

# THE ASSASSIN

By Ben H. Bagdikian

In what dark, hidden corner of the mind grew Lee Oswald's mysterious compulsion to shoot a man he didn't even know?

S.E. Pitt  
12/11

Among the millions who sat watching their television screens, none will ever forget the incredible scene—the gaunt, thin-lipped prisoner, his pale face bruised, the burly man in the neat, snap-brim hat pushing forward, the pistol suddenly outthrust, the sharp report, the look of fear and anguish on the prisoner's face as he crumpled to the floor, the voice of the stunned announcer repeating over and over, "He has been shot; yes, he has been shot . . . no question about it; he has definitely been shot."

The mysterious shooting by a night-club operator named Jack Ruby not only destroyed Lee Oswald but left unanswered and perhaps unanswerable the haunting question of what distorted internal force had driven Oswald to assassinate the President of the United States. In the first hours after President Kennedy's death, many assumed the killing was the work of Birchite fanatics; then, when Oswald was captured and剖essed himself a Marxist, there were outcries against both right- and left-wing extremists. But Oswald's Marxism was

less a political belief than a symptom of deeper drives and twisted passions that propelled this obscure and seemingly innocuous man to kill.

No one can know, now, when or how the obsession began, but its roots lie deep in the past. The third of three boys, he was born in New Orleans in 1939, shortly after the death of his father, an insurance salesman. He later spoke bitterly of the suffering his widowed mother had experienced; but people who knew him in childhood are vague about his family life. His IQ was 103. His grades were below average; he was always lonely.

"I remember that child vividly," says Mrs. Clyde Livingston, his fourth-grade teacher in Fort Worth. "He wouldn't have his lunch at school but would go home for it. I asked him if he went home to eat with his mother, and he said she wasn't there, so he ate alone. I asked him if his mother prepared his lunch for him, and he replied, 'No. I can open a can of soup as well as anybody.'"

He seldom displayed emotion, but Mrs. Livingston remembered two events that,

in retrospect, seem important. The first came at Christmas time in 1949. The other children in the class brought the teacher small bottles of perfume. Oswald struggled to school carrying a large cardboard box. Inside was a black-and-white puppy from the litter of a large mongrel that seemed to be the boy's only companion. He gave the puppy to his teacher and visited her every weekend to make sure the dog was cared for.

The second event occurred when Lee became smitten with the model girl of the class. She was the best-dressed, the best student, the most popular, and she was pretty. For the first time Lee began combing his bushy, curly hair. He tucked in his shirttail. This was so startling that Mrs. Livingston considered it a major change in the boy and encouraged it quietly. Unobtrusively she rearranged chairs and placed Lee beside the girl. But another boy began pushing his way into class lines beside the girl, and she smiled prettily at him. Lee drew back into solitude.

"He was just a little, lonely boy," Mrs. Livingston said. "He wasn't for any-

thing, and he wasn't against anything. He just wasn't anything."

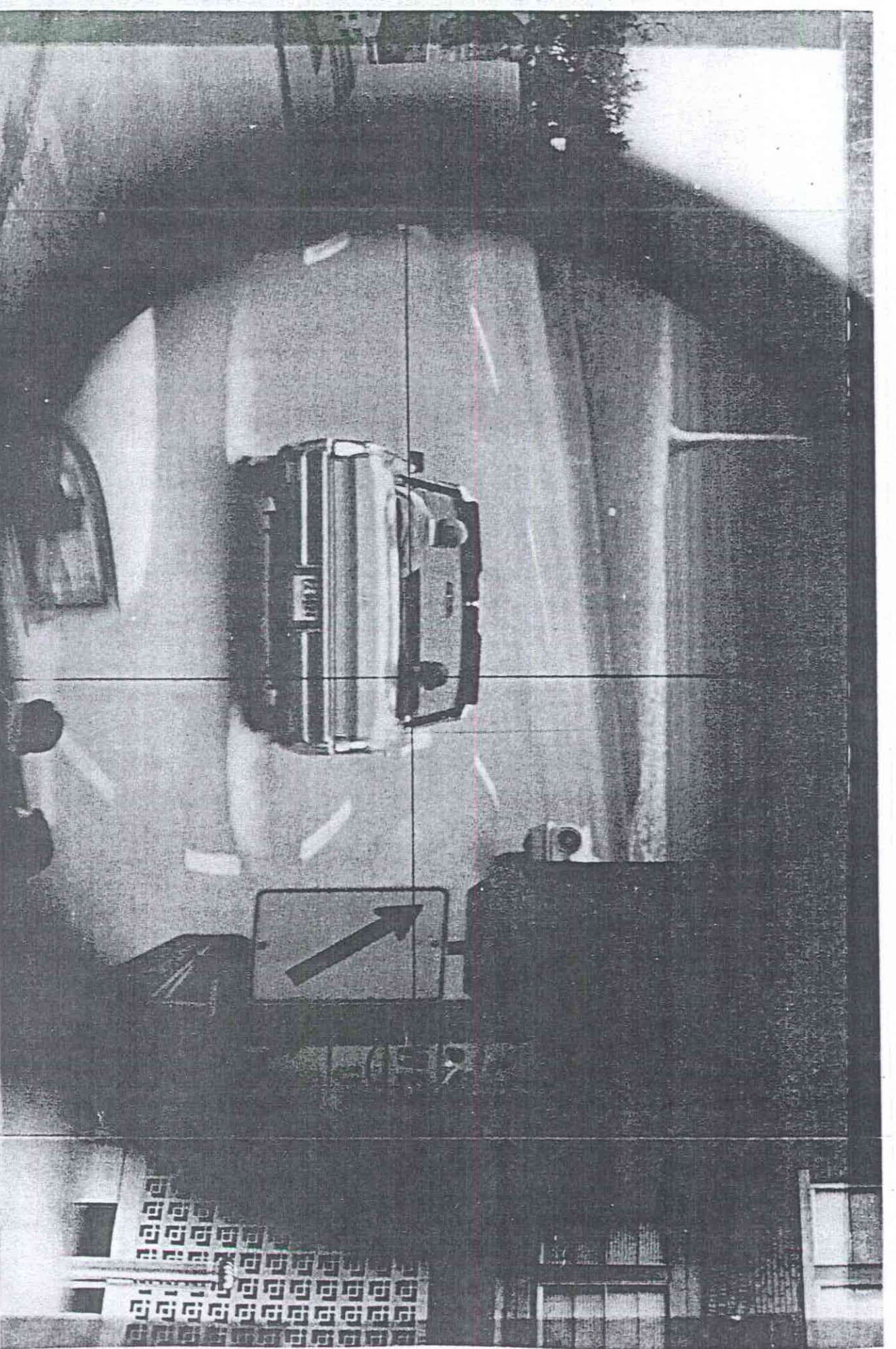
After sixth grade the family moved to New Orleans, where Lee again was known as a lonely boy. "He just didn't get along with the others," a classmate, Ed Collier said. "For the first time he began fighting." "He fought with a lot of guys," recalled another classmate, John Neumeier, of Jefferson Parish, La. "I don't remember him palling around with anyone. He just didn't have any buddies." But he did have one, a schoolmate named Edward Voegel. "I sort of liked him," Voegel said, "because he was not a ruffian like most of the rest of them."

During these years, Lee Oswald developed a keen interest in guns—not abnormal, perhaps, except in its intensity. "One day at his house," Edward Voegel recalls, "he showed me a toy pistol, and he asked me, 'Does it look real?' I told him, no, it didn't look real, it looked like a plastic toy. The next time I visited him he said he wanted a real pistol and knew where he could get one. He said he'd have to steal it from a pawn shop on Rampart

(over)



*From the same building where Oswald lay in ambush, a telescopic lens reconstructs an approximation of what the killer saw at the moment of tragedy.*





(F.R.)  
S.E.P. 12/14

Street." Voegel remembers he had a difficult time convincing Oswald that if he broke the pawn-shop window it would set off an alarm.

The chaos of his home and school life left him rootless and friendless. In 1952 the Oswalds moved to a shabby tenement district in the Bronx, N.Y., where in 15 months he attended three different schools. From there, the family moved once more to New Orleans, where Lee finished the last half of his ninth grade. The next year he entered 10th grade and dropped out after one month. In 1956 the family moved back to Fort Worth, and he started 10th grade again.

It was no go. After 23 days he quit school and joined the U.S. Marines. But whatever he was searching for he did not find. He worked his way from buck private to private first class (though he would later claim to have been a sergeant). Two years later he was court-martialed for using "provoking" words in front of a noncommissioned officer. He had already been court-martialed once for owning an unregistered gun, and broken to buck private.

In the Marines his performance on the rifle range, typically, was better at the start than at the end. Oswald began by qualifying as a "sharpshooter," with a score of 212 points out of a possible 250. Two years later he scored a less impressive 191.

Disgruntled by life in the Marines, Oswald claimed a hardship in the family and formally applied for his release from the Corps in September of 1959. The Marines granted it. "It was like getting out of prison," he said later.

Oswald's hardship claim stemmed from the fact that his mother was then in the hospital and penniless. When her hospitalization insurance ran out, she said a fortnight ago, she first sold her furniture to pay the bills and then, after six months, finally wrote her youngest son for help. On the basis of her letter, the Red Cross helped Lee Oswald get a release from active duty.

Yet it was perhaps characteristic of Lee that, after he got out of the Marines, he did not remain in Texas to help pay his mother's bills. Instead he left for Russia. "She's rather old," he said later. "I couldn't expect her to understand. It wasn't quite fair of me to go without telling her, but it's better that way." On October 15 of that year, he wrote the Supreme Soviet, the highest parliamentary body in the U.S.S.R., and asked for Russian citizenship. Sixteen days later, he gave a press interview in the Hotel

Metropole in Moscow to explain what he was doing in Russia.

"For two years now I have been waiting to do this one thing," he said. "To dissolve my American citizenship and become a citizen of the Soviet Union." The boy who had never been able to express himself adequately now spoke freely of feudalism and exploitation. "My mother," he said, "has been a worker all her life. She is a good example of what happens to workers in the United States. At the age of fifteen, after watching the way workers are treated in New York, and Negroes in the South, I was looking for a key to my environment. Then I discovered socialist literature."

"I am a Marxist," Oswald told Aline Mosby, an American reporter in Moscow. "I became interested about the age of 15. An old lady handed me a pamphlet

about saving the Rosenbergs. I still remember that."

He told reporters he then went on to read Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. "It was," he said, "what I'd been looking for. It was like a very religious man opening the Bible for the first time."

After his interview with the press in Moscow, Oswald seemed to fade from public view. The American embassy in Moscow delayed formal acceptance of his renunciation of U.S. citizenship to give him time to think it over. Then, for some reason, Russia declined to confer Soviet citizenship on him, although he

was told he could stay as a resident alien. He moved to Minsk and found a job.

### More disillusionment

But Oswald's new religion of Marxism failed to satisfy him. Sixteen months after entering the Soviet Union, he initiated efforts to return home, only to find that the Soviets refused to expedite an exit visa. Two months later, Oswald complicated his problems by marrying a Russian girl named Marina Nicholaevna, a pharmacist in Minsk. Then he discovered that the Marine Corps, because of his attempt to renounce his U.S. citizenship, had issued him an "undesirable" discharge, and his irritations grew. On January 30, 1962, he wrote an angry letter to John Connally in Fort Worth, not realizing at the time that Connally had resigned his post as Secretary of the Navy weeks before to run for the governorship of Texas. In his letter Oswald promised that he would "employ all means to right this gross mistake or injustice to a bona fied [sic] U.S. citizen and ex-serviceman." He had gone to live in Russia, he wrote, "much in the same way as E. Hemingway resided in Paris."

Two weeks after that his wife gave birth to a daughter. The couple named the baby June Lee.

On May 24, 1962, the State Department renewed Oswald's U.S. passport, confirmed his citizenship and lent him \$435.71 to purchase passage home. The Oswalds left Rotterdam on June 4.

It was a warm, bright afternoon, June 13, 1962, when the Holland-America Line steamship *Mausdam* lowered its gangplank in Hoboken, N.J., and Lee Oswald set foot on American soil again. But the country had never heard of Oswald then, and Americans had their minds on other things. In Texas a man named Billie Sol Estes was testifying before a grand jury. In New York the movie *Lolita* was opening to mixed reviews. In Washington the President of the United States was lunching with President Roberto F. Chiari of Panama.

It seems hard to believe that Lee Oswald had any idea at the time that his fate and President Kennedy's were to collide 17 months later on a street in Dallas. Most likely Oswald felt only that he was coming home again, after still another failure to find his niche in life, to try once more to make a new start.

Moving his family to Dallas, Oswald worked at various jobs—starting, as usual, better than he ended. But somehow he managed to repay the State Department loan. In January of this year he was hired as a trainee with the Dallas advertising typographic firm of Jaggars, Chiles and Stoval.

In May, 1963, Lee Oswald lost his job. His explanation to associates was "they



didn't have enough work." But there was another reason. Said Bob Stoval, president of the firm, "He was supposed to learn how to make photographic prints, but he wasn't competent. He was discharged." Then Stoval added, in a now-familiar refrain, "He was a quiet person. He didn't have much to say to anybody. I guess he was a bit strange in that way."

The quiet man, the orderly person, the strange fellow—these were words some people used to describe Lee Oswald to the end. But beginning in May of this year more people began to see a glint of steel beneath the calm and soft exterior. Lee Oswald took his wife and child to New Orleans, where they rented an apartment at 4911 Magazine Street.

"He had a military manner, walked very erect, looked straight ahead and never paid any attention to anyone," said his landlord, Jesse James Garner. And he had ordered a gun—an Italian 6.5 rifle, later fitted with telescopic sights, for which he paid a Chicago mail-order house \$12.78. The rifle was sent to a Dallas post-office box, addressed to "A. Hidell."

Another person who knew him in New Orleans, Mrs. Doris Eames, a next-door neighbor, remembered. "He wouldn't associate with anybody, never had any friends. No one ever came there to visit. He would never return a greeting, so people stopped greeting him. His little wife was just the opposite. She seemed very friendly—except when he was around. He didn't seem to want her to mix with anyone."

For two months in New Orleans Oswald held a job as a maintenance worker in a coffee-processing plant. Then again he was dismissed. "He simply wasn't doing the job," his boss said. "He was bright, quiet, but often tough to find."

One place where Oswald was not difficult to find in New Orleans, according to singer Connie T. Kaye, was the city's French Quarter. "He used to hang out in the Bourbon House," she recalled. "And sometimes he'd go to the bar at Pat O'Briens, where I work. When the crowd was heavy, he'd push in where the twin pianos are and see the show without buying a drink. I had a run-in with him a couple of months ago. I have a gag in my routine, something about 'Castro that

Bastro.' That gets a laugh. Well, this particular time, after the show, I went over to the Bourbon House, and Oswald came up to me and said, 'What are you using that line for? What are you knocking Castro for?' I knew from the way he looked that I was dealing with a character so I got up and left."

But Oswald was not just another French Quarter character. On June 24 he applied for a passport—for use, he said, in the late fall—to travel in the Soviet Union, England, France, Germany, Holland, Finland, Italy and Poland as a "photographer." Despite his previous record in foreign travel he was—inexplicably—issued the passport the next day. Six weeks later he provided another glimpse of a new and different Oswald. He made an attempt to pass as a double agent.

Carlos Bringuier, a fiercely anti-Castro Cuban exile, recalls, "I met him around August fifth. He came to our office to ask in what way he could help us fight Castro. He wanted information about the activities of the Student Directorate. He said he was an ex-Marine with experience in guerrilla warfare and gave me a Marine guidebook with his name on it."

Bringuier gave Oswald nothing. At first he thought that Oswald was a secret agent who had been sent from the CIA or the FBI to infiltrate the exile organization and gather intelligence information about their anti-Castro activities.

Four days later a friend ran into Bringuier's office to say that an American citizen was distributing pro-Communist literature on Canal Street. Bringuier hurried to the scene. "I was shocked," he said. "It was Oswald. He had one sign that said VIVA FIDEL and another that read HANDS OFF CUBA. He tried to shake hands with me, but I refused and called him a traitor. We had a small fight, because we got all his propaganda and we threw it up in the air."

During the fight, Oswald displayed a steel nerve. "He saw I was trying to hit him, so he put his arms down and said, 'OK, Carlos. If you want to hit me, hit me.' But I thought if I hit him, he would appear as the victim, so I didn't."

The brief skirmish and the resulting publicity attracted the attention of news-

*(Text continued on page 26)*



*Moments after the shooting police swarm into the building from which the firing had come.*



## In the police station: a shocking drama

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(CONT'D)

(continued from page 23) men at radio station WDSU, who invited Oswald to appear on a panel show called *Conversation Carte Blanche*. On the show, Oswald said he was a Marxist, admitted that he had lived in Russia and extolled the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. Shortly afterward Oswald left New Orleans—without paying his rent—and moved to Texas. His wife was going to have a baby, he said.

Marina Oswald and their daughter went to live with the Paines in a suburb of Dallas. On October 14 a nice, quiet fellow presented himself to Mrs. A. C. Johnson, who keeps a rooming house on Dallas's Beckley Avenue. He was alone. Yes, she had a room. No liquor, no visitors in the bedroom, no cooking. Eight dollars a week. The young man took it. He declined her request for the name of a relative "in case of emergency." "That won't be necessary," he explained. "It doesn't matter." But he did sign his name: "O. H. Lee."

He brought in a few clothes, half a dozen books, a small portable radio, some cans of beans, apricot preserves, peanut butter, sardines, instant coffee.

"He was a good renter," Mrs. Johnson says. "Some renters, they'll come in with beer on their breath. But he never did. He was always quiet. Twice a day he called a number and spoke some foreign language. He was very well behaved.

When he took a bath, he'd clean out that tub as clean as any woman you ever saw."

The next day Oswald got a job in a book-distributing firm in a building that dominated Elm Street in Dallas. He signed up as a \$50-a-week stock clerk. Usually he spent weekends in Irving, a suburb, with his pregnant wife and child. On November 21 he varied his routine by going out to the suburb on Thursday night, instead of on Friday. Friday morning he got a ride to work, carrying a long object wrapped in brown paper. When asked what was in the package he later said it was a bundle of window shades.

That afternoon, as President Kennedy's special car was moving down the curving incline of Elm St. at 12 miles an hour, a rifle barrel emerged, unnoticed, from a sixth-floor window of the building in which Oswald worked. The car and the eyes of the Secret Service men had passed the building. One hundred yards more and the car would have reached the safety of an overpass, but fifteen and a half seconds before the big open limousine would have been out of the assassin's sight, three shots rang out.

Oswald's marksmanship was astonishing. He had to shoot downward, a diffi-



Oswald's wife (left) with her infant child and husband's mother.

*Nightclub owner Jack Ruby, who killed the assassin, was immediately seized by police.*





cult feat. He shot from a height at which air currents can cause bullets to drift. His weapon was a cheap, Italian-made bolt-action Mannlicher-Carcano rifle. Yet he fired so rapidly that his victims scarcely had time to turn their heads. And each of the three bullets found a mark. Two struck the President; the third seriously wounded Gov. John Connally.

Moments after the shooting, when a policeman entered the building and rushed toward Oswald, by then on a lower floor, the manager said, "No, not him. He works here." Lee Oswald slipped out of the building, his absence noticed only after police took a roll call of all building employees. The police then broadcast an alarm: "Unknown white male, 30, slender build, 5-6, 160 pounds, thought to be carrying a 30-06 or 30-30 rifle."

Oswald ran to his rooming house. "You sure are in a hurry," the housekeeper, Mrs. Earlene Roberts, said. He didn't speak, grabbed a jacket and ran out again. About a block away from the rooming house, a policeman in a radio car—Patrolman J. D. Tippitt—saw him hurrying on the sidewalk, thought he fit the description broadcast in the alarm and called to him. When the policeman got out of the patrol car, "O. H. Lee" pulled a gun and shot him dead. Then he hurried away and ran into a theater. Witnesses who saw the patrolman murdered called other police. The reinforcements ran into the theater after him, trying desperately to find him by the light

of a film called *War Is Hell*. The owner of a nearby shop turned on the house lights, and pointed. "There he is!"

The rest was a sleazy drama in the Dallas police station. Oswald, pale, unemotional, unshakable, denied his guilt. The next day, as he was being escorted by detectives down a police-station corridor, Jack Ruby pushed forward and shot him in the stomach.

Ruby, a 52-year-old bachelor, is short, round and fleshy. Born Jack Leon Rubenstein in Chicago, he grew up as a street fighter and once had a finger bitten off in a brawl—his trigger finger. He has a record of petty charges—disorderly conduct, liquor-law violations, carrying a concealed weapon—dating back at least to 1949. In Dallas he was known mainly for his two striptease clubs, one of which provides an amateur night each week for aspiring local strippers. He has professed deep devotion to Democrats, especially the late Franklin D. Roosevelt and the late John F. Kennedy.

As millions of viewers watched the live performance of the Dallas police in their own corridors, the nightclub operator ran up to the manacled prisoner and thrust a revolver almost to his side. A detective recognized Ruby and shouted "Jack, you son of a bitch." But Ruby had already pulled the trigger—using his middle finger. Less than two hours later, at 1:07 P.M., Dallas time, Oswald died in Parkland Memorial Hospital—about 10 feet from the spot where the President had died two days earlier.

When *The Post* went to press there were still many curious rumors and unanswered questions. Was there a personal link between Ruby and Oswald? Had Ruby shot Oswald to shut him up? These questions would not remain unanswered. Over the confident statements of the bumbling Dallas police, the Justice Department and the F.B.I. assured the nation that the mystery was not resolved and the facts would be made public. THE END

*"Jack, you son of a bitch," a detective yelled, but Jack Ruby pulled the trigger.*

(Photograph © 1963, Dallas Times-Herald and photographer Bob Jackson.)