that he attended a party in September of 1963 at which Shaw, Ferrie and Lee Harvey Oswald plotted the assassination?

Russo, it has been brought out, told a newspaper at Baton Rouge, La. Feb. 24 he had once heard Ferrie say "we are going to get him (Kennedy)" but gave it no more thought until he saw Ferrie's picture in the paper in connection with Garrison's investigation.

He told New Orleans television station WDSU two weeks ago that Ferrie never mentioned Oswald's name to him, adding, "I had never heard of Oswald until on television . . ."

But in the court hearing yesterday he gave explicit details of the alleged plot in mid-September, two months before Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas Nov. 22, 1963. He named Oswald, Ferrie, and "Clay Bertrand" as the three conspirators and pointed out Shaw in court as "Bertrand."