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Proved to be of no value as informant FBI 'contacts' with Jack Ruby confirmed

By HUGH AYNESWORTH
Staff Writer

The FBI approached Jack Ruby on several occasions in 1959 to try to recruit him as an informant, but he proved to be of no value to the bureau, an FBI spokesman confirmed Thursday.

Theodore L. "Ted" Gunderson, special agent-in-charge of the Dallas FBI office, said bureau files showed Ruby was contacted March 11, 1959 "because he was in a position in his business to know a lot about what was going on."

"He was totally unproductive and was never developed to the stage where he was an informant," Gunderson said, "but we did approach him with that in mind."

Gunderson would not identify the agents who contacted Ruby.

Agents reported eight other conversations with Ruby during the next

seven months. Gunderson said the file on the Dallas nightclub owner was closed Oct. 2, 1959.

An ex-agent familiar with the case said, "Outside of a few gripes concerning some of his business competitors, talking to Ruby wasn't even worth the car fare. I think he could have helped us with information about gambling, prostitution and narcotics, but he sure didn't. He had little besides Jack Ruby on his mind."

Pat Gannaway, in charge of vice, narcotics and intelligence divisions for the Dallas Police Department (DPD) at that time, said he felt sure Ruby never gave any information to anybody or everybody else he came in contact with would have known about it. He was just that way.

Gannaway is now with the state Criminal Justice Council in Austin, having retired from the DPD about

four years ago. He said his intelligence agents on the DPD would not have had to do any recruiting of the talkative Ruby. "All they would have had to do was walk in the front door."

The controversy about the FBI-Ruby link surfaced again this week as Mark Lane, the crusader-lawyer who is perhaps the best known of the Kennedy assassination conspiracy theorists, talked about the situation with newsmen.

Lane, who now represents a lobby group called Citizens Commission of Inquiry, based in Washington, called a press conference, then canceled it, then told reporters what he originally intended to talk about in the press conference.

He told a Knight News Wire reporter he intended to turn over a letter from longtime FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover, written to the Warren

Commission in 1964, to Rep. Don Edwards, D-Calif., chairman of the House subcommittee on civil and constitutional rights of the judiciary. Instead of presenting the letter at a press conference.

That letter, written June 9, 1964, was not mentioned in the Warren Commission Report on the John Kennedy assassination, nor its 21-volume set of exhibits. But it has been available in the National Archives since 1965, and several reporters have been aware of it.

Lane's group apparently just discovered it this year, according to the Knight reporter.

Hoover's letter to the commission said Ruby was contacted because of his "knowledge of the criminal element in Dallas." Originally, Hoover went on, Ruby "expressed a willingness to

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furnish information" but no results were ever obtained and after several more meetings with him, agents gave up on the contact and closed the case.

That the Warren Commission failed to mention the approach to Ruby anywhere, is, to Lane, proof of "the fraud, deception and repression" he claims government agencies have engaged in since the assassination.

Lane said Rep. Edwards told him he planned to ask FBI Director Clarence Kelley for the "302s" on the case. (A "302" in bureau parlance is a detailed report of an FBI interview.)

The Dallas FBI office refused to release the 302s to The Times Herald, explaining that release of such secret reports was against policy.

Joe Tonahill of Jasper, Tex., one of Ruby's lawyers when Ruby was convicted of murdering Lee Harvey Oswald here, said he had never been told the FBI had contacted his former client, but said he was not surprised.

"You know how Jack tried to ingratiate himself with all the officers," Tonahill said, "and you know he would do the same thing with the FBI if he thought he could."

"He may have blown some smoke at 'em and made 'em think he could

do more for 'em than he could," Tonahill added, "and that wouldn't surprise me a bit."

Ruby rose from obscurity toward infamy Nov. 24, 1963 when he slipped into the City Hall basement and shot Oswald to death as police were moving

the accused presidential assassin to the county jail.

Ruby was later convicted of murder in an emotion-filled Dallas courtroom, but the conviction was overturned by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals because, they contended, Judge Joe B. Brown allowed inadmissible testimony and refused to grant a change of venue motion though the court deemed there was too much prejudicial publicity in Dallas to hold a fair trial here.

While awaiting re-trial in Wichita Falls, Ruby contracted cancer and died in Parkland Hospital in January 1967.

In the months before his death, and even as far back as when Chief Justice Earl Warren interviewed Ruby in his jail cell, Ruby talked incessantly of vast "conspiracies" in the case. But the conspiracies Ruby envisioned always centered around delusions that he or his family would be slain because he was Jewish.

Lane and scores of other assassination buffs who have spent a large portion of the past dozen years investigating or theorizing about the assassination and its myriad ramifications have often claimed Ruby was involved somehow in a conspiracy.

But since most of them have, at one time or another, claimed Oswald

wasn't even the man who killed the president, it seems unlikely too much new excitement can be generated from the sudden disclosure of a document scrutiny for a decade.