

LAWMAN

Belli Swaps Shouts With Venireman

Laconic, drawing State Police Capt. M. C. Blount turned up as a prospective juror Thursday afternoon in the Jack Ruby case, and wound up in a shouting match with silver-tongued defense lawyer-Melvin Belli.

It all ended with Judge Joe B. Brown personally excusing Blount from the jury list.

Blount told the court that the only thing he knew about the Ruby case "was what I read in the newspapers." He answered yes to state questions of whether he felt he could give Ruby a fair trial as a juror.

When it came Belli's turn for questioning, he asked Blount why he hadn't taken advantage of a ruling exempting him from jury duty.

In the course of haggling over the question, Blount's voice rose as he interrupted the attorney.

"Are you trying to shout me down?" shouted Belli at Blount.

"I'm a pretty good shouter," shouted back Blount.

"And I bet you're a pretty good shooter, too," replied Belli, still in high pitch.

"You want to get on this jury so you can send this defendant to the electric chair, don't you?"

When state attorneys jumped up to object, Judge Brown announced that he was excusing Blount as a possible juror.

"We got along pretty fine, didn't we?" Belli asked Blount as the officer, a veteran of 23 years with the Texas Highway Patrol, stepped down.

"Yes, we did," said Blount with a smile. And they both shook hands.

Defense Asks Additional Challenges

Attorneys for Jack Ruby asked Judge Joe B. Brown Thursday to give them more than the usual 15 peremptory challenges allowed each side in a murder trial.

These challenges permit a lawyer to reject a prospective juror without giving a reason.

The defense request came when Ruby's lawyers had used five challenges — one-third of their total.

Judge Brown did not rule specifically on the request but told the lawyers, "I haven't given any thought to it (allowing more than 15 peremptory challenges)."

Dist. Atty. Henry Wade said state laws provide for only 15 peremptory challenges for each side.

Wade said, however, that prosecutors "can't do a thing about it" if a judge gives additional challenges to the defense.

"They could appeal if we got more challenges, but we don't have the right of appeal," Wade noted.