

A.P. MAN REPORTS

Justice's Wheels Grinding Slowly In Ruby's Trial

Editor's Note: One of the many out-of-town reporters in Dallas for the Jack Ruby trial is Sid Moody of the Associated Press. His view of the trial's first day, as distributed to newspapers and broadcast media over the world, follows:

By SID MOODY

Associated Press Writer

The wheels of justice ground exceedingly slow as the trial of Jack Ruby drew its beginning.

At times the courtroom and adjacent halls in the Records Building resembled a cattle drive as lawyers, jurors, spectators, cameramen and reporters shuffled to and fro. But Dist. Judge Joe B. Brown wasn't going to be rushed.

"I've got four years left in my term," the calm-voiced jurist told reporters, as they crowded around him during a recess.

But life in the 200-seat courtroom was stirring early. Long before the 9 o'clock starting time, reporters were on hand. A secretary bustled in and slipped a box of tissue under the judge's bench.

One of the two court stenographers, a trim woman in a blue dress, slid into her seat, pushing aside two wide-brimmed Texas hats that had been left on the desk. A bright plaid coat hung informally over the rail in front of her. She rubbed her hands and cracked her knuckles and pulled out a pen. She was ready.

"Get me some more of that branch water," Judge Brown asked an attendant. A green carafe was put on his bench as reporters filed in, wearing their double identification badges. Uniformed sheriff's deputies frisked them.

Then, suddenly, Melvin Belli, Ruby's flamboyant defense counsel, was there. He tossed his red velvet satchel — a gaudy item that looks like something you'd find lashed atop a stagecoach rather than in a courtroom—onto the table. He whirled his black, red-lined coat with the velvet collar off his shoulders. He put his reading on the desk: A copy of a book called "The Decision-Makers: The Power Structure of Dallas."

A box of cough drops followed (Belli is somewhat of a walking medicine cabinet. Later he pulled a tin of aspirin from his pocket and popped a pill in his mouth. Straight, no water.)

Ruby came next flanked by plainclothes security guards. His face was pallid. He said he'd been up since 6 and had a good night's sleep. But he looked tense.

"Hello," he said to a reporter, and leaned forward to shake his hand over the railing. "I got one friend here at least."

As the clerk of the court opened the session, Ruby stood with his hands clasped behind him looking straight ahead. His eye could take in the American flag above the judge's right and the Long Star banner of Texas to Brown's left.

There was only a handful of spectators in the back rows. One man said he'd dropped in for a moment. He had no trouble getting in — just wanted to see what was going on before starting his day's work.

"The people will show up Tuesday," said an attendant. "They know ain't nothin' goin' on the first day."

Judge Brown, though, thought there was one surprise, at least. During a recess, after Belli had asked for a directed verdict of acquittal, the judge said:

"This is the first time I ever heard of doing that before the jury's even selected."

"Did you dwell very long on overruling him?" he was asked.

"Yeah, I dwelled a long time on that," the judge smiled. All of half a minute.

So it was mostly a day for getting started, for getting bearings, for sizing up.

Looming diagonally across the street, never far from behind if sometimes out of sight, is the Texas School Book Depository, from which police say Lee Oswald fired the shots that killed President Kennedy.

The courtroom itself is a honey chamber, far closer to real life than the mahogany room where TV's Perry Mason explodes his wizardry. Overhead, eight ancient, wide-bladed fans windmill languorously in the cigarette smoke.

The plain wooden furniture is nicked and scraped. The stuffing is coming out of the back of one of the defense's chairs, an elegant contrast to the meticulously upholstered Belli. A dead cigar sticks out of a spittoon by a leg of the prosecutor's table.

High up on the wall behind the judge is a painting of Liberty, a fully developed woman garbed in a skimpy robe who is awkwardly holding a flaming torch at arm's length as though she was afraid the smoke would get in her eyes. Across from her is a painting of Justice, another ample lady holding a scale.