

Ruby Sought to Tell All-in Lie Test

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For a capsule drama within the framework of an immense tragedy, few episodes were more gripping than the polygraph test which Jack L. Ruby insisted on taking over the protests of attorneys, family and friends.

Eighty-five pages of testimony from the Warren Commission hearings tell the story of the convicted Ruby's determination to make public his answers to any questions put to him about his slaying of Lee Harvey Oswald.

Except for a two-hour break, the wrangling and questioning went on for 10 hours in the Dallas County Jail last July 18.

The rough-and-ready Ruby, the hustler who went from Chicago's streets to Dallas' night-club district, emerged from the controversial interrogation with as good marks as anyone could expect under the circumstances.

Wasn't Dissuaded

He asked for the polygraph test, was granted it by Commission Chairman Earl Warren and neither his attorneys, Clayton Fowler and Joe Tonahill, nor his closest advisers could dissuade him.

In fact, Ruby nearly drove his legal counsel to distraction by insisting, before and during the test, that it must be released to the public as soon as possible and by insisting that William F. Alexander, representing the District Attorney's office, should be let in on the quiz.

Fowler repeatedly tried to convince Ruby that by divulging information to the district attorney he might be destroying his last chance in the event he won a new trial.

"I've got the monkey on my back now," said Ruby.

"Well, you've got more than a monkey on your back, Jack,"

answered Fowler. "This is your decision."

10 Series of Questions

The FBI polygraph expert, Bell P. Herndon, went to great lengths to explain the operation to Ruby and to put him at ease. The test was given in 10 series of questions, each series lasting 3 minutes or less with breaks in between.

It finally was agreed that Alexander would be permitted to hear the preliminary questions, but would leave the room when Herndon directed them for a response on the polygraph.

Most of the questioning went smoothly with Ruby apparently in a cooperative, chatty and amiable mood. But on occasion he tried to help Herndon rephrase long questions. Once this lead to the ludicrous situation of Alexander horning in with a suggestion about how a question should be shaped.

This was during a series dealing with the question of premeditated murder, which Fowler warned was the very crux of Ruby's hope for eventual reversal or clemency.

Negative Answer

To the question: "Aside from anything you said to George Senator (Ruby's roommate) Sunday morning, did you ever tell anyone else you intended to shoot Oswald?" Ruby answered "No."

But even after the questioning began, Ruby was not satisfied that the district attorney's office was not getting his answers first hand.

"I've already told it to the Warren Commission," Ruby pleaded with Fowler.

"Listen, Jack," the attorney begged, "will you please listen to me? This man got up down there and asked the jury to send you to the electric chair."

"I know it," Ruby answered.

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- Belmont
- Mohr
- DeLoach
- Casper
- Callahan
- Conrad
- Evans
- Gale
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- Sullivan
- Tavel
- Trotter
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- Holmes
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- New York Post
- The New York Times
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"I want him in here and I want you to ask him to come in, please."

Alexander continued to remain out of the room during Herndon's questioning for the polygraph, but Ruby relentlessly insisted on the prosecutor getting in on the act.

Stayed Out of Room

In his anxiety to show his all-out cooperation, Ruby once said to the man who had asked the death sentence for him:

"Bill, I think you can give these people certain questions and more potent ones than they know, because you probably know a lot of things that you have in your own mind that you'd like to have answered too."

"Jack, I really can't think of anything I'd like to ask," the prosecutor replied.

At another time he surprised Ruby by saying:

"Jack, you are a good man." Whereupon Ruby replied, "Who, Bill?" and they held a 3-minute private conversation.

Test Is Described

Ten days after the polygraph test Herndon described it in great detail for Arlen Specter, assistant Warren Commission counsel, who also presided at the test.

Specter sought to evaluate the credibility of the examination in view of the testimony of three psychiatrists, including Dr. William Beavers, as to Ruby's mental instability.

Herndon left open the question as to Ruby's mental competency, but agreed that Dr. Beavers had concluded that Ruby seemed to be "aware of the questions and that he understood them, and that he was giving answers based on an approximation of reality."

Herndon gave Ruby a high score on the test—provided he was mentally competent. He said Ruby answered all relevant and pertinent questions without indication of deception.

Ruby's Score Is High

For instance he answered negatively, with good responses on the machine, to such questions as "Did you know Oswald before Nov. 22, 1963?" "Did you assist Oswald in the assassination?" "Have you ever been a member of a group advocating the violent overthrow of the U.S. Government?" "Did you have a gun when you went to the Friday midnight press conference at the jail?"

The answer was "yes" when he was asked: "Did you shoot Oswald in order to save Mrs. Kennedy the ordeal of a trial?"

He also said "yes" to the query about whether he first decided to shoot Oswald Nov. 24.

Became Less Candid

Ruby became less candid on so-called control-type questions concerning his personal life. He was upset over questions about whether he was married, or had run into difficulty while serving in the armed forces, or had served time in jail.

As to Ruby's complicity to answer the questions, Dr. Beavers made one exception in his belief that the killer was in touch with reality.

Ruby refused to answer at all when Herndon asked (1) "Do you think members of your family are now in danger because of what you did?" and (2) "Is Mr. Fowler in danger because he is defending you?"

Asked these questions before he was wired for polygraph, Ruby had answered "yes" to both.