

Tolson
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RA
Suddenly, New Dallas
Uproar
-Jail Break at the
Ruby Trial

3 of 7 Flee;
A Soap 'Gun'
-Cows Crowd

The Washington Post and Times Herald _____
 The Washington Daily News _____
 The Evening Star _____
 New York Herald Tribune
 New York Journal-American _____
 New York Mirror _____
 New York Daily News _____
 New York Post _____
 The New York Times _____
 The Worker _____
 The New Leader _____
 The Wall Street Journal _____
 The National Observer _____
 People's World _____
 Date _____

NOT RECORDED
 128 MAR 16 1964

31 MAR 17 1964

MAR 7 1964

By Maurice C. Carroll
Of The Herald Tribune Staff

DALLAS, Tex.

Outside the courtroom where Jack Ruby is on trial for the world's first televised murder, seven convicts — one armed with a fake pistol—staged a preposterous, televised jail-break yesterday.

The man with the gun marched a hostage past the first defense witness, a pregnant girl who slumped to the floor in terror; past armed guards at the courtroom door; through the crowd of photographers and whirring TV cameras, down the marble steps where spectators lined up waiting to see the big trial.

This happened at about 3:35 p. m., just as the defense was getting ready to start its case on the trial's 17th day.

Out the glass doors of the courthouse he marched his captive. Behind him the "escape" sirens wailed and a slight, young messenger boy for CBS captured another escapee but—in the turmoil—five other felons slipped from the courthouse jail.

Inside the courtroom, after an unexplained pause, a 19-year-old strip-tease dancer called Little Lynn was escorted to the witness stand and made a brief, fluttery but effective performance.

NEWS TO COURTROOM

The spectators in court didn't find out about it until Judge Joe B. Brown ended the session a little after 5 p. m. but the most bizarre sideshow yet—a full-scale jail-break—had just erupted outside.

Of the escapees, mostly serving long terms for robbery and armed robbery, four were still at large last night, with 1,700 Dallas County lawmen looking for them.

Two thugs, including the man who had marched the judge's clerk, Mrs. W. L. Thornton, through the corridor crowded with spectators, reporters, photographers and guards, were captured quickly. A third was taken a short time later.

As the pistol-wielding Clarence Gregory led Mrs. Thornton out the courthouse door, lawmen followed at a respectful distance. Gregory had what looked like a black, snub-nosed pistol pressed into Mrs. Thornton's back.

"Go to a parking lot," Mrs. Thornton said to her captor. "You can make a break for it there."

SHERIFF GRABS HIM

They hurried to the parking lot, next door to the courthouse, and there, Deputy Sheriff Charles Player, who has been helping guard the Ruby trial, grabbed him from behind.

Meanwhile Deputy Rosemary Allen, who had been "frisking" the women spectators at the Ruby trial, saw another of the escapees run into a stairwell near the special press room set up for reporters covering the big trial.

"Stop that man," she yelled. "Stop that man, he's an escaped prisoner."

Leon Davis, 22, working as a messenger for CBS at the Ruby trial, was coming up those stairs. He spread his arms and the fleeing prisoner, John Jenkins, ran right into them.

Then three men from the Probate Court, next to the press headquarters, ran down and grabbed the escapees arms.

The seven escapees were in a dayroom on the sixth floor of the 1,100-inmate prison, which occupies the top floors of the same building where Ruby is on trial. Around the corner is the School Book Depository where the sniper hid to fire at President Kennedy on Nov. 22.

Somewhat—Sheriff Bill Decker didn't have all the details down immediately—the seven managed to capture two jailers and march them to the special, extra-lock elevator well that serves the jail.

A lawyer, G. Ray Lee, was on his way up in the elevator to see a client at the time.

The car stopped at the fourth floor—how the prisoners got down the two floors is not immediately clear—and into the car surged the whole crew.

"Show 'em the gun," one shouted. "They don't believe we have a gun."

Down to the second floor, where the Ruby murder trial was underway, sped the elevator. There the escapees "frisked" turnkey LeRoy Hunt and found keys that opened the door to the crowded corridor. It was piled with camera equipment, littered with coffee containers and cigarette butts, but it is the working space for photographers covering the trial.

Just then, Miss Allen was turning into the corridor, leading Mrs. Melvin Belli, wife of Ruby's chief defense lawyer, and Karen Lynn Bennett, 19, a plump, pregnant, little blonde who once worked as a strip-teaser at Ruby's Carousel Club.

"Nobody's supposed to come out of that door like that," Miss Allen said, and she started to scream. She shoved Mrs. Belli and Little Lynn through a door into another stairwell.

Already nervous, the little blonde witness became terrified.

"Close the door," she screamed. "Close the door. He's after me. He's after me."

She swooned on the stairs.

Walking by at the time was a local TV newsmen, Wes Wise, who had been a witness for the prosecution.

"Get some smelling salts or a wet rag or something," said Mrs. Belli.

Mr. Wise headed back toward the press room just as Mrs. Thornton, a grey-haired woman in a plaid dress and a fluffy red scarf, marched by in the other direction, with her captor behind her.

"Get out of my way, please," she said. "He has a gun in my back."

Mr. Wise kept right on going in the other direction. He came back a moment later with a wet paper towel to mop Little Lynn's brow.

The escapee marched Mrs. Thornton past the photographers—some of whom still thought that the turmoil was due to efforts to get a picture of Little Lynn—and on past the long line of waiting spectators on the marble stairs.

"She was quite calm," said Louis G. Richardson, at the head of the line. "He seemed more nervous than she did."

Had the other escapees gone past there too?

"We can't be quite sure. The guards had just let some sort of prisoner past, and it was a bit confused," deputies said.

The spectators pressed back against the wall and the captive and captor hurried down.

When Deputy Player finally grabbed Gregory from behind, he dropped his "gun." The barrel was a taped pencil. The rest was made of soap, bits of wood and metal, all stuck together with blackstrap but it looked real and deadly. The prisoners had had pancakes for breakfast.

Mrs. Thornton had been sitting peacefully in her office when a Probate Court employee, Edna Biggs, came running in. "Pan, Ruth, run. He's got a gun, he's got a gun," gasped Miss Biggs.

Both women tried to get out a rear door of the office, which also leads into a courtroom. From the empty courtroom dashed Gregory. He grabbed Mrs. Thornton. "Show me the way out," he said.

"There is no way out, only the window," she said. "But if you go out the window, you're done for."

"Then we'll just have to go out the front way," he said. Mrs. Thornton recalled later that he was "very polite."

Despite the turmoil, the legal show had to go on. Little Lynn, her plump face pallid above a white maternity suit topped with a demure round collar, her blonde bouffant hair a trifle disarranged, was led to the witness stand by Mr. Bell.

The perky manner she showed on the witness stand gave no hint of the fear she had just experienced.

In a firm voice, with a soft Texas twang, she told how she had telephoned Ruby to wire her some money on the morning that Lee Harvey Oswald, accused assassin of President Kennedy, was shot to death in the basement of Dallas Police Headquarters.

"I talked to him between 10 and 10:30 on that Sunday morning," she said. "He sounded like he had been crying."

Little Lynn, who is just 19, said she needed money to pay the rent on her Fort Worth apartment.

The defense already was said that Ruby wired the money from a Western Union office at 11:17 that morning, just a few minutes before Oswald was shot, an argument against any charges of premeditation.

Little Lynn made a string of points for the defense. The claim is that Ruby shot Oswald during an attack of psychomotor epilepsy, that he is suffering from organic brain damage, and the defense lawyers have tried to paint a picture of a volatile, erratic, violent man.

"He had a very quick temper," Little Lynn said. "He'd fly off the handle. But then it was all over."

District Attorney Henry Wade was gentle in his cross examination of Little Lynn, described by Mr. Bell as "the little girl but for whom this wouldn't have happened."

"Her call woke him (Ruby) up that morning," Mr. Bell said.

After about 15 minutes on the stand, she was escorted out of the courtroom and into the clerk's office outside. The turmoil following on the jail-break was still swirling.

In a sense, yesterday's wild doings wrote a postscript to the day. The court session had started with showing of films from that other frantic day, when Oswald was shot. They were repeated at slow speeds.

As cameramen's lights flashed, the films showed, police hustling the handcuffed Oswald through the door, past a crowd of reporters and guards, toward the backing fender of an automobile.

Over and over they showed how a radio reporter stuck a microphone in front of Oswald, then draw it back as a lunging figure thrust a pistol into Oswald's abdomen.

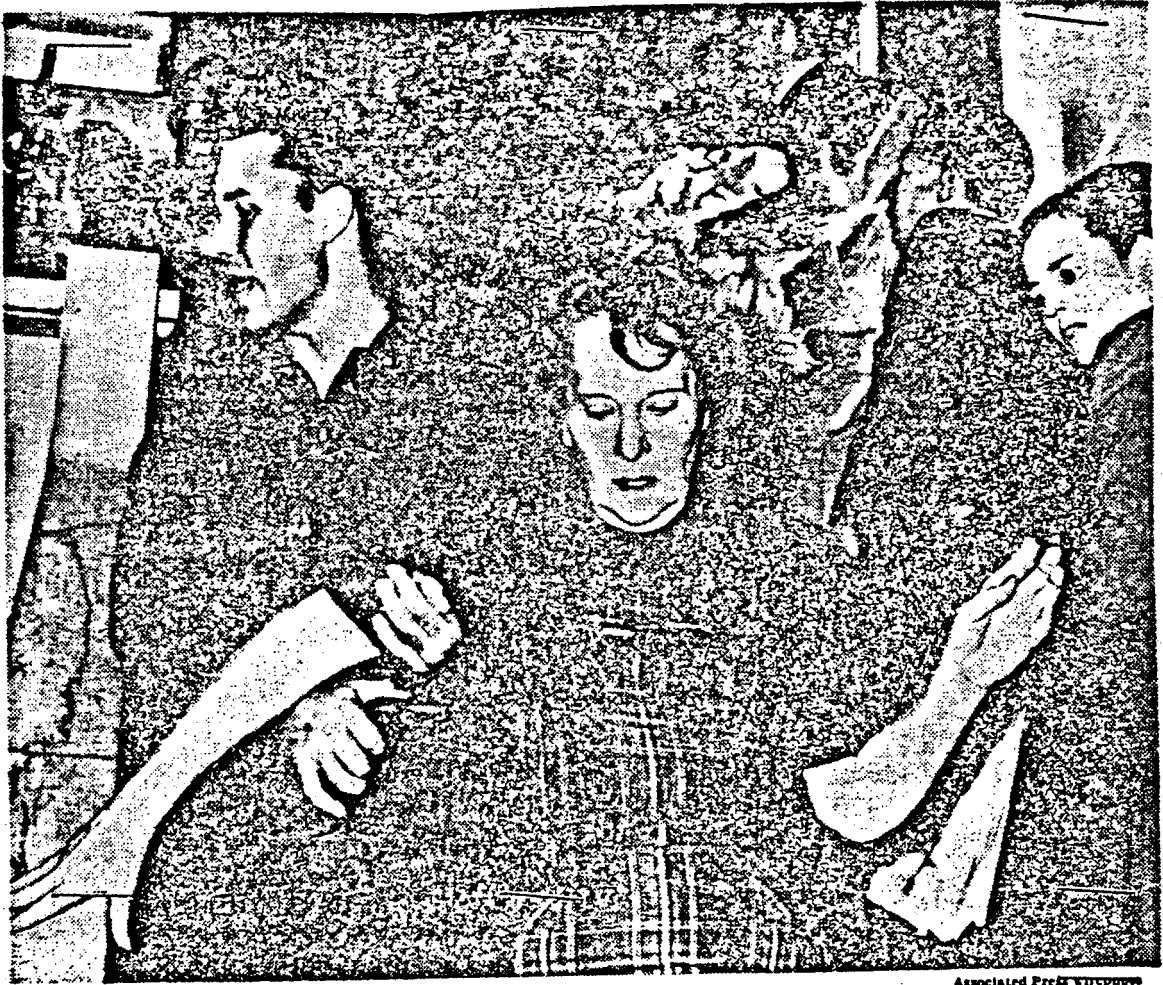
They showed Oswald's face twisted in wracking pain and police scrambling for the killer and weapon.

Jack Ruby, the man with the pistol, had never seen the films. He crouched forward at the defense table and peered intently over the broad shoulder of lawyer Paul Burleson.

It didn't appear that he was saying much. Had he spoken?

"He just said he didn't remember the crowd," Mr. Burleson recalled.

On Thursday, Detective Thomas McMillon had testified he clearly remembered Ruby shouting an obscene phrase at Oswald as he plunged forward to shoot the accused assassin.



Associated Press Wirephoto

PAST TERRIFIED THRONG on a stairwell outside the Ruby trial. fleeing prisoner Charles David Gregory hustles a hostage, clerk Ruth Thornton, at whose ribs he hold a soap "gun."



Associated Press wirephoto

THE ESCAPE—Charles David Gregory looks back at photographer as he marches Mrs. Ruth Thornton, with a bogus gun in her back, down the street away from the Dallas Criminal Courts yesterday. At right, Deputy Sheriff Charles Player climbs over parked car on his way to intercept the escaping prisoner and free hostage . . .



Associated Press wirephoto

THE CAPTURE—Sheriff Player leads Gregory away after taking his soap pistol as Mrs. Thornton gasps with relief. The deputy stood his ground and the prisoner offered no resistance. Mrs. Thonton was shaken by her hostage role, but unharmed.