

Figure in Oswald Inquiry Is Dead in New Orleans

Garrison Links Him to a Plot, an Idea He'd Called a Joke

By GENE ROBERTS

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NEW ORLEANS, Feb. 22—A central figure in District Attorney Jim Garrison's investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy was found dead in bed today.

The District Attorney immediately contended that the death of David William Ferrie, a 48-year-old former airline pilot, was an "apparent suicide." He charged that the dead man had been involved in "events culminating in the assassination."

Just four days ago, Mr. Ferrie acknowledged that he was under investigation but called the inquiry a "big joke."

"Supposedly I have been pegged as the getaway pilot in an elaborate plot to kill Kennedy," Mr. Ferrie was quoted as saying last Saturday in a copyrighted story in The New Orleans States-Item.

The New Orleans police said Mr. Ferrie's nude body was found under a sheet in his apartment here at 11:40 A.M. today by a friend.

Note Found on Table

What appeared to be a suicide note was on the dining room table in the apartment, according to Dr. Nicholas Chetta, the Orleans Parish coroner.

But Dr. Chetta said he was not yet classifying the death as a suicide. He said "anatomical findings" thus far had shown that Mr. Ferrie suffered a brain hemorrhage.

"Probably this man was under undue pressure," Dr. Chetta said.

Although Mr. Chetta declined to reveal the full contents of the note, he quoted part of it as saying:

"To leave this life is, for me, a sweet prospect. I find nothing in it that is desirable, and on the other hand, everything that is loathesome."

The time of the death was "sometime last evening," Dr. Chetta went on, adding that Mr. Ferrie was last seen alive at 5 P.M. Tuesday by an "associate."

Link to Assassination Doubted

Meanwhile, a staff member of the Warren Commission, which conducted a 10-month investiga-



Associated Press Wirephoto

David W. Ferrie. After his eyebrows were burned in an explosion some years ago, Mr. Ferrie wore mascara.

Apparent Suicide Note Found —Brain Hemorrhage Cited

tion into the assassination, said in a telephone interview today that he did not believe Mr. Ferrie was involved in the Presidential murder.

"The F.B.I. did a very substantial piece of work on Ferrie," said Wesley J. Liebeler, a law professor at the University of California at Los Angeles.

"It was so clear that he was not involved that we didn't mention it in the report," said Mr. Liebeler, who helped conduct the New Orleans phase of the Warren inquiry.

"Garrison has a responsibility to indicate just why he thinks Ferrie might have been involved and so far as I can determine he has given no reason," he said.

The Warren Commission concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, who spent part of his high school years in New Orleans and lived here again during the spring and summer of 1963, killed President Kennedy alone and unaided.

Mr. Ferrie came under investigation by local and Federal authorities only hours after the assassination when Edward Voebel, a high school classmate of Oswald's, told investigators that Oswald had served briefly in a civilian air patrol unit commanded by Mr. Ferrie.

Then, three days after the assassination, when they received reports that Mr. Ferrie had made a quick trip to Texas immediately after the Presidential murder, Mr. Garrison's staff arrested him for questioning.

But Federal interest in Mr. Ferrie waned, according to one investigative source, when the F.B.I. determined that Mr. Ferrie had gone to Houston rather than Dallas and had not known Oswald in the air patrol.

"We checked all of this out," Mr. Liebeler added, "and it just did not lead anywhere."

Mr. Garrison's staff continued to find Mr. Ferrie a fascinating figure, however. He wore false eyelashes and a wig to cover burns he had once suffered and, according to one of Mr. Garrison's investigators, did "strange things, like practice hypnosis and keep rats and mice in his apartment in hopes of finding

a cure for cancer."

He was, according to the investigator, dismissed by Eastern Air Lines after he was charged by Jefferson Parish authorities in 1961 on multiple counts of homosexuality and indecent behavior. The charges were never brought to trial.

After leaving the airline, Mr. Ferrie seemed to support himself through occasional investigative work and charter flying. At one time he was listed in the telephone directory as a psychologist.

Called a Pleasure Trip

He was mentioned a few times in testimony in the 26-volume supplement to the Warren Commission report, but was not discussed at length in the New Orleans press until last week, when the States-Item learned that Mr. Garrison was investigating him.

Two of the newspaper's reporters—Rosemary James and David Snyder—went to Mr. Ferrie's apartment on the second floor of an old brick home on Louisiana Avenue Parkway here, and reported later that he denied any connection with the assassination.

They said he told them that in November of 1963 he was working as an investigator for a New Orleans attorney, G. Wray Gill, who was trying a Federal Court case involving Carlos Marcello, who had been accused by the Metropolitan Crime Commission here of having a link with the Mafia.

Mr. Marcello was acquitted at

3:30 P.M. on the day of the Kennedy assassination, according to the statement Mr. Ferrie gave the reporters, and soon afterward he and two friends decided to go to Houston and Galveston on a pleasure trip.

"Ferrie claims," the reporters said, "that while he was in Texas 12 law-enforcement officers, including Garrison and former District Attorney Frank Klein, broke into his home and carted off books, photographs and some other personal belongings."

Mr. Garrison, without mentioning the alleged entry, commented today that "we thought it peculiar that a man would undertake a trip to south Texas when everybody else was watching television."

In a formal statement, Mr. Garrison said:

"The apparent suicide of David Ferrie ends the life of a man who in my judgment was one of history's most important individuals. Evidence developed by our office had long since confirmed that he was involved in events culminating in the assassination of President Kennedy.

"Although my office has been

investigating Mr. Ferrie intensively for months, we have not mentioned his name publicly up to this point. The unique nature of this case now leaves me no other course of action.

"Members of my staff have been maintaining a continuous stake-out in the vicinity of Mr. Ferrie's house for a long period. Information from this observation as well as from other sources had caused us to become increasingly concerned as our investigation progressed about the possibility of his killing himself.

"Because of this, in a meeting in my house this morning, we had reached a decision to arrest him early next week. Apparently we waited too long. I have no further comment to make about Mr. Ferrie's death or about any aspect of the case."

At a news conference Monday, Mr. Garrison alluded to Mr. Ferrie by saying local newspapers had reported that he thought one of his suspects might have been a "getaway pilot."

Mr. Garrison said that he did not think the man had been a getaway pilot, but he did not say then or today what role he suspected Mr. Ferrie of playing.

However, one of Mr. Garrison's investigators, who asked that his name not be used, said one theory was that Oswald was part of a plot in New Orleans to assassinate Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba. But after Oswald was denied entry into Cuba, the theory goes, the conspirators then decided that he should shoot President Kennedy instead.

Housewives who lived near Mr. Ferrie at the time of the assassination told newsmen he had a strong interest in Cuba, and acquaintances reported him to be militantly anti-Castro.

At his news conference today, Mr. Garrison was asked if he had any reason to believe anybody but Oswald took part in the assassination. Mr. Garrison replied:

"I have no reason to believe at this point that Lee Harvey Oswald killed anybody in Dallas on that day."

Blood Vessel Ruptured

Meanwhile today, Dr. Chetta, the coroner, said that findings showed thus far that a blood vessel at the base of Mr. Ferrie's brain had ruptured, causing a hemorrhage.

Mr. Ferrie, he went on, suffered from high blood pressure and swelling and congestion of the lungs. The States-Item reported that Mr. Ferrie also suffered from sleeping sickness.

But Dr. Chetta said he would not attempt to "classify" the cause of the death until more tests had been carried out.

The District Attorney's in-

vestigation gained national attention last Saturday when Mr. Garrison said that he was planning to make arrests in the assassination case.

Later he added that the arrests would come within weeks, but on Monday he said that reports by local newspapers had delayed them for "many months."

Mr. Garrison also said last Monday that he had been disturbed by an editorial in The States-Item, one of two daily newspapers in New Orleans. The editorial had asked:

"Has the District Attorney uncovered some valuable additional evidence or is he merely saving some interesting new information that will gain for him exposure in a national magazine? Mr. Garrison, it seems, should have some explanation."

Mr. Garrison, who is 46 years old, has frequently made headlines in the five years he has been district attorney of Orleans Parish, which embraces New Orleans. He started a clean-up campaign of what he called prostitution and blackmail

along New Orleans's Bourbon Street. His campaign stirred bitter protests from Bourbon Street businessmen.

Checked His Airplane

NEW ORLEANS, Feb. 22 (UPI)—Mr. Ferrie is mentioned on pages 14, 29, 30, and 31 of Volume VIII of the Warren report.

Detective Frederick S. O'Sullivan of the New Orleans police testified that he and police Lieut. Paul Dwyer went to the New Orleans airport to look at Mr. Ferrie's airplane.

"We went there to check it to see if it was flyable and to see possibly whether he had been flying it lately with the thought he may have transported Oswald to Dallas," the detective testified.

He conclude, he said, that the plane was not flyable.

Alleged a Sexual Deviate

A reference to the possibility that Mr. Ferrie may have been a sexual deviate is contained in a Secret Service report dated Dec. 3, 1963, concerning Oswald's activities in New Orleans and published as Exhibit 3119 by the Warren Commission.

The report quotes Mr. Voebel as having said that when he joined the Civil Air Patrol, "Capt. Dave Ferrie, a former pilot or co-pilot for Delta or Eastern Air Lines was the commander at the time Oswald joined. He said he does not know if Oswald was acquainted with Ferrie, who is alleged to

be a homosexual."

In his appearance before the Warren Commission, Detective O'Sullivan testified that he was one of nine vice squad detectives covering New Orleans and that "we handle any vice, gambling, prostitution, homosexuals, handbooks."

The detective was asked: "You have never had any contact with Ferrie in connection with your activities on the vice squad? Is that correct?"

Mr. O'Sullivan's reply, as published on page 31 of Volume VIII of the report on the commission's hearings, was:

"No; Ferrie lives or he did live in Jefferson Parish. We have no authority in Jefferson Parish."

Mr. Ferrie was born in Cleveland, the son of James H. Ferrie, a former police captain who died in 1950. His uncle was William R. Ferrie, a battalion chief in the Cleveland Fire Department, who died in 1964.

He was educated in Roman Catholic parochial schools in Cleveland and attended a Catholic seminary in Ohio. He dropped out, however. He learned to fly and he taught aeronautical science at Benedictine High School in Cleveland from the fall of 1944 to the spring of 1948.

He became a flying enthusiast as a youth. A neighbor of the Ferris, who lived on the southwest side of Cleveland in a middle income section, said young Ferrie used to build model planes in his backyard.

Mr. Ferrie moved from Cleveland to New Orleans, 15 years ago. There, he became a pilot for Eastern Air Lines.

According to a friend, Mr. Ferrie was "a rabid anti-Castroite." The friend said he hinted that he had participated in the Bay of Pigs invasion but would never elaborate.

F.B.I. Declines Comment

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 22—An F.B.I. spokesman said today that the bureau would have "no comment" on Mr. Ferrie's death.