

Russo Testifies He Was Hypnotized to Check Credibility

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NEW ORLEANS—In a strained, almost inaudible voice, Perry Raymond Russo testified Thursday he underwent hypnosis three times in an effort to establish the credibility of his claim that he overheard a plot to assassinate President John F. Kennedy.

Dr. Nicholas Chetta, Orleans Parish coroner for 17 years, took the stand later and said that the hypnotic sessions and a sodium pentothal test he administered convinced him Russo is neither "a faker" nor "insane."

Russo, a 25-year-old insurance salesman, said he underwent the hypnosis between Feb. 24 and Monday, the day before he began testifying at a preliminary hearing into conspiracy charges against New Orleans civic leader Clay L. Shaw.

Russo said he could not remember the exact dates, but recalls that the hypnotist told him to think about "nice, soothing, relaxing things."

Truth Serum Administered

Dr. Chetta said he administered the sodium pentothal (the so-called truth serum) to the state's witness and was present when Russo was subjected to three hypnotically induced trances.

The results, the coroner said, convinced him Russo "definitely was not faking" and "fulfilled all the requirements of legal sanity."

Chetta added that he found the witness a "very rational, controlled and well-disciplined individual."

The sodium pentothal test, the coroner said, produced a "good resulting examination."

Russo has testified at the hearing that he heard Shaw, Lee Harvey Oswald and David W. Ferrie conspiring to assassinate President Kennedy. The hearing will enter its fourth day at 10 a.m. today.

If Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison, who claims to have "solved" the Presidential assassination, succeeds in establishing "probable cause" during the hearing, Shaw, retired

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director of the International Trade Mart, will have to stand trial.

Chetta tangled verbally with Garrison three weeks ago, after Ferrie was found dead in his bed at his apartment here. The coroner ruled Ferrie died of natural causes; the district attorney has insisted repeatedly that he committed suicide.

Chetta's testimony was the high point of Thursday's session.

Chetta Accepted

Three judges sitting at the hearing accepted Chetta as qualified to offer expert testimony in the fields of forensic (legal) medicine and psychiatry.

Chetta conceded that sodium pentothal had "limitations" if the individual given the test were not a fit subject and if the physician administering it were not an expert in its use.

But, he said, a person who undergoes what he called "narcoanalysis" will "recall events" and "reveal things he does not care to reveal," if properly tested.

He said from his observation of Russo he considered the witness to have been a fit subject for a sodium pentothal test, and added that a person "skilled in the use" of the drug can separate the untruth from the truth.

Fewer Inhibitions

Chetta said the test puts the subject in a "twilight zone" in which the individual is conscious and can answer questions. But he said the inhibitions of the person are sharply reduced.

The test was given Feb. 27 in Mercy Hospital operating room.

Present were two other doctors, district attorney's aides and Sister Albertine, superintendent of surgery at the hospital. The test lasted about 40 minutes, the coroner said.

Chetta also testified he was present when Dr. Esmond A. Fatter, a private physician, hypnotized Russo, twice in the coroner's office and once in the district attorney's office. Russo voluntarily submitted to hypnosis as a credibility test.

Chetta said he had talked with the informer "six or seven times" when he was not in a sodium pentothal-induced trance or under hypnosis.

Attorney's Question

Asst. Dist. Atty. Al Oser asked Chetta if Russo made any statements to him about the assassination of President Kennedy.

"Yes," the coroner replied.

Oser made repeated efforts to get Chetta on record as saying that statements Russo made under the influence of drugs and hypnosis were "substantially the same" as those he made when not.

But each time defense attorney F. Irvin Dymond objected, and presiding Judge Bernard J. Bagert sustained the objection.

Before Chetta took the stand during the afternoon session, Dymond made further efforts in cross-examination to damage Russo's reliability as the state's informer.

Often Mumbles

Russo was visibly tired. In contrast to the two previous days on the witness stand when he boomed out his replies, Russo often mumbled his words. He sometimes was slow in responding and often asked the defense attorney to repeat his questions.

But he fared much better than he did Wednesday when Dymond trapped him in several conflicting statements.

"Have you ever heard of post-hypnotic suggestion?" Dymond asked.

Russo said he had, but he rejected any implication that he might have been under post-hypnotic suggestion Tuesday when he took the stand for the first time to reveal the alleged plot.

He repeated his story of having overheard Shaw, Oswald and Ferrie plotting in the latter's apartment in mid-September, 1963.

Russo said that despite the conversation he claims to have overheard, "I didn't get the impression" that the three men were

necessarily planning to carry out the alleged plot.

Russo has testified that he knew Shaw as "Clem Bertrand" and Oswald as "Leon Oswald" the "three or four times" he saw each of them in 1963.

He admitted for the first time Thursday that the last time he had seen Leon Oswald the latter was clean and shaven. Before, he had insisted that each time he encountered Oswald he had been "dirty" and bewhiskered.

Why, then, he was asked, had he not recognized Lee Harvey and Leon as the same man from photographs published of Oswald after the assassination?

"Cause I was only there eight or 10 minutes," he replied, indicating that he had taken only a brief, disinterested look at Oswald at the time.

Early October

That was in Ferrie's apartment in "early October," Russo has insisted.

Dymond contended Wednesday that the Warren Commission reported that Oswald left New Orleans Sept. 25, 1963, and never returned here.

Russo contends the conversation he heard between Shaw, Oswald and Ferrie followed a "party" in Ferrie's apartment, attended by "eight or 10 people."

Wednesday, he said he could remember the names of only two persons he believed attended the party, "Sandra Moffett" and "Lefty Peterson."

But Thursday Russo said he believed two of the "Spanish-looking people" he had seen at the party, which ended before he claims to have overheard the plot, were named "Manuel" and "Julio."

Records Wanted

Later, defense attorneys obtained a subpoena calling for the Immigration and Naturalization Service here to produce records the federal government may have for a "Julio Busnedo or Buznedo" and a "Manuel Garcia Gonzales (Gonzales)."

The defense attorneys indicated in the subpoena they believe the records

will reflect on Russo's credibility.

The names Gonzales and Busnedo have figured nebulously in Garrison's investigation. There have been reports that the district attorney's investigators have made several trips to Florida trying to find the two men. Also, there have been reports they have enlisted the support of Florida authorities in an effort to find the two Cubans. Both Cubans have been linked to mysterious activities concerning exile movements aimed against Premier Fidel Castro's Communist Cuba.