

JFK PLOT QUIZ: SEAMY SUSPECTS

By MERRIMAN SMITH

UPI White House Reporter

NEW ORLEANS, March 4 (UPI) — For a nation — and a world — still distressed by the assassination of John F. Kennedy, a new and dismaying chapter is being written here in the murder of the young President.

The central figure is Jim Garrison, politically ambitious district attorney of Orleans Parish. He is an enormous man who has a basso profundo-robusto voice and an investigative technique to match. At times, he looks and acts much like the late Sen. Huey P. Long, whose Roman circus talents still are remembered fondly in some areas of the state.

Garrison's evidence comes in part from some of the seamiest sides of the New Orleans demimonde. It includes witnesses bedeviled by booze, pills and psychoneuroses — people who believe society has wronged them since birth.

First Arrest

Garrison's investigation produced its first arrest Wednesday night. Clay Shaw, 54, former managing director of the International Trade Mart at New Orleans, was charged with participating in a conspiracy to murder President Kennedy.

Garrison was not present when a spokesman for his office announced the arrest outside the locked doors of the district attorney's office. The nature of Shaw's alleged conspiracy was not disclosed, but Garrison promised through his spokesman that more arrests would follow.

Whether Garrison can prove his over-all case is another matter. At this point, it seems doubtful that the investigation and promised court trials will produce much more than the fact that some Cubans in New Orleans in 1962-63 and some American oddballs did indeed speak wishfully of seeing Kennedy killed.

Merriman Smith, UPI White House reporter who won the Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the Kennedy assassination, went to New Orleans last week to look into charges that the murder of the young President involved a conspiracy spawned in Louisiana.

Garrison hopes to prove that Lee Harvey Oswald sat in these sordid councils before going to Dallas where Kennedy was slain. That would be contrary to the Warren Commission conclusion that Oswald was the sole assassin and was not involved in any conspiracy, foreign or domestic.

Garrison does not believe this. He believes there is a good chance Oswald "didn't kill anybody"; that at the most, Oswald may have fired the shots that wounded Gov. John Connally of Texas and hit Kennedy in the throat, but that the killing shot which hit the young President's head came from another gun, another assassin.

With all respect to the hard-driving, hard-living 45-year-old district attorney, his case so far has to be described as flimsy. In his currently powerful position, he can arrest almost anyone for anything. But proof will come harder, particularly considering the credibility of some of his sources.

Having to work with such informants does not dismay Garrison. He has pushed himself almost to the point of physical and mental exhaustion to complete what he considers a durable case. And he believes he has it.

I spent hours talking with Garrison — in a dignified old restaurant nestled in the city's famous French Quarter and in the book-lined study of his spacious home in a new section off of St. Bernard Avenue.

Sipping an incredible mixture of cream soda and gin, the district attorney seemed wracked by exhaustion and spoke of getting away for a few days to

sleep and sun-bathe. If he has any inner doubts about the strength of his case, he doesn't show it. He exudes scorn for his detractors, of whom there are many in New Orleans.

"We have definitely found out how they killed President Kennedy and we're going to prove it," he told me.

Reminded of his oft-stated promise of forthcoming arrests and convictions, he was asked about timing.

Not Stampeded

"I'm not going to be stampeded into it," he said. "I'm interested in gathering facts and proving them in court, not in getting premature headlines. I'm going to get every last man involved in killing President Kennedy and a number of other persons who, in my judgment, are accessories after the fact."

History may not be changed appreciably by the Garrison investigation, but it could influence his own political fortunes. There is considerable talk that his friends may push him for lieutenant governor this fall. Of such talk, Garrison says, "I couldn't care less." For those who do not understand the argot of politicians, this is an understatement.

Garrison, who fought this town's criminal court judges to a landmark decision by the U.S. Supreme Court and won, is not overly impressed by the fact that the Warren Commission, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Secret Service and hundreds of state and local police investigators believed Oswald acted alone.

The district attorney is convinced, as are many private citizens here and

abroad, that the commission stopped far short of a full inquiry and thus missed the truth.

The moving spirit behind this new investigation is, in fact, highly anti-Washington except for Garrison's warm attitude toward Sen. Russell Long, D-La., whom he says encouraged him to undertake the inquiry. Garrison would like nothing better than to show up the commission and particularly the FBI, for which he worked as an agent for about four months in 1952.

Packs Revolver

The six-foot-six district attorney who packs a revolver under his coat (sometimes he forgets the gun and wears only the holster), refuses acidly to share his investigation at this stage with the FBI or any other Federal agency which failed to turn up the evidence, which he now has.

"I see no reason to delay this investigation another three years," he said.

What makes Garrison so confident of arrests and convictions in the relatively near future? The Iowa native and 1950 law graduate of Tulane University says his files are overflowing with evidence.

It must be noted, however, that much of this evidence is based on the words and deeds of men and women of known instability. District attorneys, of course, must listen endlessly to stool pigeons, drunks, dope-heads and downright nuts.

Most criminal investigations, however, feature one or more witnesses of reasonable stability whose versions can be used to measure or evaluate evidence offered by others. If Garrison has any such witnesses, he has kept it a close secret.

Leading Figures

Here are some of those who have figured in Garrison's case so far:

● An unfrocked airline pilot, fanatically religious, who sometimes dressed in

vestments of a priest in something he called the "Orthodox Old Catholic Church of North America," and a known sexual deviate. This was David W. Ferrie, who on George Washington's Birthday last month was found dead in bed, wearing a red wig and mascara eyebrows. Ferrie, one of the foundation stones of Garrison's case, was labeled promptly by the district attorney as a suicide. The coroner and two doctors who conducted an autopsy attributed death to hemorrhage of a blood vessel at the base of his head. Ferrie was in an advanced stage of hypertension which was not helped by his frequent use of stimulant, depressant and euphoric pills.

● A convict of Cuban extraction with a penchant for armed robbery, burglary and pushing narcotics. This professional tough, Miguel Torres, has not behaved so pugnaciously of late. Whining for protection, he was questioned by Garrison's men in Angola State Prison, moved to the New Orleans Jail, then into the jail hospital for even greater safety. One theory is that Miguel may be more afraid of the Cosa Nostra, which is well-represented here, than he is of Garrison or some of the alleged conspirators.

● Jack S. Martin, 51, a native of Phoenix, Ariz., also known variously as Col. Martin and Bishop Martin (affiliation, Orthodox Old Catholic Church of North America). A self-styled expert on electronic eavesdropping, Martin describes himself as "author, a former newspaperman, professional soldier, adventurer and philosopher."

Asked whether he had been known as Edward S. Suggs, he told me, "I don't want to discuss it. Martin is now my legal name."

Contradictory

Some of Garrison's critics say Martin is highly important to the case. Martin agrees most enthusiastically. But not Garrison. The district attorney and his staff questioned Martin countless times, as have the FBI and Secret Service. His stories are highly contradictory.

Martin has told a variety of stories linking Oswald with Ferrie. One version was that Ferrie hypnotized Oswald who went to Dallas under a spell; that Ferrie was waiting for Oswald in Dallas with a get-away plane on Nov. 22, 1963; and that Ferrie and Oswald were heavily influenced by

W. Guy Bannister, former FBI agent, later deputy chief of the New Orleans police force and then head of a private investigation agency before his death in 1964.

Martin, an episodic drunk and no stranger to jails and mental wards, has a pattern of talking and recanting. He told the Secret Service the lurid story about Ferrie being the get-away pilot, then took it back as being nothing but a fantasy. He told me in turn the Secret Service lied, that he had taken back nothing. He also told me that Ferrie had a rifle identical to the one used by Oswald and that on one occasion Bannister pistol-whipped Ferrie over something related to the anti-Castro movement.

Before I mentioned our conversation to anyone and was sitting in my hotel room studying my notes on Martin's jumbled conversation, he was on the phone to a New Orleans TV station denouncing the UPI and me for having distorted what he said.

Martin is worth remembering, however. At about the time of Ferrie's death, Martin was quite apprehensive about his own safety and left town. He told me he moved around for more than a week, finally reaching a point 1000 miles away. We picked up reports of his presence as far away as Rosarita Beach in Baja California, more than 2000 miles from New Orleans, and at various locations in Mississippi and Texas.

Always Broke

In any event, this took financing of a sort and Martin is perennially busted. Where did the funds come from? Asked whether he gave Martin walking-around money, Garrison waved off the question and said he would not be so foolish as to attach any definitive importance whatever to information from this kind of source.

● David Lewis, 26, New Orleans Bus Co. freight handler and self-described private investigator, part of the Bannister-Ferrie-Martin set.

Lewis, too, fears for his life enough to disappear periodically. His motivation in the case seems to involve profit and status. He rebuffs reporters with a lordly "no comment." But moments later he tries to peddle for an outrageous sum a tape recording which he made with Martin "naming names." UPI was invited to start the bid-

ding for this tape in the neighborhood of \$1000. It hardly seemed worth it.

What does Lewis know to connect Oswald with the assassination and/or the so-called conspirators? "Plenty," he says to some, "nothing" to others. He is supposed to have done some investigative work for Bannister and for Ferrie, but Garrison's staff doubts that Lewis was much more than an errand boy with a taste for high adventure. In a case such as this, however, a casual relationship in 1962-63, retold many times, can blossom in the mind of the teller into something of major importance. Lewis is supposed to have overheard some of those bound together in their hatred of Castro communism by a mutual wish for Kennedy's death. But it would seem that anything he has to say in court would have to relate to the words and deeds of two dead men, Bannister and Ferrie, and the mercurial moods of Martin.

● Carlos Quiroga (who may be in either New Orleans or somewhere in Texas) and Sergio Arcacha. Both were involved in the Cuba Liberation Movement in New Orleans on or about the time Oswald was there. Garrison has been trying to question Arcacha, who is in Dallas. As of early this past week, the Cuban refused to budge and would not talk with Garrison's investigators in any place but the Dallas City Jail and then only when flanked by Dallas detectives.

Quiroga and Arcacha must be considerably more important to Garrison's case than some of the other publicly identified figures. Garrison does not like discussing their relationship to his inquiry, but concedes that they are prime names on his roster of persons to be questioned.

● Bernardo Torres of Miami, Fla., self-styled investigator reported to have offered his help to Garrison. Garrison is not enthusiastic about this Torres (who apparently is not related to Miquel) because he doesn't seem to have much to offer.

35 Involved

These are only some of the 35 or more people who currently show up in Garrison's inquiry. Garrison's investigation reaches into the Cuban colony of Miami and the Texas towns of Dallas and Houston, in addition to New Orleans. There are a number of Cubans with whom he would like to talk, but they have

long since dropped out of sight.

"The only way they can get away is to kill themselves," says the district attorney, reflecting his relentless, burning zeal for the chase.

Across town from the courthouse, in a quiet 11th floor office, sits Aaron Kohn, also a former FBI agent, who for more than 20 years has specialized in investigating police departments and local law enforcement. Kohn, who helped break up police corruption in Chicago, came to New Orleans in 1953 at the request of the mayor to investigate the local police department. He has remained as managing director of the New Orleans Metropolitan Crime Commission.

Garrison and Kohn have no use for each other. Garrison says, "If there is any organized crime in New Orleans, it is the Metropolitan Crime Commission." Kohn's commission consists largely of himself and several secretaries, functioning as a privately-financed watchdog over crime in Orleans Parish. The commission's board of directors includes some of the biggest names in town—from the world of banking and finance, business and education.

Kohn in 1963 wrote to Garrison, suggesting that some of the men who now figure in the district attorney's investigation be placed before a lunacy commission and committed, if possible, to mental hospitals.

More Strongly

The crime commission director feels even more strongly today. As I sat in his office where he had just heard Garrison say in a radio interview that the case was "solved" and arrests would be made shortly. Kohn paced worriedly behind his desk.

"All through this thing," he said, "there is a pervasive ingredient that needs more attention (at this point) than the assassination of President Kennedy, tragic as it was. And that is emotional illness. We treat the victims of this sort of illness like we used to treat cancer. We try to pretend it isn't there."

Shortly after Kennedy was killed, Kohn made a report on certain aspects of the case. His board of directors thought so much of it

that it was printed in pamphlet form for public distribution. It made this point:

"In New Orleans, as in every major city, there is a lunatic fringe, combining intelligence with distorted emotions. Some of them became identifiable through active evidence of destructive hate. Which of them is incapable of duplicating the shocking acts of Oswald and (Jack) Ruby?"

What about Garrison's future? During these hectic days, his admirers express confidence he will make it all the way to the Governor's chair in Baton Rouge. Some 50 or more prosperous businessmen, largely in oil and automobiles, are collecting a special fund with which Garrison can finance his investigation without using public money for which there has to be public accounting. They call it "Truth and Consequences, Inc."

His Vouchers

The local newspapers, the Times-Picayune and the States-Item, annoyed Garrison no little by examining his expense vouchers which must be filed with a court. In fact, Garrison won't knowingly talk to their reporters. This doesn't bother the papers. Their sources on Garrison's activities have been quite adequate.

It is difficult to be coldly objective about Garrison's current activities.

Almost daily, Garrison vows to say nothing more for publication until he is ready to present an iron-clad case. And almost daily, he has something more to say. At one point, he said there was reason to believe Oswald may not have fired a shot in Dallas. Then he changed this a bit to say it could be that Oswald killed no one.

Meantime, the case has a long way to go if Garrison is to be hailed as the man who revised history. At this point, it seems most doubtful he can prove the existence of a genuine operating plot. Nor does he seem at all close to finding or proving the existence of a second assassin.