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Photo by
Sydney
Winters

Dallas Chief Admits Error

DALLAS—Shortly after 11 a. m. on the morning of Nov. 24, a Texas-big man swung out of his Texas-big office on the third floor of the municipal building and headed for an elevator that would take him to the basement of the building.



Before he could get to the elevator bank, Police Chief Jesse Curry was intercepted by his secretary who said that the mayor of Dallas was on the phone and wished to speak with him.

Curry was still on the phone, speaking with the mayor, when a dazed aide rushed in around 11:25 a. m. to say that the most famous prisoner in America, Lee H. Oswald, had just been shot in the basement of the building, which also serves as the city jail.

His reaction to the astounding news?

"Disbelief," said Chief Curry when I talked with him in his office. "Just plain disbelief, after all the precautions that had been taken to transfer him from jail to the county prison. I thought every precaution had been taken . . ."

"I DON'T THINK anyone in this century had been subject to such pressure or demand for 'instant news.'"

Curry continued in his low-key manner: "It had reached the point where the news media were trying to satisfy the public, which felt it had the right to witness or participate in events as they occurred.

"As a result of Oswald's killing, I am

sure a different standard of police policy in handling news media has been set up all over the world, not just here."

On that morning of Nov. 24 Jack Ruby, operator of a cheap Dallas strip-lease joint, had somehow walked into the heavily guarded basement.

"How did such a man get into that basement," I asked, repeating the question that has bothered millions.

"I couldn't reveal that," Curry replied in his soft, low-pitched voice. "That will have to be revealed by the Warren Commission investigating the assassination. We have turned over to them every scrap of evidence we have collected."

THE SHOTS THAT KILLED Oswald triggered, among other things, what might be called "the ordeal of Jesse Curry." Within hours this man who had a national—even an international—reputation as an outstanding, competent police officer was being attacked and harshly blamed for Oswald's death.

Because he had yielded to the pressure of news media to transfer the prisoner in broad daylight, for the benefit of TV and news cameras, he was branded, first and foremost, as a publicity hog.

It was such a Klieg-light character I expected to meet when I went to his office. As an experienced reporter, I can spot a publicity hog at 5000 paces. But the police officer I met has none of the attributes of such headline-happy kooks.

"I did what I thought was best at the time," he said quietly, and with a trace of bitterness. "I would do it differently now. Sure, hindsight is wonderful."