

'... A Little Dignity'

Checking members of the press for concealed weapons, cameras, or tape recorders one afternoon last week, a Dallas County deputy sheriff briskly ran his hands down the length of a well-dressed newsman's suit. At the man's calves, the deputy stopped abruptly—and stared.

"Is that a garter?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Yeah," replied Bob Considine of the Hearst Headline Service.

"Well, I'll be damned," said the deputy, shaking his head and permitting Considine to enter the courtroom where Jack Ruby was on trial. "I didn't know anyone wore garters any more."

It was an amusing moment but, for Considine and 150 other newsmen from eleven countries in Dallas to cover the murder trial, the deputy's reaction was not at all surprising. It was in keeping with the carnival atmosphere that surrounded the solemn task of administering justice to the man accused of killing Lee Oswald, President Kennedy's alleged assassin. To the visiting newsmen (from Homer Bigart of The New York Times and Dorothy Kilgallen of Hearst to Karel Kyncoel of Radio Prague and sixteen Britons), the initial encounter with Texas-style legal procedure was downright unsettling.

Inside, three green spittoons decorated the courtroom (and were used regularly by Judge Joe B. Brown and prosecuting attorney Henry Wade). The presiding judge himself gazed at the saloon-art wall portraits of Miss Justice and Miss Liberty," reported Stan Opatowsky in The New York Post, "and could only comment: 'Miss Justice is better built than Miss Liberty.'"

"But . . ." "I've got nothing against informality itself," sighed matronly British author Sybille Bedford, part of a platoon covering the trial for Life magazine. "It's splendid, but . . ."

To get inside the courtroom, a newsman must first be accredited (150 have been, and 75 more are expected once the trial actually starts), wear two identification badges at all times, and then be searched every time he enters. Once inside, it's every man for himself. One British artist, who felt he wasn't getting a good view of Ruby, first persuaded the sheriff to ask the defendant to look his way (which he did) and then, before a morning session started, wandered over to Ruby's table. As Ruby's attorneys chatted with the press, he talked with the defendant and completed his drawing. "He wanted to know if the double chin showed very much and asked that I give him more hair," said the artist. "And finally he said, 'Give me a break will you? Give

me a little dignity.' It was pathetic."

Twice each day, when the judge announced a recess, some 50 reporters sprang from their hard-back benches, some even leaping the rails of the dock, and raced to surround the attorneys. Moments later, the courtroom was bedlam as the doors were opened and the TV cameramen and photographers, who are not allowed inside during court proceedings, battled each other for the news. "What happened to poor Jack Ruby?" said Murray Kempton of The New Republic, looking at the chaos all around him. "He keeps getting smaller and smaller and smaller. Doesn't anybody remember that he is on trial?"

Despite the diversions in the courtroom, newsmen were hard-pressed to



Oswald armed: Whose exclusive?

develop fresh angles about a case that has been discussed at length in the world's press for three months. To make life easier for the reporters, a public-relations firm set up a press room with 34 phones and sixteen Western Union machines.

No News: Although the biggest hard news so far has been the naming of the jurors, visiting newsmen last week were still filing some 40,000 words a day by wire and a great deal more by phone. By the weekend, newsmen were almost reduced to interviewing each other to meet the demand for copy that their editors were requesting. Yet they all realized that once the jury was

picked, they would have more than enough to keep themselves busy. "Abroad, there is the feeling that there must be something about the assassination that hasn't been told," said Maurice Adams of The Sydney (Australia) Morning Herald. "And this is the place it must come out." Months of legwork have convinced almost all U.S. newsmen that the conspiracy theory was simply impossible. But, after the carnival antics last week, just about anything else seemed possible in Dallas.

A Big Sale

Dallas was the dateline for another brand of journalism last week—check-book journalism. Everybody—from accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald's mother to the ticket seller at the movie theater where he was arrested—has had something to sell. Yet, mostly for reasons of taste, the giants of the bought-by-line and the exclusive picture—Life, The Saturday Evening Post, McCall's, and Paris-Match—managed to keep their pens in their pockets.

Then three weeks ago a Life photographer received an anonymous phone call, offering him exclusive shots of Oswald (including one of him holding a rifle). The photos apparently had been collected by police officials during the investigation, and the best guess was that some official source had passed them on to the seller. Life's lawyers decided against buying them on the ground that the documents actually belonged to Marina Oswald and that she could sue. The photographer then went to James Martin, an ex-motel manager and Marina Oswald's business adviser, seeking the originals. Martin had the photo of Oswald and the rifle and sold exclusive North American rights to Life for less than \$5,000.

Unfortunately for Life, at least two other packets of Oswald photos were subsequently being circulated (but not by Martin). Gene Roberts, an enterprising, 31-year-old reporter for The Detroit Free Press, decided to go after them and managed to buy some twenty photos (including the one Life had bought) for only \$200. The Free Press rushed the Oswald-with-rifle picture onto its front page early last week and then turned it over to the Associated Press—on the day that Life hit the stands with the same photo on its cover.

By the weekend, attorneys for Life and Marina Oswald were both talking about legal action against the Free Press, and Oswald's mother was thinking of suing Life on the astounding ground that the magazine's story was "inaccurate" and that the front-page photo may have been her son's head superimposed on somebody else's body. "The legs," she said, "do look very long."